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Hardy's Novel Impression-Pictures

by NORMAN ARKANS

THE IMPRESSIONISM of Thomas Hardy's *The Woodlanders* has been remarked by many readers, usually with an unavoidable reference to Barber Percomb's ravishing eye for Marty South's abundant crop of hair and with the requisite allusions to Hardy's notebook entries on impressionism and art which were placed in the *Life* to coincide with Hardy's work on *The Woodlanders*. Yet few readers have trusted these impressionistic cues enough to regard the novel fully in the light of impressionist aesthetics and Hardy's exposure to impressionist art. This is what I propose to do in the following discussion, though to suggest that Hardy's literary art can be described as impressionistic in quality, and therefore to appropriate freely the concepts and terms of one art form for another, runs the risk of confusing the figurative with the literal. Any analogical comparison between painting and literature has its limits, and if we think in terms of the inverse relationship between the two—of “seeing” a book and “reading” a painting—we are in much less danger of straying beyond the bounds of reasonable and useful discourse on the subject. “Seeing” *The Woodlanders* from this perspective shows Hardy's impressionism residing largely in the interstices, to borrow one of his favorite words, of the novel's story. Hardy loads these spaces with what can best be described as the “stuff” of the story—representing its essential quality—so that as we encounter the characters and events of the novel, we remain in constant touch with this quality. The effect of such a technique yields a singular and predominant impression for the novel, a major undercurrent gliding beneath the surface. This aspect of Hardy's art is of prime importance and stems from his absorption of the basic principles of the impressionist school of painting.

Like other revolutionary movements in the arts, French Impressionism burst upon the scene with an intensity that was to ensure both its relatively short life and its indelible imprint on the course of twentieth century art. That this movement happens to have been contemporaneous with much of Hardy's novel writing—the period of the first impressionist exhibition in 1874 to the final group showing in 1886 spans the time between *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *The Woodlanders*—is, of course, largely coincidental, though that both occurred in the latter decades of the nineteenth century in Europe will be attributed by scholars of a historical per-

suasion to specific social, cultural, and aesthetic factors prevalent at the time. From the perspective of artistic influence, there also appears to be sufficient grist here for the mill, some of it rather tantalizing. Hardy's familiar pronouncements recorded in the *Life* about impressionist art, J. M. W. Turner, and the nature of artistic reality show that he not only was exposed to impressionist painting, but found its basic tenets stimulating and attractive. Given Hardy's immersion in the London art scene, a glimpse of which we catch in Michael Millgate's biography, and his fondness for visiting galleries, it is very likely that he would have seen the impressionists' work and followed the controversies it stirred among the critics in London and Paris, among them Emile Zola. While we have no evidence that Hardy actually visited the London gallery of Paul Durand-Ruel, the Parisian dealer who promoted the work of the impressionists in 1873-74 and again in 1882-83, it is not at all impossible that he did so during his annual stay in London, especially at Durand-Ruel's show at Dowdeswell's galleries in New Bond Street from April to July, 1883, when Hardy reports that he was in London "seeing pictures, plays, and friends."¹ Nor is it difficult to see him making the rounds of similar galleries in Paris during his trips there from 1882 to 1890, especially during the autumn of 1882, when the Hardys settled in for several weeks to rove about and take in the art of Paris. We know from a letter to Mary Sheridan dated June 1, 1889, that Hardy saw a Monet exhibition of "impression pictures," finding them "interesting" and vivid in their synaesthetic effects: "In looking at them you could almost feel the heat of the sun depicted in the painting, & the dazzle of the noon-day."² On the literary side, about the time he was finishing *The Woodlanders* in 1886 and 1887, Hardy made extensive transcriptions in his notebooks of passages from Zola's *Germinal* and *Abbe Mouret's Transgressions*.³

The word "impression" appears frequently in statements Hardy made about his art. On numerous occasions, for instance, he urged his reading public to accept his novels as impressions rather than arguments, this in response to what was perceived by some to be Hardy's polemic in favor of certain controversial ideas on such things as religion, marriage, or sexual behavior. The unfavorable reception of what was perceived as his philosophic pessimism brought forth from Hardy a defense of his poems as "feelings and fancies written down in widely differing moods and circumstances." He proposed that "the road to a true philosophy of life seems to lie in humbly recording diverse readings of its phenomena as they are forced upon us by chance and change." These he referred to as "unad-

1. Florence Emily Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy 1840-1928* (1928, 1930; rpt. London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 159.

2. *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Richard Little Purdy and Michael Millgate (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), I, 191.

3. *The Literary Notes of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Lennart A. Björk (Gothenburg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1974), #A180-201.

justed impressions.”⁴ Though Hardy’s frequent use of the word may differ somewhat from that of the painters, I nevertheless want to suggest that in general the artist’s relationship to experience implied by the concept of impressions grows out of a common *Zeitgeist*.

One of the predominant qualities of impressionist painting is the apparent motion of objects, achieved through the impressionists’ attempt to portray the subtle effects of light on objects and the resultant rainbow of color produced by varied light effects. In concentrating their attention on light and its vibration, especially upon water, the impressionists developed stroke techniques creating the illusion of action and motion. If constant motion is a principal force at work in the universe, then a painting can represent an object only at a precise moment of time. Hence, we have the impressionists’ series paintings, such as Monet’s Rouen Cathedral series, in which an object is presented under varying light conditions at different times, or, in other words, from different perspectives. Reality, or the truth of any representation of reality, will reside in the eye and mind of the perceiver capturing the moment. With such an emphasis on motion, the world is represented in a state of constant flux, subject to continual change. Any attempt to represent such a world in painting or novels would have to appear as a series of seemings, approximating truth for that moment, but likely to change in the next. Moreover, in such an evolving world, the relationship among objects is never fixed. The indistinctness in the contours of objects in impressionist paintings suggests this dynamic relationship between objects, including relationships between people and between people and their environment. The world is seen as an organic unity with all things interpenetrated by light and energy.

In focusing their efforts on painting light, the impressionists were trying to paint something that had not been painted before: the literal equivalent of atmosphere, the glue-like substance that lay between people, landscapes, and objects, linking them together. And in this substance, this ether that infuses a scene and connects the objects in it, lay the essence of experience, which the impressionists attempted to capture in giving life to their “impression” of a moment. This, it seems to me, is the crowning achievement of the impressionist school, the suggestion, in the immediacy of experience, of a dynamic universe continually evolving. It is this aspect which more than any other links Hardy the novelist to Impressionism.

Notes on the subject of art and painting that he selected for inclusion in the *Life* point to the aesthetic kinship between Hardy and the impressionists. For instance, Hardy’s eye for “the deeper reality underlying the scenic, the expression of what are sometimes called abstract imaginings” in landscape painting resembles Camille Pissarro’s advice to a young

4. See the prefaces to the 5th edition of *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* (1892), the 1st edition of *Jude the Obscure* (1895), and *Poems of the Past and the Present* (1901) in *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*, ed. James Gibson (London: Macmillan, 1976), p. 84.

painter “not to give the contour in detail, but to paint what is within. Paint the essential character of things, try to convey it by any means whatsoever, without bothering about technique.”⁵ Hardy’s comment comes in the midst of an important sequence in the *Life*. For the period towards the end of 1886, Hardy arranged a number of entries dealing with art, impressionism, and the status of his current project, the composition of *The Woodlanders*. He begins the sequence with a word-picture of a winter scene and follows it with his well-known note on impressionism, occasioned by an exhibit at the Society of British Artists. The principles he cites (“what you carry away with you from the scene is the true feature to grasp . . . *what appeals to your own individual eye and heart in particular . . .*”) to his way of thinking are “more suggestive in the direction of literature than of art.” Hardy then recounts one of his “social” visits with Mrs. Jeune, picturing her as “an example of Whistler’s study in red,” which he had seen that morning in the Gallery. We are told of his discussion with Lady Carnarvon concerning *The Woodlanders* and trees at Highclere. He recalls how she “went about the room weaving little webs of sympathy between her guests,” the web forming one of the dominant image patterns in *The Woodlanders*. The year 1886 draws to a close, and the entries for 1887 begin with two rather lengthy notes on art, the one about wanting to see the deeper reality underlying the scenic in landscape painting, and the other oft-quoted one on his attraction to the “much decried, mad, late Turner,” in which “the exact truth as to material fact” yields to truth derived from the mind’s interaction with an object. In the next breath, Hardy announces the completion of *The Woodlanders*.

It is clear from this portion of the *Life* that, at the time Hardy was working on *The Woodlanders*, his aesthetic ideas were deeply influenced by his exposure to impressionism. If, as is becoming more apparent as we begin to unravel the mystery surrounding the composition of the *Life*, one of its organizing principles is the clustering of pertinent information around particular poems and novels, then Hardy’s arrangement of his notes on art, and their impressionist aesthetic, with his progress reports on the completion of *The Woodlanders*, should not be taken lightly. These clues may be his way of telling us how to go about tracing signifying patterns in the novel.

Another way of thinking about the overall impression arising out of the “interstices” of a novel, its “deeper reality” so to speak, is to consider the texture that emerges in a novel when a predominant aspect of it both delineates its infrastructure and completes the space created by the structure. In *The Woodlanders*, of course, the woods create this texturing effect, but we see it in other novels as well, though not to the same extent. For example, in the sequence formed by chapters 19 through 23 in the

5. Cited in John Rewald, *The History of Impressionism* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1973), p. 456. The advice was given in 1896–97 to the painter Louis Le Bail.

heart of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, the ritualistic activities associated with sheep farming create a distinct and all-encompassing impression. Intermingled with Boldwood's marriage proposal to Bathsheba, Oak's banishment and return, and Boldwood's displacement of Oak at the shearing supper (which only momentarily stabilizes the love triangle), are the sheep washing, the grinding of the clipping shears, the almost fatal illness of the flock, the sheep-shearing, and the shearing supper. It is all sheep. The overall effect of the sequence suggests a new version of pastoral in which passion, the traditional basis of the relations between the sexes — and Hardy's abiding subject — is inseparably linked to the work with which people occupy their lives. The sequence contributes its impression to the mass of prosaic reality out of which enduring — though temperate — passions grow.

Tess, too, exhibits facets of Hardy's impressionism. It is a novel always on the move — migration propels the novel forward — and its several moods are reflected in the impressions left by Tess's various phases. The most notable of these is at Talbothays, where once again the intersection of love and work determines the novel's texture. The Talbothays section radiates the lushness of the dairy valley where Hardy means to regenerate Tess. This world is imbued with the power to evolve and change organically, and we find ourselves continually meeting sentences like the following, which recur as a leitmotif throughout the section: "Rays from the sunrise drew forth the buds and stretched them into long stalks, lifted up sap in noiseless streams, opened petals, and sucked out scents in invisible jets and breathings." This is vintage Hardy writing, and when you think of Talbothays, passages like this spring to mind. For example, there's Hardy on cows:

They were the less restful cows that were stalled. Those that would stand still of their own will were milked in the middle of the yard, where many of such better behaved ones stood waiting now — all prime milchers, such as were seldom seen out of this valley, and not always within it; nourished by the succulent feed which the water-meads supplied at this prime season of the year. Those of them that were spotted with white reflected the sunshine in dazzling brilliancy, and the polished brass knobs on their horns glittered with something of military display. Their large-veined udders hung ponderous as sandbags, the teats sticking out like the legs of a gipsy's crock; and as each animal lingered for her turn to arrive the milk oozed forth and fell in drops to the ground.

Or there's Hardy watching the world from the perspective of a young couple in the bloom of spring love:

They could then see the faint summer fogs in layers, woolly, level, and apparently no thicker than counterpanes, spread about the meadows in detached remnants of small extent. On the gray moisture of the grass were marks where the cows had lain through the night — dark-green islands of dry herbage the size of their carcasses, in the general sea of dew. From each island proceeded a serpentine trail, by which the cow had rambled away to feed after getting up, at the end of which trail they found her; the snoring puff from her nostrils, when she recognized them, making an intenser little fog of her own amid the prevailing one. Then they drove the animals back to the barton, or sat down to milk them on the spot, as the case might require.

Or perhaps the summer fog was more general, and the meadows lay like a white sea, out of which the scattered trees rose like dangerous rocks. Birds would soar through it into the upper radiance, and hang on the wing sunning themselves, or alight on the wet rails subdividing the mead, which now shone like glass rods. Minute diamonds of moisture from the mist hung, too, upon Tess's eyelashes, and drops upon her hair, like seed pearls. When the day grew quite strong and commonplace these dried off her; her teeth, lips, and eyes scintillated in the sunbeams, and she was again the dazzlingly fair dairy-maid only, who had to hold her own against the other women of the world.

It is not the presence alone of such writing that I want to call impressionistic, though it is, but the effect Hardy hopes to achieve from it. Writing like this stems from an impressionistic impulse to distill the essence of a novel's vision to form what Hopkins called the "under-thought" of a work, the substance from which the conception of the novel springs and which permeates its being. It is the structure of a novel translated to its style. I can think of no other nineteenth century novelist who conceived of the novel quite in this way, and it is the singular quality which marks Hardy's uniqueness among the novelists of the century. It is also the legacy he passed on to the novelists of our century.⁶

In *The Woodlanders*, virtually everything that happens happens in the woods. As has often been remarked of Egdon Heath in *The Return of the Native*, the woods themselves become another character in the novel. Yet in *The Return of the Native*, the heath functions largely as the stage upon which the human drama is enacted. In *The Woodlanders*, however, the woods provide more than a setting for a particular human drama. They comprise the texture of the novel, infusing it with a tone and feeling almost primitive in nature. Everywhere you turn in this extraordinary novel, you come up against the intricate patterns and sheer labyrinthine mass of these woods. It is as if the novel were written with Hardy rarely, if ever, taking his eyes off them. In fact, the only time he does so for very long is during the divorce sequence, which is also the most desultory reading in an otherwise splendid novel.

The woods dominate our consciousness as we experience the novel. The smells of decaying leaves and pomace and bark saturate the pages and, together with vivid descriptions of the gnarled and twisted trees, project a world whose basic laws are visible in its facade: the mutable forces of evolution which underlie the fundamental struggle for existence. These are the immediately apparent signs of the role Hardy has in mind for the woods, investing them not only with the ether of the novel, but loading them with a symbolic significance reflective of the forces at work on the human side. But they also have a less pronounced presence, which con-

6. One may read Trollope, for instance, and follow a story that seems to unfold itself effortlessly, or Eliot to discover the subtleties of character and psychological realism. A Hardy novel distinguishes itself in a different way by projecting a distinct image of an organic world, cosmic in its magnitude, in which the natural, supernatural, and human elements combine for a larger-than-life effect. This ambitious aspect of the scope of Hardy's vision yields the characteristic I have been describing as its texture, or essence, and the only other novelist of the period who occasionally comes to mind in this way is Dickens. The kind of fiction Hardy was writing contributed to the development of the novel as seen in the works of writers like Lawrence, Joyce, and Faulkner.

tributes to their ubiquity. For example, the simple narrative act of moving Grace out-of-doors for a walk with her father requires the woods: "The breeze was fresh and quite steady, filtering itself through the denuded mass of twigs without swaying them, but making the point of each ivy-leaf on the trunks scratch its underlying neighbour restlessly." Or Fitzpiers may resort to the language of the forest in expressing his idea of love: "it is joy accompanied by an idea which we project against any suitable object in the line of our vision, just as the rainbow iris is projected against an oak, ash, or elm tree indifferently." Or, even more ironically, the growth of a feeling between Grace and Fitzpiers entails an analogy drawn from the world they inhabit but may not fully comprehend: "Theirs grew as imperceptively as the twigs budded on the trees." Images like these by themselves are not extraordinary, but in a novel in which the reader's gaze is so often directed to the woods, it is worth asking why Hardy is so determined not to let up, not for a minute.

Consider, for example, the number of crucial episodes that directly involve the woods. There is John South's obsession with his elm tree and its symbolic presence in Grace's rejection of Giles. There is Fitzpiers's and Grace's first real tryst after the barking episode in the woods. There is the night Felice and Grace together wander lost in the woods. There is Grace's escape from Fitzpiers to the woods. And so on.

Like Hardy's other major novels, *The Woodlanders* depicts the changing nature of human experience. The organic growth and continuous evolution we see exhibited in the natural world lie at the core of the human side, also. To calibrate Grace's changes, Hardy invents the unusual plot of having her go through what amounts to four different courtships with her two rival lovers, one with each before and after her marriage to one of them. The Grace we see in each of these separate courtships is different from the others as her experiences accumulate and her character evolves. The changes underscore Hardy's attempt to explore the vague and uncertain mysteries of life which attend the growth of self-knowledge and the relations between the sexes, and with each change new grounds are established upon which the revived relationships proceed. Yet in the midst of these dynamic forces, *The Woodlanders* is a quiet, subdued novel, the overwhelming impression of which is its unrelenting indistinctness. That so little in life is clear and straightforward gets reflected in the shades and entanglements of those prosaic woods.

Exactly who sees and comprehends the woods is at times, though, not very clear, and Hardy capitalizes on this aspect of the novel to emphasize the relative obscurities in life and the difficulty of interpreting experience. From a variety of perspectives, Hardy as narrator focuses his eye on the ever-changing facade of the woods. We know with certainty what he sees and what we as readers are expected to see. However, to what degree the characters share in these perceptions is at times ambiguous. And frequently, our estimation of the characters depends on our assessment of

their relationship to the world in which we observe them but of which they may not be fully cognizant. A sense of this interpretive challenge may be gained from the scene where Grace and Melbury ascend High Stoy Hill to watch for the gallivanting Fitzpiers, whose nightly excursions to White-Hart Vale have resulted in his temporary disappearance.

They halted beneath a half-dead oak, hollow and disfigured with white tumours, its roots spreading out like claws grasping the ground. A chilly wind circled round them, upon whose currents the seeds of a neighbouring lime-tree, supported parachutewise by the wing attached, flew out of the boughs downward like fledglings from their nest. The vale was wrapped in a dim atmosphere of unnaturalness, and the east was like a livid curtain edged with pink. There was no sign nor sound of Fitzpiers.

Hardy presents the picture of this stark, blustery scene to raise momentarily in the reader's mind an ominous note regarding Fitzpiers's fate, but it is not clear to what extent he aligns Grace's and Melbury's vision with ours, and, therefore, to what extent they, too, read the portending signs. From other evidence, of course, we know that Grace, at least, suspects the worst, but not from any indication that she is as attuned to her surroundings as the narrator and the reader are. Doubtless, she perceives, and Melbury also, the gusty wind and perhaps an awkward aspect about the vale. But the curtained sunrise, or the animated lime-tree seeds meant to elicit images of the errant Fitzpiers, or the tree's clutching grip on the earth are very likely restricted to the narrator's and the reader's consciousness.

In this way, Hardy has continual recourse to the woods in developing the figurative undertone of the novel, and he also uses them as a barometer for measuring the relative health of his characters' psyches, frequently as an objective correlative to assist in the difficult task, as he says at one point in the novel, "to precisely describe a human being, the focus of a universe." We perceive the characters in the novel in relationship to the woods, always, and assess them in part according to the comprehension they exhibit of the natural world and its protean forces: the more integrated the better. Fitzpiers's alienation from this world, measured by the dearth of "old association" and familiarity with local objects, comes from his inability, through little fault of his own, to read the landscape, to find in it meaning and significance which only memory can instill. Without these touchstones and the capacity to perceive them, life becomes hazy and unclear, and one gropes blindly for a comfortable place and a familiar identity. One of the principal themes in the novel, the clarity of life versus its undefined and undefinable qualities (as Hardy classified the book), gets worked out in the interplay between character and environment, between character and the woods.

The most important psyche in the book, of course, is Grace's, and the degree to which she is integrated with the woods is a measure of her wholeness. Throughout most of the novel, Grace wanders as an undefined presence, a consciousness without a center. We are told that Grace

is sometimes beautiful and sometimes not. She is presented as a "conjugal creature" whose appearance belies her reality, "a shape in the gloom," difficult to read and discernible only by piecing together "a movement now and a glance then." Fitzpiers's effect on this ethereal creature is to accentuate her indistinctness and exaggerate her confusion, as Hardy emphasizes in contriving the bizarre scene where Grace discovers Fitzpiers asleep, and then becomes conscious of his eyes resting on her back: "An indescribable thrill passed through her as she perceived that the eyes of the reflected image were open gazing wonderingly at her." After one of Fitzpiers's courting visits, Grace "felt like a woman who did not know what she had been doing for the previous hour," and she is "indefinably depressed" after she concedes her wish for a proper church marriage. At what ought to be a moment of triumph and elation in anticipating her marriage, Grace discovers the reality of it to be out of harmony with her conception: "Everything had been clear, then, in imagination; now something was undefined." And after several months of marriage to Fitzpiers, her first encounter with Giles leaves her feeling an indescribable pity for him without understanding why. As things grow increasingly complex for her, Grace fades to a blur of indistinctness and indefinableness, until she virtually disappears in the woods.

The woods have always been a part of Grace's consciousness, unlike Fitzpiers and Felice Charmond, but her connection to them was severed when she was sent away to be educated. When she returns, she still possesses the ability to perceive the life represented by the woods, but not necessarily to comprehend it, and the widening gap between perception and understanding causes increasingly more confusion for Grace. For instance, her view of Giles as "Autumn's very brother" liberates her "like a released bough" from her jealousy over Fitzpiers's affair with Felice: "her sense revelled in the sudden lapse back to Nature unadorned." These feelings confuse her, though, and she attempts to suppress them. The effect, however, is overwhelming, as she shares with Giles a blissfully transcendent experience:

With their minds on these things they passed so far round the hill that the whole west sky was revealed. Between the broken clouds they could see far into the recesses of heaven as they mused and walked, the eye journeying on under a species of golden arcades, and past fiery obstructions, fancied cairns, logan-stones, stalactites and stalagmites of topaz. Deeper than this their gaze passed thin flakes of incandescence, till it plunged into a bottomless medium of soft green fire.

Yet the sublimity of such a moment is repressed, at least for the time being, until Grace believes herself freed from her social obligations to Fitzpiers, when her awareness of the woods once again dominates her consciousness.

During Grace's ordeal in Giles's hut, the narrator casts his gaze and the reader's over a wooded world fraught with infinite faces and varied meanings. Grace's gaze falls on these scenes also, but her distraction is such as

to preclude a full reading of them. From her ordeal, though, she will emerge chastened and whole, for the first time in the novel. And her completeness will be measured by the extent to which she both perceives the wooded world and comprehends it.

The world which reveals itself here is by no means an easy one to read, and its complexities perceived by the reader are barely intuited by Grace.

The plantations were always weird at this hour of eve—more spectral far than in the leafless season, when there were fewer masses and more minute lineality. The smooth surfaces of glossy plants came out like weak, lidless eyes: there were strange faces and figures from expiring lights that had somehow wandered into the canopied obscurity; while now and then low peeps of the sky between the trunks were like sheeted shapes, and on the tips of boughs sat faint cloven tongues.

Throughout the novel, we have watched the struggle in Grace's divided consciousness between her several selves, which alternately gain dominance over her and contribute to her protean emotional life. The elemental experience she undergoes in Giles's hut isolates her from everything but herself, and the ordeal forges her divided consciousness into wholeness. It is essential to the novel that the reader sees this happen, which is one reason the novel continues after Giles's death. Grace will be able to take on Fitzpiers later, though of course she does not, and there is no way she can know it, yet. The utter solitude she feels in the hut strips her of her defenses and brings her face to face with the chaos she has until now managed to avoid.

The wind grew more violent, and as the storm went on it was difficult to believe that no opaque body, but only an invisible colourless thing, was trampling and climbing over the roof, making branches creak, springing out of the trees upon the chimney, popping its head into the flue, and shrieking and blaspheming at every corner of the walls. As in the grisly story, the assailant was a spectre which could be felt but not seen. She had never before been so struck with the devilry of a gusty night in a wood, because she had never been so entirely alone in spirit as she was now. She seemed almost to be apart from herself—a vacuous duplicate only. The recent self of physical animation and clear intentions was not there.

Thus alone in the woods, Grace perceives the elements at work, and Hardy elevates his prose to capture the sublimity of the natural forces contending for existence. Their struggle is Grace's, also, though she does not internalize it as such. It is important to distinguish in segments like the following her perceptions from the narrator's. In the hut, Grace sees a world in turmoil, but it is the narrator who interprets it as a battle for survival. Were Grace able to conceptualize the trees "wrestling for existence," we would be reading a novel written twenty years later by Lawrence, or Woolf. For now, Grace is just discovering the terror and universality of her spiritual loneliness.

She continually peeped out through the lattice, but could see little. In front lay the brown leaves of last year, and upon them some yellowish green ones of this season that had been prematurely blown down by the gale. Above stretched an old beech, with vast arm-pits, and great pocket-holes in its sides where branches had been removed in past times; a black slug

was trying to climb it. Dead boughs were scattered about like ichthyosauri in a museum, and beyond them were perishing woodbine stems resembling old ropes.

From the other window all she could see were more trees, in jackets of lichen and stockings of moss. At their roots were stemless yellow fungi like lemons and apricots, and tall fungi with more stem than stool. Next were more trees close together, wrestling for existence, their branches disfigured with wounds resulting from their mutual rubbings and blows. It was the struggle between these neighbours that she had heard in the night. Beneath them were the rotting stumps of those of the group that had been vanquished long ago, rising from their mossy setting like black teeth from green gums. Further on were other tufts of moss in islands divided by the shed leaves—variety upon variety, dark green and pale green; moss like little fir-trees, like plush, like malachite stars; like nothing on earth except moss.

The strain upon Grace's mind in various ways was so great on this the most desolate day she had passed there that she felt it would be well-nigh impossible to spend another in such circumstances. The evening came at last; the sun, when its chin was on the earth, found an opening through which to pierce the shade, and stretched irradiated gauzes across the damp atmosphere, making the wet trunks shine, and throwing splotches of such ruddiness on the leaves beneath the beech that they were turned to gory hues. When night at last arrived, and with it the time for his return, she was nearly broken down with suspense.

The ordeal has a certain element of the surrealistic about it, as the natural forces build to a crescendo over Grace's divided self. The cumulative effect of the impression made on her by this world pushes Grace beyond the barrier she and Giles have erected between themselves, though by now it is too late for Grace to salvage much of anything, here. It is only in the aftermath of Giles's death that we find Grace's perception of the woods and all they represent converging with the narrator's and ours. The two perspectives become less distinguishable than they have previously been, signifying that the indistinctness and indefinableness of Grace's character are coming into sharper focus. She understands now, as the narrator had all along, that Giles and Marty shared an intimate knowledge of the woods and were in harmony with its rhythms.

They had planted together, and together they had felled; together they had, with the run of the years, mentally collected those remoter signs and symbols which seen in few were of runic obscurity, but all together made an alphabet. From the light lashing of the twigs upon their faces when brushing through them in the dark either could pronounce upon the species of the tree when they stretched; from the quality of the wind's murmur through a bough either could in like manner name its sort afar off. They knew by a glance at a trunk if its heart were sound, or tainted with incipient decay; and by the state of its upper twigs the stratum that had been reached by its roots. The artifices of the seasons were seen by them from the conjuror's own point of view, and not from that of the spectator.

Grace has evolved into a creature more in tune with the forces that shape her world, and this will enable her to survive, presumably, the times of quiet and storm she can anticipate in a life spent with Fitzpiers. She is capable now of a deeper communion with the natural world, and it should not pass unnoticed that her final reconciliation to Fitzpiers is set in a luxuriant forest glade, in which there is no getting lost.

. . . she noticed they were in an encircled glade in the densest part of the wood. The moon, that had imperceptibly added her rays to the scene, shone almost vertically. It was an exceptionally soft, balmy evening for the time of year, which was just that transient period in the

May month when beech trees have suddenly unfolded large limp young leaves of the softness of butterflies' wings. Boughs bearing such leaves hung low around and completely inclosed them, so that it was as if they were in a great green vase, which had moss for its bottom and leaf sides. Here they sat down.

The progress of *The Woodlanders* follows the gradual union of Grace's divided self, the source of which lies everywhere around her in the novel, like a *spiritus mundi*, suffusing all things. It is like watching the movement in an impressionist painting between the figure and the scene, the two working together to project more fully the identity of the figure. The presence of this force, this spirit, I attribute to Hardy's conception of the novel and his appropriation from impressionist painting of a mode of representation suited to his vision of a dynamic universe. To tell the story of the growth of Grace's consciousness required the vast impression conjured up by Hardy's woodland world.

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