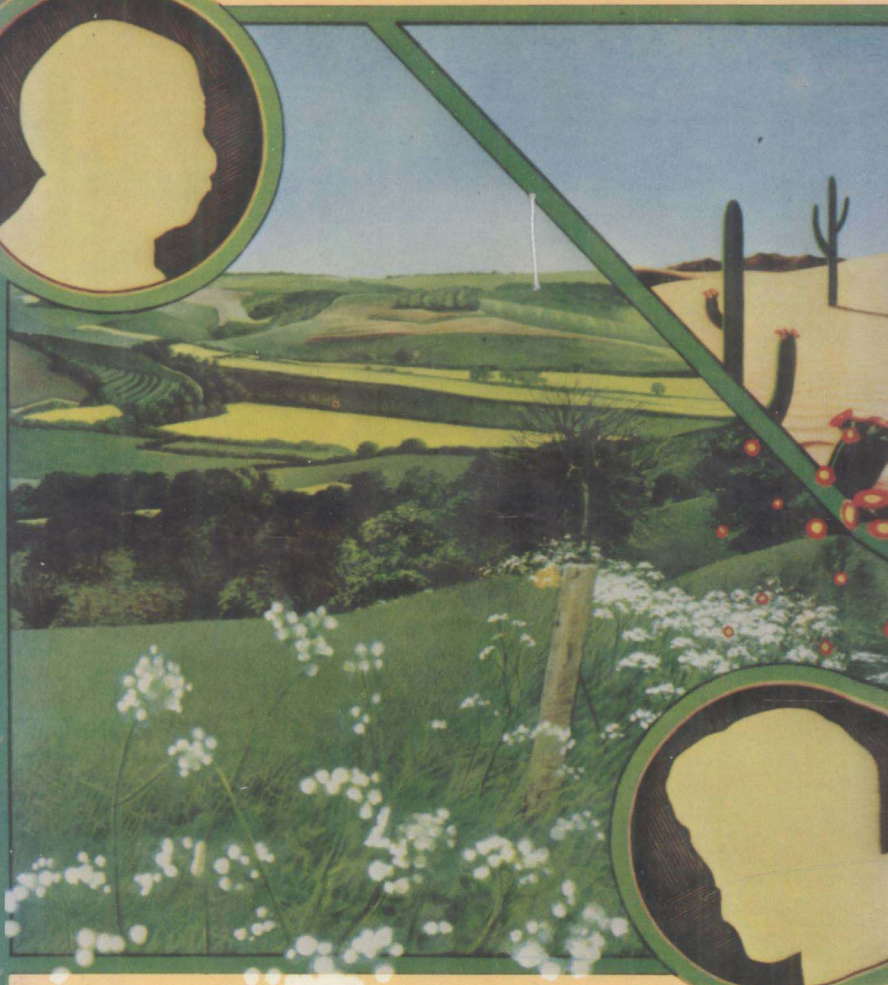
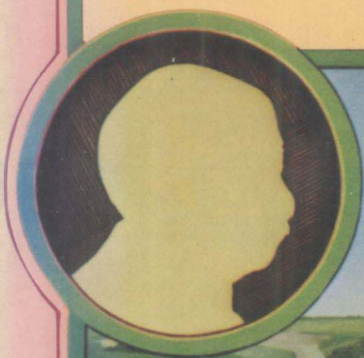


THE NATURE NOVEL  
FROM  
HARDY TO LAWRENCE



JOHN ALCORN

# THE NATURE NOVEL FROM HARDY TO LAWRENCE

JOHN ALCORN

*Professor of English Literature  
San Francisco State University*



© John Alcorn 1977

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without permission

*First edition 1977*

*Reprinted 1978, 1980*

*Published by*

THE MACMILLAN PRESS LTD

*London and Basingstoke*

*Associated companies in Delhi Dublin Hong Kong*

*Johannesburg Lagos Melbourne New York*

*Singapore Tokyo*

ISBN 0 333 21195 2

*Printed in Hong Kong*

*This book is sold subject  
to the standard conditions  
of the Net Book Agreement*

*Naturam expellas furca, tamen usque recurret*  
You may drive out nature with a fork, but she will  
always return.

Horace, *Epistles*, I. x. 24

## Preface

The aim of this study is to demonstrate that between Thomas Hardy and D. H. Lawrence there arose in English literature a new story-telling convention, a convention which involved new themes, descriptive techniques, plot devices, methods of characterization, and new ways of relating character to landscape; and that these changes, far from being gratuitous or accidental, reflect a single basic insight about human experience, an insight which continues to make its force felt in English and American fiction in our own time.

The scope of this subject is necessarily broad, covering some dozen writers and reaching across several decades. But the formal aim is specific and confined: to trace a continuity of theme and technique in a group of English novels during the first two decades of the twentieth century. It is not my aim to provide a rounded or total picture of the novel during this period, but rather to center upon a single literary impulse which co-existed with several others. Thus if I seem to neglect such major novelists as Conrad, James, or Joyce, it is because they relate only occasionally to my subject. Even in respect to the literature which lies within the bounds of my subject, I have had to be highly selective, since the body of that literature is very large. Much more might have been said, for example, about such writers as Wilfrid Scawen Blunt or R. B. Cunninghame Graham; instead I have treated analogous material in the works of W. H. Hudson and H. M. Tomlinson. My method has been to select writers and books which seemed most effectively to represent a huge library of material, much of it now unread and forgotten. The importance of this body of literature is in large measure a cumulative one: taken together, these works provide a new perspective for twentieth-century fiction, both in England and in America.

The need for this study is symbolized by the fact that there is at present no historical term to denote the literary movement which is my subject. My greatest difficulty has been one of terminology. Are these writers "late Romantics," "primitivists," "naturalists," "social

realists," "evolutionary utopians"? Each label is useful, but ultimately inadequate and misleading.

Thus I have found it not only convenient but necessary to invent a term for the movement I hope to trace. I have used the word "naturist" not only because it suggests the essential insight of the movement, but also because the term is devoid of established literary connotations. It is the purpose of this study to provide those connotations, and thus to define the word "naturist," not in abstract language, but in terms of the concrete effect of the novels themselves.

It may be helpful at the outset to provide a working definition of the word. The naturist world is a world of physical organism, where biology replaces theology as the source both of psychic health and of moral authority. The naturist is a child of Darwin; he sees man as part of an animal continuum; he reasserts the importance of instinct as a key to human happiness; he tends to be suspicious of the life of the mind; he is wary of abstractions. He is in revolt against Christian dogma, against conventional morality, against the ethic which reigns in a commercial society. His themes are inevitably utopian; his attention is seldom diverted from questions of social organization, and usually some elements of socialism are at work in his philosophy. As a novelist, he is likely to prefer a loose plot structure, built around an elaborately described landscape. As a descriptive artist, he tends to dislike the fixity of the still photograph, and he anticipates, in many respects, the effect of the "moving" pictures which are coming to birth during these same years. Finally, he is part of that larger movement on behalf of sexual liberation which is one of the marks of English literature from 1890 to our own day.

These writers comprise a loosely knit family: the naturist spectrum extends from the relatively primitivist group (Hudson, Tomlinson, perhaps D. H. Lawrence) to the liberal humanist group represented by Butler and Forster.

I am indebted to Dan Laurence for advice and encouragement, and to Anthony Billings for invaluable help in preparing the manuscript.

# Contents

<i>Preface</i>	ix
1 Hardy: A Better World	1
2 Butler: The New Spirit	25
3 Spirit of Place: The Travel Book	42
4 Spirit of Place: The Novel	60
5 Hardy and Lawrence	78
6 Lawrence: A Version of Pastoral	90
7 Toward Freud	107
8 Epilogue: Is Great Pan Dead?	113
<i>Notes</i>	125
<i>Bibliography</i>	129
<i>Index</i>	137

# I Hardy: A Better World

It is now a good many years since Husserl set forth the motto, "Zu den Sachen selbst," "to the things themselves," as an exhortation to philosophers to bring themselves closer to the sources of experience. To do so is very hard for philosophers: they come to experience with too many intellectual preconceptions. Artists are better at it.

William Barrett, *Irrational Man*

It might be said that the twentieth-century philosopher has set himself the task of presenting reality rather than analysing it. Bergson's "duration," Whitehead's "event," Dewey's "mind," Camus' "absurd," Heidegger's "existence" – each formulation points to a dimension of experience beneath the grasp of clear and distinct ideas. Husserl's "things themselves" are individual entities, and as such are ultimately incomprehensible. For this task of presenting concrete experience, the artist is surely better equipped than the philosopher; thus Santayana, Sartre, and Camus take to writing novels; Dostoevsky and Kafka are glossed by theologians; Nietzsche, Sartre, and Whitehead become literary critics; Conrad and Hardy are discovered to be proto-existentialists; and B. J. Lonergan, a respected Jesuit theologian, can assert that "the artists have become the true moralists of the age."

Nowhere in fiction is this quality of concreteness better exemplified than in the novels of Thomas Hardy. The topography of Wessex, its vegetation, its insect and animal life, and the physical attitudes of its human inhabitants, are the raw material of Hardy's fiction. His growth as a novelist is directly related to his increasing ability to push beyond "word-painting" – the tableau effect of *Two on a Tower* – and to develop the immediate and tactile quality of description that gives such irreducible solidity to Egdon Heath, or Tess's dairy farm, or Jude's Christminster. D. H. Lawrence admired Hardy for his "sensuous understanding . . . deeper than that, perhaps, of any other



## 2 *The Nature Novel from Hardy to Lawrence*

English novelist";<sup>1</sup> and Joseph Warren Beach writes of "Mr. Hardy's extreme fondness for facts," and adds that "there is something touching about the way he leans upon them, his naive faith that in them salvation is to be found."<sup>2</sup>

It is only in the careful description of concrete fact that Hardy can embrace the paradox, the abiding dilemma that lies, like Egdon, beneath civilization. "A novel," wrote Hardy, "is an impression, not an argument."<sup>3</sup> Perhaps too much attention has been given to Hardy's ideas, his "philosophy." Hardy's truth is his quality of vision; it is the style and texture of his novels. His importance for the writers who follow him – and for twentieth-century fiction in general – rests upon the impression his novels give, not upon his attitudes, opinions, or ideas. For Hardy seemed to be saying, with Yeats: "Man can embody truth but he cannot know it."<sup>4</sup>

In Hardy's novels man's body seems to grow, like a tree, from the soil. Farmer Gabriel Oak, in *Far From the Madding Crowd*, is deeply rooted in the soil from which he derives his sustenance, his name, and his sturdy character. Bathsheba, Fanny, Troy, Boldwood – all move around the monumental figure of Oak and the land he symbolizes.

If man is part of the landscape in *Madding Crowd*, Hardy's landscape is itself humanized in *The Return of the Native*. Egdon Heath is presented to the reader, in the first chapter heading, as "A Face on Which Time Makes but Little Impression." Egdon seems to "wake and listen," and to feel at last the human emotion of love: "The storm was its lover, and the wind its friend" (5). These first pages of the novel quickly identify Egdon Heath as "a place perfectly accordant with man's nature – neither ghastly, hateful, nor ugly; neither commonplace, unmeaning, nor tame; but like man, slighted and enduring" (6).

The humanizing of Egdon Heath is more than a convenient metaphor: it is the very soul of the novel, the source of both character and plot. The "lonely face" of Egdon suggests the "tragic possibilities" that will become actual in the plot. But the metaphoric face of Egdon is only a prelude; as the novel progresses, metaphor yields to direct description of the organic life which springs from the heath. In his last novels, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy discards metaphor: his landscape becomes literal and stark, as if to suggest that the traditional device of metaphor has become inadequate for his purposes, creating, as it does, too wide a poetic distance between the thing itself and the writer's sensibility. We are

made to feel Tess's physical movement across the land from the beginning of the story until her final moments at Stonehenge, and in her movement is her story. *Jude* begins with a vivid sense of concreteness, especially in the scenes between Jude and Arabella. But one of the themes of the book is modern man's loss of contact with the physical world, and in the latter portions of the novel, Hardy's style reflects this sense of estrangement and abstraction. Yet the novel is structured around an elaborate symbolism of location, as the chapter headings suggest ("At Marygreen," "At Christminster," "At Melchester," etc.). From the detailed map of Wessex, which first appeared at the front of *Madding Crowd*, Hardy moves toward that sensuous immediacy of landscape characteristic of the later novels. The naturists inherit this exuberant awareness of the earth from Hardy. Hudson, Tomlinson, Douglas, Forster, and Lawrence continually suspend the action of their characters to study the shape and contours of the landscape on which they move.

It can hardly be claimed that Hardy and the naturists were responsible for this renewed attention to landscape and the world of nature in modern English literature. Clearly such credit belongs to their forbears, the Romantic poets, and especially to the poems of Wordsworth. The naturists are deeply indebted to the Romantic movement in matters of style as well as theme. But were the naturists in fact merely translating Wordsworthian nature-worship from poetry into fiction, or did their inspiration have a more immediate and independent origin? Surely they shared with the Romantics an interest in the "unknown modes of being" associated with the world of physical nature. But Wordsworth's response to nature is located still within the epistemological world of John Locke: from the contemplation of a natural setting, Wordsworth derives ideas and feelings. His intimations of immortality end with "soothing thoughts," "the philosophic mind," and "thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."

The naturists, on the contrary, are closer to the unconscious-centered psychology of Freud, Jung, and William James than to the empirical psychology of John Locke; they are suspicious of any conversion of landscape into philosophy, and reject the idea of an empirical event in nature as an occasion for abstract or general thought. Lawrence finds a truth in Hardy's novels "greater than ever the human mind can grasp," and seeks to evoke the same intuitive awareness in his own novels. Virginia Woolf has a similar reaction to Hardy's novels: ". . . there is always about them a little blur of un-

#### 4 *The Nature Novel from Hardy to Lawrence*

consciousness, that halo of freshness and margin of the unexpressed.”<sup>5</sup> This “margin of the unexpressed” is of course present in Wordsworth’s poems as it is in all good poetry; but in the naturist novel it is central, not marginal. E. M. Forster was alluding to this fact when he wrote of Shakespeare and the Romantics as being “subconsciously aware of the subconscious,” in contrast to modern novelists, who “have conscious knowledge of it.”<sup>6</sup>

Wordsworth’s poetic vision presumes a distance between the object (the landscape) and the subject (the poet). The naturist tendency, culminating in Lawrence, is to avoid this subject-object separation by closing the personal subject within the impersonal world of nature. Thus the naturist is post-Romantic in his attempt to obliterate the observing, thinking, feeling first-person, the Wordsworthian “I.” This naturist impulse anticipates the techniques later developed by Pound, Eliot, and Joyce, to alter the personal lyric voice into the dramatic voice of a *persona*, placed within a larger objective framework. To the later writers, that framework is aesthetic and mythic; for the naturist, it is natural and ontological. His characters, like the tiny figures in the immense spaces of a Chinese screen painting, or like the grasshopper-sized Clym Yeobright cutting furze, are themselves part of the landscape. Lawrence’s exhortation, “just be oneself, like a walking flower,” though it would be quickly understood by a student of Zen or the Tao, would likely have seemed absurd to Wordsworth, Shelley, or Tennyson.

The naturist rejects all ideals, including the Romantic ideal of nature. When Lawrence shudders at Shelley’s lines, “Hail to thee, blithe Spirit! / Bird thou never wert,” he was rather heartlessly articulating this naturist aversion to the spiritualizing and idealizing of natural phenomena. Where Wordsworth seeks to assimilate meaning out of nature into mind, Lawrence reverses direction, allowing nature to draw back into itself the contingent mind: “. . . the mind has no existence by itself, it is only the glitter of the sun on the surface of the waters.”<sup>7</sup> Wordsworth might have accepted this statement as an apt metaphor; but for Lawrence it is not metaphor. He means it literally. In the same way, Hardy’s personification of Egdon Heath is misunderstood if it is taken as an example of the Pathetic Fallacy. He is referring to an actual wisdom literally present in nature, though unfathomable to the mind of man. This sea-change in the traditional use of metaphor signals a radical redefinition of the place of human beings in the world of nature; and it is this new and quite original view of nature which identifies and distinguishes naturism as a de-

parture within the larger context of the Romantic movement of the nineteenth century.

What was responsible for the change? In a word, it was the vision of Charles Darwin, penetrating to the process beneath the appearance. Darwin's *The Voyage of the Beagle* was the platform upon which naturism was built. Indeed, for the novelist at the end of the nineteenth century, if there had been no Charles Darwin, he would have to have been invented. From Flaubert and Balzac to Zola, from the Brontës and Jane Austen to Dickens and George Eliot, the basic critique of industrial and bourgeois life had been made. The vein had been thoroughly explored, and it was difficult to see how any new novelist could do it better. The miseries and inequities and snobberies and hypocrisies had been exposed; yet within this great tradition of realism in the novel, there were few premonitions of new possibilities or constructive alternatives for the individual or for bourgeois society. The utopian spirit of the humanists More and Erasmus – a spirit which was, in fact, sanely pragmatic – was conspicuously absent from the nineteenth-century novel, which set itself only the indispensable task of reporting things as they were.

To be sure, Marxism and the various streams of socialism and anarchism were steadily gaining hold among intellectuals, and the spirit of the French Revolution was far from dormant within the working class; but for the time, these movements remained undercurrents of theory, seminal but still powerless. In England, Ruskin's criticism of industrialism was accurate and telling, but his own vision of an alternative society, like that of William Morris, seemed contrived, artificial, and distant from the consciousness of the ordinary man. What was needed was a utopia after the manner of More, Erasmus, and Rabelais – a utopia founded upon a *donnée*, a given truth already present ontologically in nature and not contrived by the theory-ridden minds of men. A new generation of novelists sought to build upon the nineteenth-century critique of bourgeois society in a constructive way, by seeking out a new (though very old) authority, the authority of human and physical nature. The naturist novel was built, not upon a new set of ideals, but upon a new quality of vision which first appeared in the works of Charles Darwin.

It is characteristic of any scientific discovery that phenomena which had previously seemed uninteresting and unexceptional suddenly become fascinating and resonant with meaning. The microscopic quality of Darwin's vision meant that an arid plain became for the first time as interesting as a florid life-filled jungle. A favorite province

## 6 *The Nature Novel from Hardy to Lawrence*

of naturalist description is the desolate landscape – Hardy's "gaunt waste in Thule," Butler's bare Alpine entrance to Erewhon, Douglas's Calabria, Forster's Marabar, Doughty's vast Arabian deserts. Darwin had introduced this central naturalist theme on the first page of *The Voyage of the Beagle*: "The neighborhood of Porto Praya, viewed from the sea, wears a desolate aspect. . . . The island would generally be considered as uninteresting; but to any one accustomed only to an English landscape, the novel aspect of an utterly sterile land possesses a grandeur which more vegetation might spoil."<sup>8</sup>

Darwin's writing provided a basis for the naturalists to hope that modern man could find a way out of the prison of bourgeois institutions to a better world. Darwin's promise of amelioration is framed in the slower rhythms of biological rather than human time, but it was interpreted by the naturalists to be as sure as evolution itself: ". . . and the fact of his having thus risen," Darwin wrote, "instead of having been aboriginally placed there, may give him hope for a still higher destiny in the distant future."<sup>9</sup> The naturalists recognized that this "still higher destiny" would emerge, not from the schemes and theories of men – not from Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, or Marx – but from the quieter and more enduring geological truth hidden within Egdon Heath, the Marabar Caves, the Arabian deserts, and the Amazonian jungles. Thus in Hardy's "The Darkling Thrush," it is no human prophet, but rather the "ecstatic sound" of bird-song which offers the dejected poet "Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew / And I was unaware." This song of hope echoes throughout naturalist literature, and distinguishes it from both the nineteenth-century realist novel and the twentieth-century novel of existential despair.

Throughout *The Voyage of the Beagle* Darwin sensed, even before he understood, that the genius of nature lay in its capacity to create variety. Any general theory in science is an attempt to grasp the single principle of operation which explains the widest possible group of events. But Darwin's extraordinary achievement was to discover that the simplest principle of biological process was the principle of proliferation itself: in its variety was its simplicity, for selection was contingent upon mutation. Organisms survive by means of genetic mutations which are random, accidental, irrational and unpredictable in any individual; it is the environment which selects the mutations and thus provides the principle of unity. This sense of a random and accidental process, operating in terms of unknowable specifics but always within a larger and purposeful plan, marks the uniqueness of Darwin's discoveries in the history of science: nature becomes his-

torical and triumphs over history's accidents. But this triumph has nothing to do with the human mind or human thought; it is the environment, not the mind of man, which provides the principle of unity, the plan, and the wisdom to survive. "Natural selection," wrote Darwin, "is a power incessantly ready for action, and is as immeasurably superior to man's feeble efforts, as the works of Nature are to those of Art."<sup>10</sup> "How fleeting are the wishes of man! how short his time! and consequently how poor will be his results, compared with those accumulated by Nature during whole geological periods!"<sup>11</sup>

The naturists caught from Darwin this central recognition: that the rich profusion of nature contained an adaptive principle far superior to any ideas that might be fabricated by the human mind. The principle of natural selection can be known, but its operation in any particular instance cannot; knowledge of the principle of evolution provides specific data about the past, but not about the future. "Thought is abstract," cries Heard in *South Wind*; had he not abhorred syllogism, he might have added that abstraction is reduction, and that to reduce is to falsify. The naturists insist, with Darwin, that the thought is not the thing. At the end of the naturist adventure, in 1922, the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead would call this superstitious attribution of truth to abstract concepts "the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness."

The naturists are not anti-intellectual, for they recognize the indispensable but limited function of human thought for the preservation of the species *homo sapiens*. Unlike other animals, humans must know in order to survive; but the content of knowledge necessary to human well-being is small. America's early naturist, Thoreau, suggests as much in *Walden*: "Rescue the drowning and tie your shoe-strings." But when knowledge proliferates, as it has in our civilization, far beyond its limited function, it becomes, as it did in Eden, the cause of our fall. The naturist novel returns always to Eden, where there is no knowledge, only wisdom: Clym to Egdon, Tess to Stonhenge, Abel to Patagonia, Stephen to Cadbury Rings, Heard to Nepenthe, Tomlinson's narrator to his Amazonian garden, Birkin and Ursula to Sherwood Forest. It is Birkin who, at the very end of *Women in Love*, best expresses the central naturist inheritance from Darwin: "Whatever the mystery which has brought forth man and the universe, it is a non-human mystery, it has its own great ends, man is not the criterion."

Darwin's admiration for what he calls "profitable variations" in nature is in part responsible for a renewed respect among the naturists

## 8 *The Nature Novel from Hardy to Lawrence*

for individual differences. "Under the term of 'variations,' " Darwin wrote, "it must never be forgotten that mere individual differences are included."<sup>12</sup> In the scheme of evolution, a genetic characteristic which is dormant and maladapted in one kind of environment may become crucial to survival in another. Transforming biology into sociology (as he often did), the naturist sensed that the tendency of any society to ostracize or punish the non-conformist hinders the evolution of the species. The survival of the fittest is thus contingent upon the survival of the misfit. The naturist novel is populated with characters, from Ernest Pontifex and Jude Fawley through Stephen Wonham and Aaron Sisson, who are outcasts, rogues, idlers, eccentrics, drunkards, bi-sexuals, adulteresses – in short, barbarians. After all, Charles Darwin himself had noticed that "there can hardly be a doubt that we are descended from barbarians."<sup>13</sup>

Finally, it was Darwin's use of language in *The Voyage of the Beagle* that furnished a pattern for the prose style of the naturist travel book and novel. The rhythms and periods of Darwin's prose constitute a unique style, a blend of minute observation and interpretative comment. Darwin's language communicates a quiet but constant thrill of discovery, a controlled excitement at his encounter with a hitherto lost world. His nature description possesses a luminous quality which projects, beneath its literal surface, a sense of wonder at this discovery of a brave new world that has such creatures in it. For a poetic equivalent, one thinks of the radiant crescendo of Dante's verse in the "Paradiso" cantos. Such a comparison is not as absurd as it might appear: Darwin's world was prosaic and material, Dante's exalted and incorporeal; Dante looked up, to the unfolding celestial rose, Darwin looked down, to the unfolding fronds of Tahiti. But each is encountering what for him is a literal truth, each is finding an Eden which had been lost but now is a living presence, uncovered to the senses and the intelligence. In both works, the governing metaphor is the physical image of light. And for the generation of naturists who followed Darwin, this newly discerned paradise appeared as wonderful and hallowed as Dante's was to his readers. If Dante's rose was mystical, so too was the naturist landscape. Butler's exalted vision of an Alpine promontory is akin to the humiliating revelation of Adela's real self in the Marabar Caves. The naturist, in short, experienced a religious awe no less intense than that of Dante.

In the first two decades of the twentieth century, landscape becomes a dominating presence in English fiction. Darwin's influence –



and in turn, Hardy's – can be measured, not only in terms of the new importance of landscape description, but more significantly in terms of the new manner in which landscape enters the art of story-telling.

Landscape in the Renaissance pastoral romance of Poliziano or Tasso, Spenser or Sidney, was deliberately enamelled and two-dimensional. Surface color and design provided a static frame, a background for the conventionalized action of the protagonists. Renaissance pastoral poets were not interested in recapturing the vivid concreteness, the tangibility, of Dante's "Inferno" or "Purgatorio," or of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. But in Hardy's "pastoral tragedy" landscape comes alive. No longer a backdrop, it becomes, to use Aldous Huxley's phrase about Lawrence, a "principal personage" whose presence is felt in terms of a new sensuous grasp of space. For Hardy himself seems to be impatient with the secondary qualities of things; he seeks the enduring monumental shape which lies beneath the distortions and limited perspectives of human vision.

Hardy's point of view as novelist is in the tradition of the omniscient narrator; his vision is often Olympian and panoramic; he sees landscape from above, as one looks at a map. Lawrence noticed that at times "the map appears to us more real than the land" ("Study," 420), and Auden spoke of Hardy's "hawk's vision."<sup>14</sup> It is characteristic of Hardy that the title he first chose for *The Dynasts* was "A Bird's-Eye View of Europe at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century."

This sense of the spatial distance of the narrator from the action is essential to the pathos – or the tragic irony – of Hardy's novels. At times, in fact, Hardy seems to be looking at his characters through a telescope. The title "Two on a Tower" conveys an effect of telescopic distance which so often frames his novels, locates the action at every moment, and embraces the contradictions so essential to Hardy's mood. The beginnings of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *The Return of the Native*, and the ending of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, all have a quality of universality which is projected by means of a sense of visual distance.

Hardy's "bird's-eye view," his "hawk-like vision," was the last of its kind in English literature. In a world grown vastly more complex and unmanageable, a world where "things fall apart," few novelists would again have the temerity to try to put things together again through the integrating vision of an omniscient narrator. The twentieth-century novelist would attempt to solve the problem by means of an imposition of myth upon chaos; yet the immediate data



## 10 *The Nature Novel from Hardy to Lawrence*

of literature would become increasingly more subjective, until in Joyce's Molly Bloom a whole cosmos would seem to center upon a kind of organic purring, a physical vibration emanating from heart, stomach, and womb.

Yet this very imagery of teeming life within the organism has its beginning in Hardy; for when he wishes to convey the intensity, movement, and change of the organic life which springs from his landscape, he is equally capable of an opposite, a microscopic, distortion. It is as though Hardy were trying to move from the eighteenth-century Newtonian world of vast spaces to a nineteenth-century world of biological scrutiny. Hardy signals, in the age of Darwin, the advent of a new novelistic language: the language of organic change, of germination and growth. His visual imagination is profoundly affected by the new enthusiasm for the microscope: "I sit under a tree, and feel alone: I think of certain insects around me as magnified by the microscope; creatures like elephants, flying dragons, etc. And I feel I am by no means alone."<sup>15</sup> Just as telescopic distance reduces Hardy's humans to ant-size, so through the intercession of the microscopic lens, the smallest insect takes on a relevance of human proportions.

The diary notation quoted above was written in 1875, and it anticipates the entomological imagery of *Return*, published in 1879. Clym Yeobright's daily life was "of a curious microscopic sort"; "bees hummed," "butterflies alighted," and

tribes of emerald-green grasshoppers leaped over his feet, falling awkwardly on their backs, heads or hips, like unskilful acrobats, as chance might rule: or engaged themselves in noisy flirtations under the fern-fronds with silent ones of homely hue. Huge flies, ignorant of ladders and wire-netting, and quite in a savage state, buzzed about him without knowing that he was a man. (298)

And in answer Clym sings, in the tradition of Colin Clout, a hymn to nature:

"L'oiseau reprend doux chant d'amour  
Tout célèbre dans la nature  
Le point de jour." (299)

Clym's joy as part of the insect and animal world is only a prelude to the almost myopic intensity of Mrs. Yeobright's vision a few pages later. As she sets out toward Alderworth, she penetrates much further than Clym into the dark origins of Darwin's species: