



March 1979

Hardy's Poetic Landscapes

Norman Arkans

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/cq>

Recommended Citation

Colby Library Quarterly, Volume 15, no.1, March 1979, p.19-36

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Colby. It has been accepted for inclusion in Colby Quarterly by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Colby.

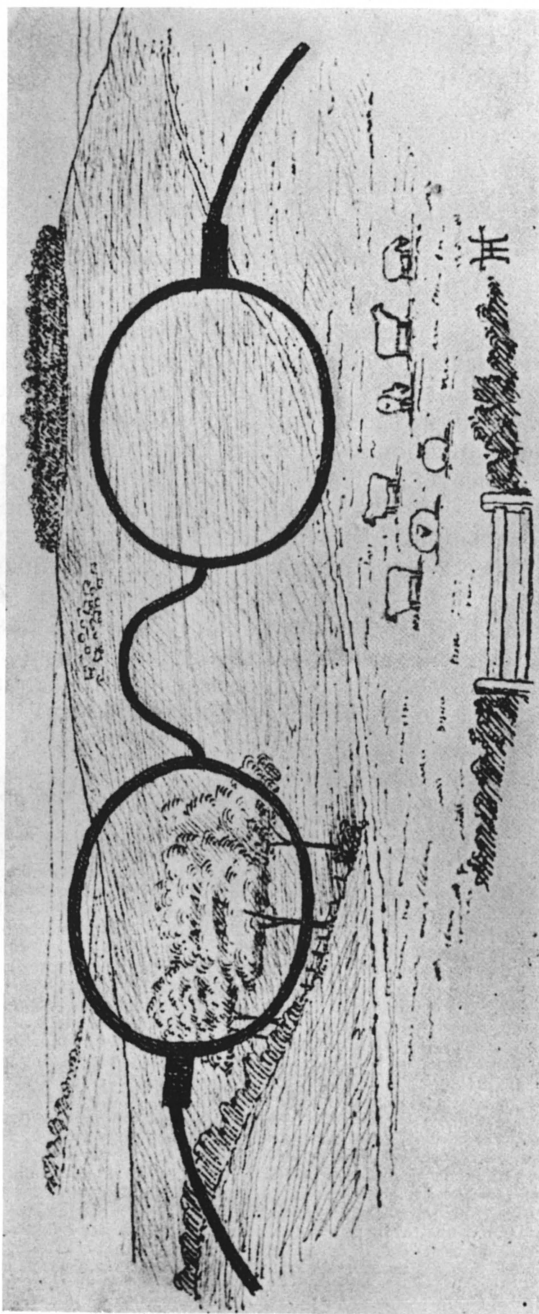
Hardy's Poetic Landscapes

by NORMAN ARKANS

ABOUT THE TIME Hardy turned his energies away from fiction towards a serious attempt at publishing verse, he resumed a favorite pastime of sketching landscapes. The sketches complemented his renewed interest in poetry and were to provide a handsome accompaniment for an illustrated volume of poems, Hardy's first. Few critics have paid much attention to the rather amateurish sketches, the majority of which depict rolling landscapes, usually dotted with small human figures.¹ Of those who have, Paul Zietlow has most critically regarded them in their relationship to the poetry of the first volume, *Wessex Poems and Other Verses*. One of the sketches accompanied the poem "In A Eweleaze Near Weatherbury," and in his book Zietlow gives a brief description: "The illustration . . . shows a landscape speckled with stiffly drawn sheep, with a pair of spectacle rims in the foreground. Enigmatically, the spectacles produce no distortion or magnification in that part of the scene which is viewed through them."² Zietlow's des-

1. Thirty-one sketches were included in *Wessex Poems and Other Verses* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1898), but were omitted from subsequent editions. Although the sketches appear awkward and at times rather crude, they offer yet another instance of Hardy's distinctive and unusual penchant for unique points of view. A measure of his interest in the sketches can be inferred from the apologies he gave for them, a characteristic form which Hardy adopted for aspects of his work he was fond of but which he knew needed a disclaimer. In a letter to Florence Henniker Hardy writes, "The sketches are quite unimportant—as, indeed, are the poems." (*One Rare Fair Woman: Thomas Hardy's Letters to Florence Henniker 1893–1922*, ed. Evelyn Hardy and F. B. Pinion [London: MacMillan, 1972], p. 74.) Four months later in a letter dated March 29, 1899, to another close friend, Edward Clodd, Hardy is even more defensive, even after the book has been well received: "The illustrations to the *Wessex Poems*, that take your fancy, had for me in preparing them a sort of illegitimate interest—that which arose from their being a novel amusement, & a wholly gratuitous performance which could not profit me anything, & probably would do me harm." (The manuscript is in the Ashley Collection in the British Library. I wish to thank the trustees of the estate of the late Miss E. A. Dugdale for permission to quote from manuscripts of Hardy's letters in the British Library.) Modern critics have been more generous to the sketches than Hardy was, some to a fault. James Gibson has attempted to expose some of the fraudulent interpretations, and in doing so calls for a reassessment: "The 'Lois Deacon School of Hardy Studies' has had fun with some of these illustrations, but I still await a convincing explanation of that astonishing drawing of the eweleaze near Weatherbury seen through that monstrous pair of spectacles." ("The Poetic Text," in *Thomas Hardy and The Modern World*, ed. F. B. Pinion [Dorchester: The Thomas Hardy Society, Ltd., 1974], p. 116.)

2. Paul Zietlow, *Moments of Vision: The Poetry of Thomas Hardy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1974), p. 4. For another discussion of the sketch and its relationship to the poem, see Tom Paulin, *Thomas Hardy: The Poetry of Perception* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975), pp. 23–25. Paulin's version of the relationship suggests a totally passive one between perception and landscape, which, like the spectacles and the landscape "have no apparent or necessary connection with each other and whose relationship is random and gratuitous, like objects in a surrealist picture. His looking at the scene, like his and our general experience of the outer world, has no relation to what he sees and is purely accidental."



cription requires some amplification. The sheep "speckle" the landscape only in the foreground and in the distance; the landscape itself dwarfs everything else in the sketch. But what dominate even more are the dark wire spectacle rims, which in terms of depth appear in the foreground, but which two-dimensionally sit smack in the center of the sketch, stretching completely across it. It is as if Hardy has lifted them from his face, held them in front of him nearly a foot, and sketched. The spectacles dominate completely. In analyzing their relationship to the poem and understanding why they do, we find a key to the way Hardy perceived reality in his landscape poems.³

To our disappointment, "In A Eweleaze Near Weatherbury"⁴ is not a noticeably good poem. In a stiffly choked first stanza, Hardy presents an aging speaker who revisits the leaze and recalls scenes from his youth, particularly one with a young lover. His knowledge of the impossibility of recapturing the lost sense of vibrancy and excitement does not prevent him from fantasizing the return of Beauty to his life. Conscious of how he views the scene, he knows that he is the same romantic lover of his younger days: "I remain what I was then / In each essential feature / Of the fantasies of men." After the first stanza, the poem falters even more. The "little chisel / Of never-napping Time" strikes an adolescent note and seems ill-fitted for the aged perspective of the final lines of the poem. What is of significant interest, however, is the suggested perceptual process and its emblem Hardy sketched in the illustration. The return to the leaze ignites the speaker's imaginative recollection of past experiences, and the landscape of "stiffly drawn sheep" springs to life in the poem. The "distortion" Zietlow wants in the drawn spectacles

3. Hardy's relationship to landscape has received wide critical attention, especially the presence of the looming landscapes in his novels, most notably, of course, *Egdon Heath*. Critics have also noted the importance landscape holds for Hardy in the poetry. In his chapter on Hardy's poetry in *Inspiration and Poetry* (London: MacMillan, 1955), C. M. Bowra recognizes the humanized landscape theme in "Beyond the Last Lamp," but evidently finds it not worth pursuing in any detailed discussion (pp. 235-236). Jean Brooks in *Thomas Hardy: The Poetic Structure* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1971), sees the connection of emotion and landscape through memory: "Memory of the relationship of a vividly-realized landscape with a human figure and human emotion can affirm the quality of a past moment in the teeth of a harsh denying present." She recognizes the interaction of environment and passion and how the memory of human activity can give value to a scene, "an affirmation out of life's denial" (pp. 69-71). John Peck has written of Hardy's use of a landscape procedure in the poems as a poetic manipulation, a willed posture through which Hardy composes his subjects and deals with obsession. ("Hardy and the Figure in the Scene," *Agenda*, X [Spring-Summer 1972], 117-125.) The most illuminating discussion of the subject appears in J. Hillis Miller's *Thomas Hardy: Distance and Desire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1970), especially in Chapter III: "What the Narrator Sees" (pp. 76-114). Miller argues that "Hardy's subject is never man alone or nature alone, but always man in nature. . . . He never doubts that it is the presence of man which gives interest and meaning to nature. . . . The scene without the figure is a nullity . . . (p. 92). Miller believes the scene itself stores up emotions and releases them later to those sensitive enough to perceive them, that the animating power lies in the object rather than in the associative mind. Miller places the source of the transforming process in the object; I think Hardy would focus it in the subject, the human mind. Paulin in his book finds Hardy torn between a passive empiricism and an active idealism which is transcended in special moments of vision. Thus, Hardy's relationship to landscape, or object, takes on varied dimensions, from passive reaction to active creativity.

4. Thomas Hardy, *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*, ed. James Gibson (London: MacMillan, 1976), p. 70. Subsequent references to this edition are identified by the letters CP.

can be found, instead, in the poem, and the spectacles as they exist are offered by Hardy as a symbol of idiosyncratic perception.

Most of us would view the leaze as Hardy presents it in the sketch (without the spectacles), with rigid sheep scattered over the landscape in a rather bland still life. But Hardy sees through the finely ground lenses of an active imagination, "magnifying" the landscape in the poem and transforming it into one alive with experiences from the past and infused with the sensibility of the speaker. In a sense, this is a distortion; but if we think of the spectacles as a symbolic representation of the lens of Hardy's eye, then what appears to us in the sketch as "distortion" (a lack of such in the part of the scene viewed through the spectacles) is actually for Hardy natural perception. The paradox of the sketch is a remarkable stroke of genius. The way in which Hardy views landscape is perfectly natural for him; hence, he cannot in the drawing suggest distortion. At the same time, he rightly assumes that no one will view the scene as he does, and thus he suggests in the relationship of the sketch and the poem a mode of perception which is simultaneously idiosyncratic and universal.

Hardy's reactions to landscapes take several different forms, but common to all is the distinction, at times clearer than at others, between personal vision of a particular landscape and the actual scene itself. Despite this distinction, the revised version of a landscape produced by individual perception almost always attracts Hardy away from the actual reality of the scene. The perception results in a newly formed landscape that mediates what Hardy thought of as two divergent experiences: the personal world of the individual and the anonymous, stark world as it exists apart from the way in which it is perceived. This blending process provided Hardy with a poetic mode in which he could unify and stabilize complex experiences and still retain the essential quality of the experiences and the landscapes. In the process, however, one's individuality protrudes from the scene and dominates it.

In the poetry that results from this process, Hardy reduces man's insignificance against the spatial backdrop and subtly transforms an indifferent environment into one whose meaning, symbolized by Hardy's spectacles in the Eweleaze sketch and more clearly articulated in the oft-quoted passage from the *Life*, depends on how it is viewed: "The poetry of a scene varies with the minds of the perceivers. Indeed, it does not lie in the scene at all."⁵ Hence, Hardy could sketch the eweleaze and offer

5. Florence Emily Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy 1840-1928* (1928, 1930; rpt. London: MacMillan, 1962), p. 50. All subsequent references are to this edition. Hardy's interest in the subjective nature of perception led him to transcribe many entries on the subject in his "Commonplace Books," among which is the following passage from a review of William Kingdon Clifford's *Lectures and Essays* in the *Edinburgh Review*: "Berkeley established the subjective character of the world of phenomena; that this world I perceive is my perceptions, & nothing more. But besides these perceptions there is also a spirit, a *me* that perceives them. And to get rid of this imaginary soul or substance was the work of Hume. Quot. from Clifford (Ed. Rev.)" Entry 1215 and note in *The Literary Notes of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Lennart A. Björk (Göteborg, Sweden: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1974).

the spectacles as *a* mode, but not as *the* way to perceive. *How* one looks is of more importance than, and even dictates, *what* one sees.⁶ In the process, man and his surroundings are united as each acts upon the other.

The "simply natural" is interesting no longer. The much decried, mad, late-Turner rendering is now necessary to create my interest. The exact truth as to material fact ceases to be of importance in art—it is a student's style—the style of a period when the mind is serene and unawakened to the tragical mysteries of life; when it does not bring anything to the object that coalesces with and translates the qualities that are already there,—half-hidden, it may be—and the two united are depicted as the All. (*Life*, p. 185)⁷

Hardy suggests in this well-known passage a reciprocal and dependent relationship between mind and object, both being necessary for qualities each possesses. Another time, in praising Turner's water-colors, Hardy reiterates his concept of a shared dependency between man and nature, "each is a landscape *plus* a man's soul" (*Life*, p. 216).

Hardy's representation of the landscape in the eweleaze poem and sketch and his comments on Turner's art amount to an aesthetic rejection of Naturalism and an embrace of a special brand of Hardyan realism. Scattered throughout the *Life* are bits and pieces of an aesthetic theory never clearly formulated conceptually by Hardy, but which, when brought together, constitute what I call his mediated realism, or in other words, naturalism tailored to one's idiosyncracies. Such an aesthetic allows for many possible versions of a particular landscape and conveniently accommodates Hardy's characteristic protean moods. For Hardy, Realism is not Art. Objective reality might be copied or inventorially reported, but in doing so one might miss the essential features of reality. Rather, art is a "disproportioning . . . of realities, to show more clearly the features that matter in those realities . . ." (*Life*, p. 229). The disproportioning is made possible by the poet's particular "idiosyncratic mode of regard" (*Life*, p. 225): "As, in looking at a carpet, by following one colour a certain pattern is suggested, by following another colour, another; so in life the seer should watch that pattern among general things which his idiosyncrasy moves him to observe, and describe that alone. This is, quite accurately, a going to Nature; yet the

6. After an entry from an article in *The Spectator* on Pasteur and Renan, Hardy adds the following annotation: "Thus thought shapes the very world: matter creates thought: reciprocal action" (*Literary Notes*, entry 1279). The process Hardy implies begins with an objective stimulus that initiates thought. The thought then influences perception of other stimuli, thus resembling in its reciprocity the Romantic mode of perception.

7. In an annotation to an entry in the *Literary Notes*, Hardy distinguished between "*The realistic & poetical schools of painting*" and quoted from the article in the *Times*: "The two tendencies are indestructible—the struggle perennial. . . . Ever since it became full grown art has always oscillated between two endeavors—the endeavor of the artist now to forget himself in what he sees, & now to transfuse all the external world with his own thought & emotion. *Times* (Rev^w of Gosse's *Life of Cecil Lawson*)" (Entry 1304 and note). Hardy sympathized with the latter idea to the extent that the measure of the artist's presence in a work determined its worth: "I prefer late Wagner, as I prefer late Turner, to early (which I suppose is all wrong in taste), the idiosyncrasies of each master being more strongly shown in these strains" (*Life*, p. 329).

result is no mere photograph, but purely the product of the writer's own mind" (*Life*, p. 153).

The shape of reality resides in the perceiver rather than in the thing perceived because he chooses what to view.⁸ In a note on the Society of British Artists, Hardy discusses the impressionist school, and while he seems uncomfortable with an extreme impressionism, he seems to accept the principle itself: "But their principle is, as I understand it, that what you carry away with you from a scene is the true feature to grasp; or in other words, what appeals to *your own individual eye and heart in particular* amid much that does not appeal, and which you therefore omit to record" (*Life*, p. 184). The resulting mode of perception, in which mind and object "coalesce," forms the basis for a "humanistic" (in the purest sense of the word) aesthetics that determines much of Hardy's poetry. His manner develops from this distinctly human selection process, and his matter reveals that the process begins and ends in man.

Wherever Hardy looked he saw people, and through the human presence he saw possibilities for imaginative action: "An object or mark raised or made by man on a scene is worth ten times any such formed by unconscious Nature. Hence, clouds, mists and mountains are unimportant beside the wear of a threshold, or the print of a hand" (*Life*, p. 116). Hardy distinguishes between an objective reality unreflective of human life and a reality impressed with man's presence in the world. If a particular scene is void of man's presence, Hardy will either imaginatively infuse the scene with it, or combine his own intellectual and imaginative powers with the scene to discover something vital and mysterious beyond mere natural representation: "After looking at the landscape ascribed to Bonington in our drawing-room I feel that Nature is played out as a Beauty, but not as a Mystery. I don't want to see landscapes, i.e., scenic paintings of them, because I don't want to see the original realities—as optical effects, that is. I want to see the deeper reality underlying the scenic, the expression of what are sometimes called abstract imaginings" (*Life*, p. 185).⁹ Merely reproducing the real world in art is insufficient. There simply is not enough there to engage man. The artist

8. Hardy had met with discussions of this concept in his reading. One occurred in G. H. Lewes, "The Course of Modern Thought," which Björk summarizes in his note to entry 899. In the article Hardy evidently read, "Things are what they are felt to be; and what they are thought to be, when thoughts are symbols of perceptions" (quoted by Björk in *Literary Notes*).

9. Hardy does not have in mind, I think, the distinction between noumenon and phenomenon Spencer draws in the passage Hardy copied in his notebooks: "*Essence of Herbert Spencer*. ' . . . The imbecility of human intelligence when brought to bear on the ultimate question. Phenomenon «[app^{er}ence]» without noumenon «[reality]» is unthinkable; & yet noumenon cannot be thought of in the true sense of thinking. We are at once obliged to be conscious of a reality behind appearance, & yet can neither bring this consciousness of reality into shape, nor can bring into shape its connection with appearance. The forms of our thought, moulded on experiences of phenomena, as well as the connotations of our words formed to express the relations of phenomena, involve us in contradictions when we try to think of that which is beyond phenomena; & yet the existence of that which is beyond phenomena is a necessary datum alike of our thoughts & our words. We have no choice but to accept a formless consciousness of the inscrutable' " (*Literary Notes*, entry 1335). Rather, Hardy is differentiating between two kinds of phenomenal reality—that of the object and that which a perceiver brings to the appearance of the object.

must look beyond even phenomenal reality to the imaginary, which lies within. Hardy is not, however, rejecting the real world to enclose himself in a cerebral cocoon. He wants man to recognize that this world is his as much as it is Nature's, and that his perceptions should complement the Beauty of the physical world.

In a notebook entry headed "Style" Hardy comes as close as he ever does to defining his "natural realism," or what I have labelled "mediated realism." It is achieved, according to Hardy, by Arnold's "imaginative reason,"¹⁰ and, as in the implications of Arnold's phrase, combines potentially antagonistic categories in uniting noumena and phenomena: "Consider the Wordsworthian dictum (the more perfectly the natural object is reproduced, the more truly poetic the picture). This reproduction is achieved by seeing into the *heart of a thing* (as rain, wind, for instance), and is realism, in fact, though through being pursued by means of the imagination it is confounded with invention, which is pursued by the same means" (*Life*, p. 147).¹¹ Hardy's struggle with the concept is revealed in the halting, overly qualified prose and discontinuity in connecting words. Nevertheless, the passage contains the essential elements of his approach to realism. Perfectly reproducing the natural world means combining one's perceptive powers with the objectively real. To imaginatively apprehend reality is to perceive it clearly. The real world is the imaginative world—illusions are real, dreams are real, idiosyncratic perceptions are real, and fictions are real. In all, a great deal depends on perception. Through the process of seeing landscape as "experience," of embracing reminiscences of place, we impose order on life and derive meaning from experience. We connect this with that, make metaphors; in fact, we do the things we do as active, perceptive, thinking beings, moving through our landscapes, determining our worlds and finding our place in them.

Hardy's rejection of what he would consider mere naturalism for idiosyncratic realism enables him at particular moments to create a private spatial identity that represents a stabilizing force in his life. The personalized terrain frequently takes the form of two related responses to the landscape. In one, past experiences are vividly recreated through an imaginative projection onto a present landscape. In the other, the landscape is viewed as an objective correlative by which Hardy determines the shape of a scene to reflect a speaker's mood. In both,

10. Hardy's attraction to the phrase is evident from the number of times one comes across it in his notes. He copied Arnold's passage twice in the *Literary Notes* some years apart. See entries 1018 and 1176 and notes.

11. In a passage reminiscent of Keats' notion of the truth of imagination, Hardy collapses the opposition between appearance and reality by viewing "seeming" for what it is—seeming. The passage is an annotation to a long passage he transcribed from "Lange's History of Materialism" in *The Spectator*. "Idealism (what seems) v. Materialism (what is.)—[Supposed to be irreconcilable—but by deliberately recognising that idealism is idealism there ought to be no difficulty—e.g. 'the sun rises' = the sun seems to rise: thus the imagination may have its full poetical scope, as with children, without danger of error. 'Tis the 'how & seem!' principle, in short. Recognise that *all happiness lies in self-deception*—& the value of fancy of idealism will be apparent^o]" (*Literary Notes*, entry 1229 and note).

experience is "spatialized" as Hardy attempts to comprehend the intangible by possessing it in tangible form. The result is a more unified, reciprocally blended version of experience.

In the landscape poems in which Hardy draws on the past, he attempts a reassessment of present experience. What might ordinarily be a meaningless scene is transformed imaginatively into one that retains feelings and events from the past, thus enabling the poet to comprehend through recollection present thoughts and feelings. Hardy felt strongly that one simply could not and ought not detach his existence from the past, from the "where" and "when" of his experience. Time and place are inseparable and act upon each other simultaneously, and the result for the poet is a newly conceived present scene. Place no longer exists inanimately but is revised into vivid experience. The metamorphosis of the landscape provides Hardy with a means to transcend time and free himself from the limits of the present. The indifferent landscape is enlivened by the recollected past, and its indifference is replaced by the human qualities Hardy brings to it.

The first poem of *Satires of Circumstance* in the section called "Lyrics and Reveries" is one of Hardy's most ambitious and poignant efforts, particularly in its elaboration of the process through which an individual landscape is animated with remembered scenes. Placed where it is in the volume, the poem is appropriately titled "In Front of the Landscape" (*CP*, p. 303), and suggests that the collection itself, which includes "Poems of 1912-1913" constitutes a map of Hardy's poetic sensibility. The verse form of alternating long and short lines implies an uncertain fragility about the experience of seeing a blank landscape animated with visions of the past. The brief dimeters are usually of a qualifying nature and in their brevity emphasize the poet's search for precision and exactness as he tries to find meaning in the experience. Like the first phrase of the poem, "Plunging and labouring on," the alternating rhythms of the different lines suggest the surge and withdrawal of the sea and reflect the predicament of the speaker, who finds himself in "waste waters" trying to find his way in the world. Only the familiarity of the imaginatively transformed landscape will suffice.

The speaker begins the poem as a drifting waif, lost in his world and seeking the safe harbor of the "customed landscape." The "tide of visions" described as "Dolorous and dear" in the abbreviated second line swamps the speaker in murky ambiguities, with the paradoxical balance of dearness and dolorousness reflecting the speaker's plunging and labouring. The sought-after clarity in this maze of complex responses to reality seems impossible and can only be achieved through a forced progression in the third line, "Forward I pushed my way." The struggle to reach stability, the glimmering light offered by the landscape, flings the speaker in and out of the swirling waters; hence, once again the paradoxical descriptions of a landscape which is simultaneously "Yon-

der and near” and of visions which are “Dolorous and dear” reflect the confusing perceptions of experiences that seem to ebb and flow like the tide. The reality of the first stanza vacillates between order and chaos, with only the speaker’s determination and will holding the land and sea together. The visions, however, as Hardy pursues the water metaphor in the second stanza, blur to a “feeble mist” that “Seemed but a ghost-like gauze,” obscuring the landscape to a seeming unsubstantiality. The land-turned-sea in the first stanza now becomes essence as the speaker transforms matter and describes a changed world. Earth, sea, and air unite as the metaphors perform their magical chemistry.

By the third stanza it is clear to us that the mists and waves of the preceding stanzas are the results of modes of regard, ways of seeing. The first line’s ambiguity suggests the central question of how one perceives reality. Are the “infinite spectacles featuring foremost / Under my sight” the speaker’s description of external sights, phenomenal spectacles in the sense of a display or show, or are the spectacles those which Hardy sketched in the illustration for “In A Eweleaze Near Weathurbury,” “corrective” lenses through which to view reality? The stanza swells with words pertaining to vision—“sight,” “discern,” “re-creations”—towards which the speaker’s point of view is uncertain. The spectacles—either phenomena or lenses—hinder the perception of his “paced advancement,” which, depending on the attitude towards measured time and space, could be more help than hindrance. And the tension of “*re-creations killing the daytime / As by the night*” (my italics) might be reversed (made life-giving) if the daytime is unbearable. Only the speaker’s close examination of the visions in succeeding stanzas will remove the ambiguity.

What he sees are visions of those he has known in his lifetime, both in times of happiness and sadness.

Some as with slow-born tears that brinily trundled
Over the wrecked
Cheeks that were fair in their flush-time, ash now with anguish,
Harrowed by wiles.

The course of a lifetime is tracked in the paths that traverse the time-worn faces, over which creep the tears in painful, agonizing slowness. The speaker, in his description of the visions, reveals not only this pained sense of life, but further “shining sights” as scene upon scene inundates him. As the elements of earth, air, and sea are blended into oneness in the blind search for order in the first stanza, so the “pleading dumbness” of these visions of experience involves the speaker’s entire sensibility and rejuvenates it, “Yes, I could see them, feel them, hear them, address them.” Now he understands more of their significance than he did when the people were alive; he can see more with “the intenser / Stare of the mind.” His approach to the landscape-turned-

experience is less uncertain now because he understands that the visions help him give meaning to the past. The wagging tongues of passers-by inquisitively call him a “dull form . . . seeing nought / Round him . . . / Save a few tombs?” They cannot see what he sees because their experiences differ from his. Furthermore, the speaker finds greater clarity of vision at the end of the poem because his mind and the landscape have interacted to make the past more comprehensible, thus demonstrating to him that there is more help in the process than hindrance. He views the past with “fuller translation” and perceives himself clearly. The unsubstantiated visions stand starker than “meadow or mound”; the unenlivened landscape becomes a backdrop for human life, in which the transitory becomes spatial and moves to the foreground. Perceiving landscape as experience brings man “In Front”—foremost in Hardy’s world.¹²

Determinedly, Hardy turns again and again in the *Complete Poems* to this dynamic relationship between one’s past and the landscape in an effort to impose order on past experience from which he can derive sense and understanding. The proximity of the land to man’s experience, its materiality, its complex ability to inspire and reflect human emotion, and the ever-present fact that man spends his life roaming it, all explain Hardy’s desire not only to comprehend the relationship but to employ it artistically in poems whose subject is some kind of sought-after stability. The resulting poems become, in a very real sense for Hardy, momentary stays against not only confusion, but more horrifyingly for him, insignificance. The trick is somehow to bring the past to the fore, to keep it “present.” Hardy persistently thought of experience in clearly temporal and spatial terms. Since time fleetingly removes place from experience, Hardy found that by restoring the spatial part of experience, the “where,” he would correspondingly restore the “when.” In other words, the spatial reconstruction of a past experience could bring back from oblivion the temporality of the events from which Hardy would derive retrospective knowledge—understanding the past leads to wisdom in the present.

Hardy’s use of place and spatially conceived experience, which “stands deep lined / Upon the landscape” (“Sacred to the Memory,” *CP*, p. 671), resembles Wordsworth’s spots of time, “That with distinct pre-eminence retain / A renovating virtue.”¹³ For both poets the temporal experience is approached spatially (hence the terms “spots” of “time”). Few have taken note that the terms reciprocally influence each

12. Hardy was impressed by the following sentence from Macaulay, which he copied into his notebook: “What ablunder to make a scenery the foreground, & the human actors the background, of a picture!” (*Literary Notes*, entry 1058 and note).

13. In several places Hardy acknowledges his debt to Wordsworth and refers to him frequently for theoretical support. To Thomas Wise he wrote, “The Wordsworth biography has arrived, & I am truly obliged to you for such a gift, for I consider myself a faithful Wordsworthian, though not to the extent of those who follow him into the years when he became parochial & commonplace” (letter in the British Library, December 20, 1916).

other, as Geoffrey Hartman suggestively points out. He might just as well be writing about Hardy:

It is hard to decide whether the first or second member of the partitive construction "spots of time" should be emphasized. If we derive the origin of the notion from Wordsworth's attraction to specific place (the omphalos or spot syndrome), and notice that "spot" is subtly used in two senses—as denoting particular *places* in nature, and fixed *points* in time ("Islands in the unnavigable depth / Of our departed time")—the emphasis would fall on the initial word. But the natural pull of the phrase, and the fact that these spots are not only *in* time, like islands, but also creative *of* time or of a vivifying temporal consciousness, throws the emphasis to the second noun and evokes a beaconing "time-spot." The concept is, in any case, very rich, fusing not only time and place but also stasis and continuity. . . .¹⁴

Hardy's use of time and place does not involve the complex multiple experience association and fusion as does Wordsworth's, but the temporal and spatial relationship follows the older poet's. One of Hardy's "time-spots" is described in "The Mound" (*CP*, p. 843), which begins with spatial and temporal referents, "For a moment pause:— / Just here it was." The "pause" is actually the poem itself, a momentary stay in the temporal universe, during which the speaker recalls an experience associated with the mound. Placing the experience in time and space gives it the order it eventually derives from the poem. Half of the poem is given to a minute description of the mound, as if the mere description lends the experience the tangible reality it needs in order to immortalize the moment the speaker recalls. The recollection is of a former loved one's "undoing," or her refusal of his love. The way each viewed the other is emphasized in the poem as Hardy dramatizes the importance of how one views experience. The poem is tightly ordered in beginning and end; the final lines take the reader out of the experience itself and bring him back to the present, releasing the momentary pause of time which brought him into the poem, "and pause:— / Yes; here it was!" The first and last lines frame the experience in time and place and give it form, as evidenced by the retrospective control the speaker has in relating the experience in one long, well-ordered sentence. The final line affirms the attachment to the mound, which itself gains significance because of the human event associated with it. The poem reflects the way much of life is spent—encountering places about which one reminisces in an experiential manner. The place takes on a different hue; the experience is relived and re-examined; the past retains its importance and blends with the present; and man envisions himself as the center of experience. In all, the activity is one which keeps life meaningful and vital.

And for Hardy it makes accessible some of the abstract incomprehensibles of experience, the "whys" of someone else's behavior, or one's

14. Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry: 1787-1814* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1964), p. 212.

own, or the significance of an experience which has passed too quickly, or of a recollected experience whose significance emerges only after years have passed. Hardy found it almost impossible, it seems, to perceive landscape without emotional associations (with love as the central human emotion), and his use of the mode to mitigate pain, to celebrate a love relationship that no longer exists, or to remember a love experience worth retaining indicates his faith in the variability of landscape for recapturing the past (which for him is almost always better than the present), and thus immortalizing the love relationship. Human behavior is given a substantial and perceivable reality in the landscape. Moreover, the poet never loses the meaningful moments and relationships—while the hearts involved are transitory, the land is permanent. Because of the land's enduring presence, associating love experiences with it renders a temporal experience eternal and conversely turns a timeless landscape into a temporal scene.

Hardy's emerging vision is most evident in the "Poems of 1912–1913," where he engages the landscape in an attempt to comprehend his responses to the death of his first wife, Emma.¹⁵ The prominence of poems of landscape and place in this group affirms one of the major aims of the 1912–1913 series, Hardy's wish and need to preserve past experience, and corroborates his implicit faith in the process. The group includes place poems like "The Walk," "Beeny Cliff," "Places," "Where the Picnic Was," "St. Launce's Revisited," "The Going," "After A Journey," and "At Castle Boterel" (one of the Beeny Cliff poems). "The Figure in the Scene," published in *Moments of Vision*, also belongs to the group, although it is not formally included. The importance of place and landscape dominated Hardy's poetry at this time, revealing his need following Emma's death to impose order on his emotional chaos, to have the tangible presence of place as a stay against con-

15. The guilt Hardy suffered after Emma's death appears as a leitmotif in the poems and has received much critical and biographical attention. Recently, Hardy's biographer Robert Gittings, in *Thomas Hardy's Later Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1978), pp. 147–153, has discovered that before her death Emma suffered from acute and persistent physical pain from a diseased gall bladder, which was largely ignored by Hardy. The evidence sheds new light on Hardy's intolerance of Emma in the last years of marriage and her increasingly splenetic temper. In 1909 Hardy wrote to Clodd in response to an invitation to Aldeburgh, "The only scruple I have about it lies in my domestic circumstances which, between ourselves, make it embarrassing for me to return hospitalities received, so that I hesitate nowadays to accept many" (letter in the British Library, May 1, 1909). After Emma's death, the tone in Hardy's correspondence shifts to that of the poems, as the guilt and regret begin to take over. To Florence Henniker, he confesses "In spite of the differences between us, which it would be affectation to deny, and certain *painful delusions* [my italics] she suffered from at times, my life is intensely sad to me now without her. The saddest moments of all are when I go into the garden and to that long straight walk at the top that you know, where she used to walk every evening just before dusk, the cat trotting faithfully behind her; and at times when I almost expect to see her as usual coming in from the flower-beds with a little trowel in her hand" (*One Rare Fair Woman*, p. 155). And he concurs with Clodd's comforting words, "Yes: what you say is true. One forgets all the recent years & differences, & the mind goes back to the early times when each was much to the other—in her case & mine intensely much" (Letter in the British Library, Dec. 13, 1912). Some months before *Satires of Circumstance* was published Hardy admitted his reluctance in publishing the 1912–1913 poems: "Some of them I rather shrink from printing—those I wrote just after Emma died, when I looked back at her as she had originally been, and when I felt miserable lest I had not treated her considerably in her latter life. However, I shall publish them as the only amends I can make, if it were so" (*One Rare Fair Woman*, p. 163).

fusion. *Satires of Circumstance*, the volume in which the 1912-1913 poems are included, opens, as we have seen, with "In Front of the Landscape," followed closely by "The Difference" and "When I Set Out for Lyonesse." After these appear "Beyond the Last Lamp," "Wessex Heights," "The Place on the Map," and "The Schreckhorn." This section of the volume, "Lyrics and Reveries," closes with the fine landscape poem, "Under the Waterfall," which is followed by Hardy's best and most formal group of poems, the "Poems of 1912-1913." This is a rich section of the *Complete Poems*, including "Convergence of the Twain" and "Channel Firing," and I think the best fifty pages in the entire volume.

A sense of Hardy's emotional investment in place can be glimpsed in the first poem of the 1912-1913 group, "The Going" (*CP*, p. 338). The poem is a powerful lament in which Hardy mourns Emma's death and regrets their not having done anything while she was alive to renew their relationship. The pain Hardy speaks is awesomely moving and embarrassingly private, and he finds vent for his grief in the landscape poem. In the opening stanzas Hardy appears unable to bear Emma's seeming indifference to her leaving him alone and his inability "To gain one glimpse of [her] ever anon!" The retrospective vision heightens his awareness of how unprepared he was for the moment of her going, and in a gently eloquent line he shifts the blame to her to ease his guilt: "Never to bid good-bye, / Or lip me the softest call."¹⁶ His ignorance of the moment's importance is voiced in terms of spatial experience, which leads him in his search for Emma to those spots they visited together, "Unmoved, unknowing / That your great going / Had *place* that *moment*, and altered all" (my italics). The lines suggest Hardy's spatial conception of temporal experience, the preserving of which requires a reconstruction of time and place. Hence it is that Hardy's visions take him to "the end of the alley of bending boughs / Where so often at dusk you used to be" where he suffers in the painful agony of seeing her shape more in absence. Momentarily, he finds solace in visions of her riding on the cliffs:

You were she who abode
By those red-veined rocks far West,
You were the swan-necked one who rode
Along the beetling Beeny Crest

He laments having done nothing to help things between them and mournfully asks why they did not "strive to seek / That time's

16. A noted instance of Hardy's revisions. In early versions of the poem, the line reads "Never to bid good-bye, / Or give me the softest call." The substitution of "lip" for give accomplishes several things. While it eliminates the "v"- "g" alliteration, it gains in sensuality and "softness." Aside from it sounding so much better, Hardy also alters the meaning. Perhaps "give" would imply too much demand on his part, for from what we know there seems to have been little giving in the last years of the marriage. The passivity of "lip" suits the situation more accurately. See Gibson, "The Poetic Text" in *Thomas Hardy and the Modern World* for an informative discussion of Hardy's revisions.

renewal?" He finds a seeming solution for redeeming the time in the return to place.

. . . We might have said,
'In this bright spring weather
We'll visit together
Those places that once we visited.'

But the solace of imaginative revisitations like those of "After A Journey" and "Castle Boterel" escapes him, and in the final stanza he resigns himself to the hopeless suffering he must sustain alone.

Well, well! All's past amend,
Unchangeable. It must go.
I seem but a dead man held on end
To sink down soon. . . . O you could not know
That such swift fleeing
No soul foreseeing—
Not even I—would undo me so!

Through the quickening, brief lines in the beginning of the stanza and the monosyllabic third and fourth lines, he tries to hold in check the chaos of the painful regret, guilt, and sense of surrender. His undoing has been a searing experience and finds no greater expression in any of the 1912-1913 poems.

These poems which combine landscape and recollected experience confirm Hardy's aesthetic theory which I earlier called "mediated realism" and his more instinctive notion that one cannot view a scene without impressing it with his own personality. Because so much of Hardy's poetry depends on memory and the past, most of the landscape poems dramatize the interaction of recollected and present scenes, but not all. In a different kind of interaction, Hardy readily creates a scene to reflect a speaker's mood and feelings at a particular moment, without a dependence, necessarily, on memory. The emotions color a scene and make it variable, constantly changing, ever mutable. A landscape, actual or imagined, or both, is thought to exist not independently of man, but predominantly in his perceptions of it, which impart to phenomenal reality the potential for infinite faces. The landscape takes on yet another quality for Hardy, that of an objective correlative which reflects the temperament or mood of a speaker. Thus, Hardy can determine the shape or quality of a particular scene to avoid predicaments like those of the speaker of the second "In Tenebris" poem, "shaped awry" and out of tune with things in general. Rather, the process admits and encourages strongly felt emotion precisely because its reflection in the landscape reveals to the poet that what he experiences does not separate him from the world as it is. The poems in which the landscape works as an objective correlative create a place in the world for the speaker by making it more like him. And furthermore, they emphasize more strongly

the importance of how one regards things, which is the subject of Hardy's best-known landscape poem.

The opening scene of "The Darkling Thrush" (*CP*, p. 150) is by far Hardy's most dynamic poetic landscape. The speaker of the poem reads "terrestrial things" whose interpretations in the first two stanzas are despairingly deathly. Of the various images in these stanzas, the most important is the lyre. Not only do the visual image and its aural associations suggest the impossibility for harmony with the landscape, but the image spatially locates the speaker behind the tangled stems, gazing outward and upward like one imprisoned by the scene. The image epitomizes the major concern of the poem by drawing more attention to itself as a mode of regard dependent on the perceiver's sense of his place in the world than it does to the scene. The speaker looks upon the landscape as if it were a corpse, and with this metaphorical mode of regard shaping his vision, the universe becomes shroud and dirge, the world becomes like him.

Hence the speaker is seemingly startled by what he hears as the thrush's hopeful song, which supposedly transcends the discord of the first stanza's broken lyre. Because he has done so in the first two stanzas, the speaker assumes that the bird chooses to fling its soul upon the landscape. He expects the universe to behave as he does, and thus anticipates similarity between the bird's landscape and his. When his expectations are contradicted, he ascribes the cause to the bird's "Hope." Yet by assuming that what he has seen is what the bird also sees, the speaker denies to the bird the possibility of a different mode of perception, one that is less self-conscious than his and therefore more hopeful. (In other words, the bird may not "see" a funeral in the landscape.) The speaker's perception of the bird differs qualitatively from his perception of landscape—in both, we discover, his mood determines what he sees, namely gloom in the landscape and hope in the bird. The poem does not, as is conventionally believed, set up a dialectic between human perception and animal perception; nor does it suggest that man can learn how to read nature from the birds. Nowhere in the poem does the speaker relax his shaping vision of what he regards—everything is filtered through his personality. He is not at all *unaware* of the blessed Hope he attributes to the bird's song, but is in fact responsible for interpreting it as such. His seeming *disregard* of the presence of two of his moods in the poem, one gloomy, one hopeful, suggests that it is not the bird which is darkling, but the speaker. He is not unaware of the hope, but of the mode of regard and perceptual process he is experiencing, which turns the world into what one wants it to be.

The speaker has been confronted in the poem with contradictory phenomena—the joyless land and the joyful bird—and in the perceptual confusion creates an artificial cause and effect between the two. The final stanza is that of what we might call an unreliable narrator who

mistakenly attributes to the bird what he himself is feeling. The speaker assumes that the bird's hope is due to some knowledge the bird possesses and he does not. But the source of whatever hope there is in the poem lies in the speaker himself, who never stops perceiving objects in the poem as objective correlatives. We discover in the speaker a hopeful bias to which he is blind. To call Hardy a pessimist because of this poem is to ignore the origin of the vision. To say that he presents in the poem a speaker who tries to read human significance from a neutral landscape and a neutral bird, and that regardless of what he sees, he will arrive at the same conclusions—that things look gloomy but not hopeless—is to approach the poem from a point of view from which one recognizes that Hardy is more interested in man's shaping perceptions of things than he is in the things themselves.¹⁷

In this shaping process, landscape undergoes a subtle metamorphosis. Things are never quite the same after Hardy stamps them with recollected experiences and emotions. This is, I suspect, as it should be, for viewed in this way the process affirms human presence in the midst of an anonymous physical world. The kind of transformation I have in mind occurs in "Neutral Tones" (*CP*, p. 12), a poem about the lingering effects of an unsuccessful love experience. The actual particulars of the experience are shaded by the recollected emotions Hardy attaches to the minutely described place as he once again focuses on the people in the specific landscape.

We stood by a pond that winter day,
And the sun was white, as though chidden of God,
And a few leaves lay on the starving sod;
—They had fallen from an ash, and were gray.

Hardy reconstructs the scene to reflect the deadness in the relationship. Everything suffers, the blank pallid sun, the barren turf, the decaying leaves, the bare ash, and what have enormous potential for life, the water and sunlight and the organic world, seem as if they were purposely fashioned for this scene and no other. And the love relationship, like the leaves in the first stanza, withers and dies and decays. The moment is one of Hardy's most devastating as a failed lover, and the images of life and death portray the stinging waste in love that has died.

The smile on your mouth was the deadest thing
Alive enough to have strength to die;
And a grin of bitterness swept thereby
Like an ominous bird a-wing. . . .

17. A passage in Dickens' *Oliver Twist* strikingly anticipates Hardy's poem. The narrator ponders the subject as he describes Oliver's refreshing sojourn in the country with the Maylies: "Such is the influence which the condition of our own thoughts, exercises, even over the appearance of external objects. Men who look on nature, and their fellow-men, and cry that all is dark and gloomy, are in the right; but the sombre colours are reflections from their own jaundiced eyes and hearts. The real hues are delicate, and need a clearer vision." (*The Clarendon Dickens*, ed. Kathleen Tillotson [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966], p. 226.)

The smile seems attached to the woman's mouth like a leaf to a tree, ready to drop off and turn gray at the slightest breeze, like everything else in this sombre poem. Hardy cannot separate the stunning impact of this visual perception of her face from his own wronged emotions, both of which color the landscape gray. For him, the spot will always retain its sombre hues, which he translates as a literal wasteland.

Since then, keen lessons that love deceives,
And wrings with wrong, have shaped to me
Your face, and the God-curst sun, and a tree,
And a pond edged with grayish leaves.

Hardy's emotional associations lend deathly memories to this place and change it subtly but significantly from what it was in the first stanza. The emphasis in Hardy's description of the scene has shifted in the final stanza; between the first and last two modifications appear—a metaphor is actualized and a factual descriptive detail approaches metaphor. The phenomenally realized white sun, earlier described "*as though* chidden of God" (my italics) is now "the God-curst sun," and the gray leaves (ll. 3–4) are now "grayish." In the transformation, the metaphor has become literal, and the literal has slipped closer to metaphor. The shift in language suggests that the associational process is not merely an identical transference of emotion from the self to the landscape, during which the place remains the same while an event is connected to it, but that the process of making landscape into experience changes the shape of reality, and what *is* only resembles what *was*. The emotionally wrought perception of the scene replaces the clear grays and whites. The tones really are neutral, not because of the color properties of the shades, but because colors of feeling mix with colors of external reality; the literal and the metaphorical blend to a neutral mediated hue and create a world neither one nor the other, but one unified by man's imagination.

Hardy's shaping mode of regard harmonizes what appear to him at first to be contradictory and frequently conflicting aspects of experience—individual private reality and the external world of objects—as he wants to believe that man and his environment are not at odds with one another. The sought after harmony results in "neutral tones" that make experience in its fullest possible sense the focus of Hardy's world. Admittedly, his visions often result in inaccessibly private imaginative worlds. Nevertheless, it is through the poetic medium that the idiosyncratic modes of regard are shared. The visions themselves may be unattainable by the reader, but the mode of regard is not. It is that which Hardy impresses time and again upon the reader of his poetry—that a way of perceiving reality leads to a meaningful engagement of it.

*State University of New York
Stony Brook*

From William Blake's Notebook:

I saw a chapel all of gold
That none did dare to enter in
And many weeping stood without
Weeping mourning worshipping

I saw a serpent rise between
The white pillars of the door
And he forcd & forcd & forcd
Down the golden hinges tore

And along the pavement sweet
Set with pearls & rubies bright
All his slimy length he drew
Till upon the altar white

Vomiting his poison out
On the bread & on the wine
So I turnd into a sty
And laid me down among the swine