

Imagery and the "Idiosyncratic Mode of Regard": Eliot, Hardy, and Lawrence

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I

IN HIS ESSAY "The Profitable Reading of Fiction," Thomas Hardy discussed the relation between a writer's style and his personal vision:

Style . . . can only be treatment, and treatment depends upon the mental attitude of the novelist; thus entering into the very substance of a narrative, as into that of any other kind of literature. A writer who is not a mere imitator looks upon the world with his personal eyes, and in his peculiar moods; thence grows up his style, in the full sense of the term.¹

Hardy's own "style" is clearly an expression of what he called his "idiosyncratic mode of regard,"² not least in his imagery, but his generalization is equally applicable to other novelists, for any writer's choice and deployment of images will express his personal vision.

George Eliot, Hardy, and D. H. Lawrence on occasion use very similar images, both literal and figurative. It is almost as if they were drawing from a common stock, as they all use images of the movement of tiny organisms (seen through a microscope or with the naked eye) and images of a circle of light or a radiant glow surrounded by a darkness which may contain wild beasts. The images are similar, but the uses made of them, the interpretations they are given, are quite different because of the different personal visions of the three authors. It could be said that all three share a post-Darwinian perspective in that all recognize a disjunction between human consciousness and a natural universe

quite indifferent to it: man is part of the natural world, subject to its indifferent laws of birth, struggle for survival, and death, but his consciousness is separate from it, for it makes no allowances for his sensitivity, his awareness, his morality, his aspiration. All three writers share this basic assumption, but they respond to the disjunction between consciousness and nature in quite different ways. Hardy's response is divided, his different impulses being dramatized by the "phantasmal intelligences" of *The Dynasts*: the agonized, sympathetic, and sometimes bitter humanism of the Spirit of the Pities, which identifies with human consciousness and human aspirations against the indifference of Nature; the resigned naturalism of the Spirit of the Years, which accepts the disjunction of consciousness and Nature and the consequent failure of human aspiration as inevitable; and the dark irony of the Ironic Spirit, which views that disjunction and its effects as a grotesque spectacle.³ Thus Hardy's vision is of a deep dualism, the conflicting responses to which are held in tension.

Both Eliot and Lawrence, on the contrary, move towards a unified response to the basic duality of life, but in diametrically opposed directions. To Eliot, if we face with humility and honesty our mutual human plight in the face of an indifferent godless universe, we may find value and meaning in helping each other. She states the matter clearly in *Adam Bede*:

For if it be true that Nature at certain moments seems charged with a presentiment of one individual lot, must it not also be true that she seems unmindful, unconscious of another? . . . There are so many of us, and our lots are so different: what wonder that Nature's mood is often in harsh contrast with the great crisis of our lives? We are children of a large family, and must learn, as such children do, not to expect that our hurts will be made much of — to be content with little nurture and caressing, and help each other the more.⁴

Thus, as Bernard Paris has stated, her ethical humanism finally leads to a reconciliation of "truth and value, moralism and realism."⁵ Consciousness may be alienated from the indifferent universe, but it can give life value and justify itself by becoming an active ethical consciousness, contributing to "the growing good of the world" by extending the moral order in the face of natural indifference:

Amid all the considerable trials of existence, men and women can nevertheless greatly help each other; and while we can help each other it is worth while to live.⁶

Thus Eliot, unlike Hardy, finally arrives at a unified response to what she sees.

Lawrence finds unity in quite another direction, that of vitalism. To him, the disjunction of human consciousness and nature is neither a tragic fact nor a difficulty that can be made tolerable by the right ethical choices. Rather, the division is the fault of our false, spiritualized consciousness. True "blood consciousness" would lead us to feel at one with Nature, to see that it is not a blind, soulless organism opposed to us, but is rather the ultimate source of value, with which we should be atoned:

We ought to dance with rapture that we should be alive and in the flesh, and part of the living, incarnate cosmos. I am part of the sun as my eye is part of me. That I am part of the earth my feet know perfectly, and my blood is part of the sea. . . . There is nothing of me that is alone and absolute except my mind, and we shall find that the mind has no existence by itself, it is only the glitter of the sun on the surface of the waters.⁷

Lawrence, then, shares Hardy's (and Eliot's) sense of the disjunction between human consciousness and the cosmos as he states it in his *Study of Thomas Hardy*:

This is a constant revelation in Hardy's novels: that there exists a great background, vital and vivid, which matters more than the people who move upon it. . . . Upon the vast, incomprehensible pattern of some primal morality greater than ever the human mind can grasp, is drawn the little, pathetic pattern of man's moral life and struggle, pathetic, almost ridiculous.⁸

The answer to man's plight is not, as in Eliot, the dedication to "the pathetic pattern of man's moral life," but is rather in ceasing to project our limited ideals upon life and instead being faithful to "the greater unwritten morality" which we feel in our "blood consciousness" and which includes our true fulfilment, our coming into Being, as part of its incomprehensible purpose.

These three quite different personal visions lead Hardy, Eliot, and Lawrence to deploy and interpret their similar images quite differently, as the following analyses will attempt to show. In each

case, the analysis will concentrate primarily on a single significant use of the image by each author, but will also include reference to related images.

II

An awareness of the existence of simple, tiny organisms and of their relationship to man was one result of Darwinian biology's impact on the popular mind. George Eliot shows this awareness in one of the more striking metaphors in *Middlemarch*, used to characterize Mrs. Cadwallader:

Even with a microscope directed on a water-drop we find ourselves making interpretations which turn out to be rather coarse; for whereas under a weak lens you may seem to see a creature exhibiting an active voracity into which other smaller creatures play as if they were so many animated tax-pennies, a stronger lens reveals to you certain tiniest hairlets which make vortices for these victims while the swallower waits passively at his receipt of custom. In this way, metaphorically speaking, a strong lens applied to Mrs. Cadwallader's match-making will show a play of minute causes producing what may be called thought and speech vortices to bring her the sort of food she needed.⁹

The image draws upon George Eliot's scientific knowledge (and probably upon her experience of George Lewes's scientific work), and thus as Walter L. Reed has pointed out, brings into the novel a scientific "structure" that implies a criticism of the more conventional literary structures of understanding:

The "scientific" analogy here appeals to a model of vision outside the literary even as it acknowledges its own metaphorical quality. The sweeping overview of Eliot's predecessors — Dickens or Thackeray, for example — is opposed and criticized by the more limited but more discerning point of view of the biological researcher; a literary convention is criticized by a scientific one.¹⁰

In the process, certain naturalistic assumptions, based on Darwinian biology, are made. It is assumed that Mrs. Cadwallader, like a protozoan, is an organism existing in a given environment and attempting to gain sustenance from it. However, the basis of the metaphor is more analogical or allegorical than it is naturalistic; that is, the comparison is obviously clever, even whimsical, and

is not used reductively to imply that human beings are *merely* organisms. Further, the emphasis is as much on the observer and the means of observation as on the thing observed. In a review in 1857 George Eliot had stated that "every great artist is a teacher . . . by giving us his higher sensibility as a medium, a delicate acoustic or optical instrument, bringing home to our coarser senses what would otherwise be unperceived by us."¹¹ In this case she is using her sensibility as an "optical instrument" to help us to see a moral and psychological truth that we might otherwise miss. The image of the protozoan was introduced, not for its naturalistic implications, but as a precise and unusual little allegory to make that moral point. The emphasis is not on the concept that man, despite his consciousness, is merely an organism, part of an amoral natural order. Rather, it is on the ethical value of human consciousness when it is used to understand other human beings.

Hardy's use of the image of minuscule organisms in water is quite different. In at least two of the novels the image is used literally rather than metaphorically, and the naturalistic implications of the relationship of lower forms of life to man are central. The image first appears in *Desperate Remedies* at a crucial point in the narrative. Aeneas Manston, his indirect proposal of marriage having being refused by Cytherea Graye, leans his arms upon the edge of a rain-water-butt and looks within it:

Staves of sunlight slanted down through the still pool, lighting it up with wonderful distinctiveness. Hundreds of thousands of minute living creatures sported and tumbled in its depth with every contortion that gaiety could suggest; perfectly happy, though consisting only of a head, or a tail, or at most a head and a tail, and all doomed to die within the twenty-four hours.

Manston's response to the vision is sharp and immediate:

"Damn my position! Why shouldn't I be happy through my little day too? . . . I'll get her, if I move heaven and earth to do it!"¹²

Here the naturalistic assumptions of the image are made explicit: man is an organism like the water-creatures, seeking happiness and ultimately doomed to death. However, in context such a naturalistic view is seen as reductive. To Hardy, it is both man's

glory and his tragedy that he has a consciousness lacking in the rest of Nature while nevertheless remaining subject to the same indifferent processes of Natural Law. As he later noted. Hardy believed that "the determination to enjoy" pervaded all life: "We see it in all nature, from the leaf on the tree to the titled lady at the ball" (*Life*, p. 213). To Lawrence, such an urge might have been a call from "the greater unwritten morality" that should be obeyed; to Eliot it undoubtedly would have been a lower, egotistical impulse to be resisted in the name of the higher morality. At this stage in his career, Hardy is closer to Eliot, and judges Mans-ton for acting selfishly on his passions (in a way that he does not judge Tess and Jude or even Eustacia Vye), but there is a lingering pity for him as a victim of Natural Law, along with a perverse ironic enjoyment of the spectacle of the intelligent and sensitive man identifying himself with creatures consisting of "at most a head and a tail." Thus the full range of Hardy's "idiosyncratic mode of regard" is implicitly present.

That full range of response is also present, although with the emphasis shifted away from moralism, in Hardy's later use of the image of the water-creatures in *The Return of the Native*. Again the image appears at a crucial point in the narrative. Mrs. Yeobright is making the unsuccessful attempt to see Clym that will lead to her death, and several times she pauses in her journey across Egdon Heath to rest:

Occasionally she came to a spot where independent worlds of ephemerons were passing their time in mad carousal, some in the air, some on the hot ground and vegetation, some in the tepid and stringy water of a nearly dried pool. All the shallower ponds had decreased to a vaporous mud amid which the maggoty shapes of innumerable obscure creatures could be indistinctly seen, heaving and wallowing with enjoyment.¹³

The creatures are simply seen in passing by Mrs. Yeobright and are not commented upon. However, in context they form part of a significant pattern. Immediately after observing the water-creatures, Mrs. Yeobright sees a furze-cutter (who turns out to be Clym), and he is described in terms emphasizing man's relationship with the lower forms of life:

He appeared of a russet hue, not more distinguishable from the scene around him than the green caterpillar from the leaf it feeds on. . . . The silent being who thus occupied himself seemed to be of no more account in life than an insect. He appeared as a mere parasite on the heath, fretting its surface in his daily labour as a moth frets a garment, entirely engrossed with its products, having no knowledge of anything in the world but fern, furze, heath, lichens, and moss. (p. 297)

The point of the imagery is partly social, underlining how far down on the social scale Clym has sunk below the level his mother coveted for him; but the naturalistic perspective implied by the image of the water-creatures is also there, showing man to be, like the lesser creatures, merely a part of a vast system of Natural Law that is indifferent to him, whatever his social pretensions. The system is not without beauty nor is man's place in it without compensations, as is shown in the earlier description of Clym's work on the heath, in which Hardy stresses the satisfaction and beauty of this "daily life of a curious microscopic sort" (p. 273). Nonetheless, even in its beauty the system of Natural Law is utterly indifferent to all human needs and aspirations. Mrs. Yeobright herself, after observing Clym's place in the system, becomes a victim of it, on her journey home facing a sun that "stood directly in her face, like some merciless incendiary, brand in hand, waiting to consume her," and finally dying of heat exhaustion and an adder bite. Before she dies, she again observes "the insect world . . . busy in all the fulness of life" (p. 308). The implication is that she, a member of "one of the larger animal species," is as much subject to the indifferent forces of Natural Law as the humblest creature (and in this situation is ironically more subject to the heat) and suffers more than they because of her consciousness and her aspirations, including her wish to be in "a free and happy place, away from all contact with the earthly ball to which she was pinioned" (p. 309). The entire sequence, of which the image of the water-creatures is but one part, expresses Hardy's naturalism at its most uncompromising, his humanism, more in the form of pity for Mrs. Yeobright than of moral judgment (although there is an implied but qualified approval of Clym's attempt to live contentedly within the limits set by nature), and his irony in

his sense of the grotesque spectacle of the gap between man's illusions and aspirations and his actual position in nature.

D. H. Lawrence's use of the image of a microscopic "plant-animal" in *The Rainbow* is as naturalistic as Hardy's, implying the continuity between man and nature. However, Lawrence celebrates the relationship as a clue to man's salvation rather than mourning it, as Hardy does, as part of his tragedy as a creature who is part of Nature yet has "reached a degree of intelligence which Nature never contemplated when framing her laws, and for which she consequently has provided no adequate satisfactions" (*Life*, p. 163). Lawrence brings in the microscope, but as a literal rather than a metaphorical means of observation, and shows Ursula Brangwen studying minute organisms with it. She has become dissatisfied with her studies, except for botany, where she "had . . . a glimpse of something working entirely apart from the purpose of the human world."¹⁴ As she works in the laboratory, she ponders a conversation with Dr. Frankstone, a physics lecturer who had held that there may be no "special mystery to life," that perhaps "life consists in a complexity of physical and chemical activities, of the same order as the activities we already know in science" (p. 440). Ursula wonders if she herself could be merely "an impersonal force, or conjunction of forces," like heat or electricity:

She looked still at the unicellular shadow that lay within the field of light, under her microscope. It was alive. She saw it move — she saw the bright mist of its ciliary activity, she saw the gleam of its nucleus as it slid across the plane of light. What then was its will? If it was a conjunction of forces, physical and chemical, what held these forces unified, and for what purpose were they unified?

For what purpose were the incalculable physical and chemical activities nodalized in this shadowy, moving speck under her microscope? What was the will which nodalized them and created the one thing she saw? What was its intention? To be itself? Was its purpose just mechanical and limited to itself? (p. 441)

Then she has her epiphany, she discovers for herself the Lawrentian axiom that "The living self has one purpose only: to come into its own fullness of being, as a tree comes into full blossom, or a bird into spring beauty, or a tiger into lustre."¹⁵ Figurative

and literal image come together in the description of her moment of insight:

It is intended to be itself. But what self? Suddenly in her mind the world gleamed strangely, with an intense light, like the nucleus of the creature under the microscope. Suddenly she had passed away into an intensely-gleaming light of knowledge. She could not understand what it all was. She only knew that it was not limited mechanical energy, nor mere purpose of self-preservation and self-assertion. It was a consummation, a being infinite. Self was a oneness with the infinite. To be oneself was a supreme, gleaming triumph of infinity. (p. 441)

Naturalism passes into vitalism, as Ursula sees that the life in the micro-organism may be "working entirely apart from the purpose of the human world," but that is only because the human world has been corrupted by the worship of "the god of material success," so that "Everything went to produce vulgar things, to encumber material life" (p. 435). Man and micro-organism share the same Life Force and have within them the same purpose — to become themselves, but man has perverted his purpose, has lost touch with his natural being. Thus for Ursula (and for Lawrence) the discovery of the continuity of man with the most primitive organisms is liberating not degrading, a discovery of man's true purpose rather than of the tragic limitations of his lot.

III

From moral and psychological analogy to humbling symbol of man's plight as part of an indifferent system of Natural Law to triumphant symbol of man's natural purpose shared with all of life, the image of the tiny organism is used by Eliot, Hardy, and Lawrence for a variety of purposes indicating the differences in their personal visions and implying different metaphysical assumptions. Their treatment of the more traditional image of the circle of light surrounded by darkness reveals parallel differences.

George Eliot uses the image in the traditional way: darkness is ignorance, to be dispelled by the light of understanding, not only rational understanding but, more importantly, the understanding that comes through the sympathetic imagination. At one point in *Middlemarch*, describing the research of Tertius Lyd-

gate, she relates the image of light to the microscope image, showing the need for the imagination to go beyond what even the microscope can achieve. To Lydgate, true imagination "reveals subtle actions inaccessible to any sort of lens, but tracked in that outer darkness through long pathways of necessary sequence by the inward light which is the last refinement of Energy, capable of bathing even the ethereal atoms in its ideally illuminated space" (p. 174). This image of imagination as "inward light" illuminating the unknown builds upon an image used earlier in *Middlemarch* to describe the effect of Bichât's research upon medical understanding:

And the conception wrought out by Bichât, with his detailed study of the different tissues, acted necessarily on medical questions as the turning of gas-light would act on a dim, oil-lit street, showing new connections and hitherto hidden facts of structure which must be taken into account in considering the symptoms of maladies and the action of medicaments. (p. 155)

Lydgate's ambition is to push the process further: "Here would be another light, as of oxy-hydrogen, showing the very origin of things, and revising all former explanations" (p. 156). Another image makes clear what was already implicit in the microscope image, that the novelist's task is parallel with the scientist's, his moral imagination likewise serving not only as lens but also as lamp: "I at least have so much to do in unravelling certain human lots, and seeing how they were woven and interwoven, that all the light I can command must be concentrated on this particular web" (p. 148). As has frequently been demonstrated, George Eliot's images in *Middlemarch* form a pattern in which light, vision, sensitive hearing, free movement, and space are interrelated, opposed by darkness, blindness, deafness, inhibition of movement, and enclosure, a pattern itself implied by the recurring image of the web that forms one of its constituents. To trace out further uses of the image of the circle of light amid darkness would be to recapitulate what has often been said, but it is worthwhile to look at one further example, where the archetype underlying the other uses appears most clearly. This is in Dorothea's statement to Will of her personal belief:

"... by desiring what is perfectly good, even when we don't quite know what it is and cannot do what we would, we are part of the divine power against evil — widening the skirts of light and making the struggle with darkness narrower." (p. 419)

Here the traditional moral dualism is clearest: the light of imagination, compassion and aspiration is the power for good in the moral struggle against the darkness of ignorance and egotism (which, in George Eliot's moral universe, is usually a form of ignorance).

Thomas Hardy retains some of these traditional associations of darkness and light but quite de-emphasizes the moral element. Tess is pictured as she is anticipating marriage with Angel Clare, joyful in her love, yet fearing that the secret of her past relationship with Alec d'Urberville will somehow destroy her hopes:

Her affection for him was now the breath and life of Tess's being; it enveloped her as a photosphere, irradiated her into forgetfulness of her past sorrows, keeping back the gloomy spectres that would persist in their attempts to touch her — doubt, fear, moodiness, care, shame. She knew that they were waiting like wolves just outside the circumscribing light, but she had long spells of power to keep them in hungry subjection there. . . . She walked in brightness, but she knew that in the background those shapes of darkness were always spread. They might be receding, or they might be approaching, one or the other, a little every day.¹⁶

In Hardy's image, the light is not intelligence or imagination but rather Tess's love and hope, irradiating her whole being so that she glows, while the darkness is not ignorance but her own fear and shame and memory of her painful past experience. The "photosphere" image recalls the image of the "halo," the "circle of opalized light, formed by the moon's rays upon the glistening sheet of dew," which encircles the shadow of the head of each of the Trantridge peasants as the group walks home drunkenly in the moonlight following the dance in Chaseborough the night of Tess's seduction (p. 102). It also recalls the glow that, to Angel, seems to surround Tess's head when they are working in fields at dawn at Talbothays, when her face "seemed to have a sort of phosphorescence upon it" (p. 170), and it recalls Tess's "condition of mind" at the time of her wedding, when she sees all

about her as "a luminous mist" and feels "glorified by an irradiation not her own, like the angel whom St. John saw in the sun" (pp. 254-55). Further, the image anticipates the repeated image of Christminster as it appears to Jude, "a halo or glow-fog overarching the place against the black heavens behind it."¹⁷ These images of glow, irradiation, phosphorescence, and luminosity also echo an earlier image in *The Return of the Native* used by Hardy to describe Clym's and Eustacia's subjective state of early marital happiness: "They were enclosed in a sort of luminous mist, which hid from them surroundings of any inharmonious colour, and gave to all things the character of light" (p. 261). Clym himself uses the image in telling Eustacia that "'when you first saw me and heard about me I was wrapped in a sort of golden halo to your eyes'" (p. 278). In each case the glow is associated with a subjective state of illusory or temporary joy or hope.

In both *Tess* and *The Return of the Native*, Hardy combines the image of the glow with that of small and oblivious insects to imply the temporary nature of happiness. In the earlier book, Clym and Eustacia are walking near a marshy margin of Egdon Heath in the summer sunset, basking in the glow of the sun and of their love:

They stood still and prepared to bid each other farewell. Everything before them was on a perfect level. The sun, resting on the horizon line, streamed across the ground from between copper-coloured and lilac clouds, stretched out in flats beneath a sky of pale soft green. All dark objects on the earth that lay towards the sun were overspread by a purple haze, against which groups of wailing gnats shone out, rising upwards and dancing about like sparks of fire. (pp. 228-29)

The sunset implies not only the inevitable end of the day but of their love also, while the gnats, a traditional image of the transitoriness of life, underline that implication, especially when compared to "sparks of fire," another image of transience. The naturalistic implications, that human love is subject to the same laws of growth and decay and doomed to the same transitoriness, are emphasized by Clym's thoughts as he watches Eustacia depart:

The luminous rays wrapped her up with her increasing distance, and the rustle of her dress over the sprouting sedge and grass

died away. As he watched, the dead flat of the scenery overpowered him, though he was fully alive to the beauty of that untarnished early summer green which was worn for the nonce by the poorest blade. There was something in its oppressive horizontality which too much reminded him of the arena of life; it gave him a sense of bare equality with, and no superiority to, a single living thing under the sun. (p. 230)¹⁸

The grass, the gnats, and the human beings, all have their moments in the sun and then depart, for "This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all"; the voice of Darwin joins with that of the preacher in *Ecclesiastes* in Clym's mind as he realizes that human life and love are subject to the laws of indifferent Nature.

The image of the gnats in the glow comes again in *Tess* when Tess and Angel are in a similar situation, walking in the meads at Talbothays on a November afternoon in the happy period just before their wedding:

Looking over the damp sod in the direction of the sun, a glistening ripple of gossamer webs was visible to their eyes under the luminary, like the track of moonlight on the sea. Gnats, knowing nothing of their brief glorification, wandered across the shimmer of this pathway, irradiated as if they bore fire within them, then passed out of its line, and were quite extinct. (p. 242)

Again, the "irradiation" is to be associated with the subjective glow of love, the gnats in their "brief glorification" with its inevitable transitoriness.

Thus Hardy uses the image of a glowing light to represent human happiness and hope, a subjective state, to be opposed to a darkness, perhaps beast-filled, that implies not only a subjective state of fear and unhappiness but also the objective factors that can produce that state — the inescapability of the past, the indifference of Time and Nature to human happiness. The negative aspects, the dark and the beast, come together in a further image in *Tess*, a metaphor used to describe Angel's emotional state when he has rejected Tess because of her past:

He reclined on his couch in the sitting-room, and extinguished the light. The night came in, and took up its place there, unconcerned and indifferent; the night which had already swallowed up his happiness, and was now digesting it listlessly; and was

ready to swallow up the happiness of a thousand other people with as little disturbance or change of mien. (p. 278)

The darkness becomes the beast, and is associated both with Angel's misery and with Nature's indifference to it.

Images of light and the beast-shadowed darkness thus are used by Hardy to express his "idiosyncratic mode of regard." The contrast of light and dark represents the inherent division between human aspiration and indifferent Nature, while his treatment of the light as both valuable and transient and of the dark as both menacing and inevitable expresses his conflicting responses to that dualism. His humanistic sympathy with Tess's aspiration is in tension with a clear naturalistic awareness of all the factors that may oppose that aspiration, especially in this case the inescapability of the past (and of the fears and shame that memories of it arouse in her). The use of the image of the wolves to represent those fears shows especially his difference from George Eliot. Albert J. Guerard has commented, "In very distinct contrast to Conrad, Hardy wanted people to be happy rather than good; he sympathized with their every effort to live and enjoy."¹⁹ The same contrast could be made between George Eliot and Hardy, and it is especially evident in their treatment of the past and memories of the past. To George Eliot "Our deeds are fetters that we forge ourselves" (even if "it is the world / That brings the iron") (*Middlemarch*, p. 31), a result of "undeviating law in the material and moral world." This "inexorable law of consequences" is not something to be mourned, for it is one of the bases of morality, for it "can alone give value to experience and render education in the true sense possible."²⁰ To Hardy, on the other hand, the "inexorable law of consequences" is evidence of the indifference of the course of things to human aspiration: Tess's past error can never be written off, despite her renunciation of it, for neither society nor "crass Casualty" will allow her to live it down. When she meets Alec d'Urberville for the first time since leaving him, she is possessed by "an almost physical sense of an implacable past which still engirdled her." That past can never be transcended:

It intensified her consciousness of error to a practical despair; the break of continuity between her earlier and present existence,

which she had hoped for, had not, after all, taken place. Bygones would never be complete bygones till she was a bygone herself.

(pp. 353-54)

To George Eliot the fact that "bygones would never be complete bygones" is the basis of moral law, and it is right that the Nemesis of his past should catch up with a man like Bulstrode. To Hardy, bygones *should be* bygones when one has repented one's mistake, and a "break of continuity" between past and present *should be* possible; that it is not possible to Tess is a primary cause of her tragedy. This difference in attitude between George Eliot and Hardy is implicit in Hardy's use of the hungry wolves as an image of Tess's consciousness of her past: not moral law at work, but a cruel and unfair persecution, part of the "INEVITABLE" that "encompasses" Tess, the representative of the "WORTHY" (*Life*, p. 251).

If the change of emphasis in the interpretation of an image is great between George Eliot and Hardy, the change is even more profound when we come to Lawrence. Hardy and Eliot at least both used the traditional associations of darkness (and the beasts in it) with evil and light with good, even if they implied very different definitions of the good, but Lawrence quite reverses those associations. Ursula Brangwen is contemplating her disillusionment with her education and the culture from which it sprang:

This world in which she lived was like a circle lighted by a lamp. This lighted area, lit up by man's completest consciousness, she thought was all the world: that here all was disclosed for ever. Yet all the time, within the darkness she had been aware of points of light, like the eyes of wild beasts, gleaming, penetrating, vanishing. And her soul had acknowledged in a great heave of terror only the outer darkness. This inner circle of light in which she lived and moved, wherein the trains rushed and the factories ground out their machine-produce and the plants and the animals worked by the light of science and knowledge, suddenly it seemed like the area under an arc-lamp, wherein the moths and children played in the security of blinding light, not even knowing there was any darkness, because they stayed in the light.

But she could see the glimmer of dark movement just out of range, she saw the eyes of the wild beast gleaming from the darkness, watching the vanity of the camp fire and the sleepers; she

felt the strange, foolish vanity of the camp, which said "Beyond our light and our order there is nothing," turning their faces always inward towards the sinking fire of illuminating consciousness, which comprised sun and stars, and the Creator, and the System of Righteousness, ignoring always the vast darkness that wheeled round about, with half-revealed shapes lurking on the edge.

Yea, and no man dared even throw a firebrand into the darkness. For if he did he was jeered to death by the others, who cried "Fool, anti-social knave, why would you disturb us with bogeys? There *is* no darkness. We move and live and have our being within the light, and unto us is given the eternal light of knowledge, we compromise and comprehend the innermost core and issue of knowledge. Fool and knave, how dare you belittle us with the darkness?"

Nevertheless the darkness wheeled round about, with grey shadow-shapes of wild beasts, and also with dark shadow-shapes of the angels, whom the light fenced out, as it fenced out the more familiar beasts of darkness. And some, having for a moment seen the darkness, saw it bristling with the tufts of the hyena and the wolf; and some, having given up their vanity of the light, having died in their own conceit, saw the gleam in the eyes of the wolf and the hyena, that it was the flash of the sword of angels, flashing at the door to come in, that the angels in the darkness were lordly and terrible and not to be denied, like the flash of fangs. (pp. 437-38)

Tony Tanner has seen this passage as "profoundly influenced" by Hardy's image of the light, darkness, and beasts in *Tess*.²¹ Certainly there is a strong similarity. Even more striking is the similarity to the image Lawrence uses to define the central situation in Hardy's work:

This is the wonder of Hardy's novels, and gives them their beauty. The vast, unexplored morality of life itself, what we call the immorality of nature, surrounds us in its eternal incomprehensibility, and in its midst goes on the little human morality play, with its queer frame of morality and its mechanized movement; seriously, portentously, till some one of the protagonists chances to look out of the charmed circle, weary of the stage, to look into the wilderness raging round. Then he is lost, his little drama falls to pieces, or becomes mere repetition, but the stupendous theatre goes on enacting its own incomprehensible drama, untouched. (*Study*, p. 31)

Since *Study of Thomas Hardy* was written between drafts, as it were, of *The Rainbow*, we cannot be sure which came first, the image in the essay or that in the novel (although it is probable that the essay came first).²² At any rate, the two are very similar, the lighted stage in the one taking the place of the circle of light in the other, in each case being contrasted with the wild darkness which most of the spectators ignore. Whatever the relationship in time, it is clear that to Lawrence the image in *The Rainbow* came to be associated with Hardy.

What is most striking about the image in *The Rainbow*, however, is how different Lawrence's interpretation is from Hardy's (and, of course, from Eliot's). Tanner has noted that Lawrence's interpretation of the beasts shows how he is "more insistent as to the torments and sterilities of consciousness,"²³ but it is not only the beasts that are changed in significance, but also the light and the darkness (and the city and the wilderness). As Kenneth Inness has pointed out, there is an "archetypal turnabout," a "startling transvaluation" of symbols, even a "demonic inversion."²⁴ Even more dramatically than in his use of the image of the microscopic creatures, Lawrence transforms naturalism into vitalism and clearly demonstrates his differences from both Hardy and Eliot.

The most obvious difference is in Lawrence's reversal of the traditional moral implications of the light-dark image. As to George Eliot, so to Lawrence light represents human knowledge and understanding, but to Lawrence this understanding is limited and superficial, known through the "upper self" only, shutting out the lower, passionate self. As the passage concerning Ursula and the microscope shows, such "intensely-gleaming light of knowledge" can be good and necessary, but what Ursula is doing in that passage is to recognize consciously something that she already knew in her blood. The dark is to Lawrence the image of the true source of value. It is not, as it was to Eliot, the area of ignorance and egotism that must be overcome with understanding. Hardy's vision of the darkness as the great natural force indifferent to human aspiration and consciousness is closer to Lawrence's, but Lawrence's vitalistic interpretation of this force means that he does not find it a threat. Thus in discussing *The Return*

of the *Native*, Lawrence reinterprets Egdon Heath as "the deep, black source from whence all these little contents of lives are drawn." Thus far Hardy might go, but Lawrence's further vitalistic arguments puts him quite beyond Hardy:

And the contents of the small lives are spilled and wasted. There is a savage satisfaction in it: for so much more remains to come, such a black, powerful fecundity is working there that what does it matter?

Three people die and are taken back into the Heath; they mingle their strong earth again with its powerful soil, having been broken off at their stem. It is very good. Not Egdon is futile, sending forth life on the powerful heave of passion. It cannot be futile, for it is eternal. What is futile is the purpose of man.

Lawrence has reversed Hardy's response to the Heath and darkness while retaining something of his meaning for it. It represents a powerful force beyond man's purpose, but as such it is to be revered rather than resented, and if man crosses it and is destroyed, that is "good," for man must learn to renounce that conscious purpose "which he has divorced from the passionate purpose that issued him out of the earth into being," he must "learn again what it is to be at one, in his mind and will, with the primal impulses that rise in him. Till then, let him perish or preach" (*Study*, pp. 27-30). Hardy could lament concerning Clym Yeobright: "As is usual with bright natures, the deity that lies ignominiously chained within an ephemeral human carcass shone out like a ray" (*Return*, p. 163). There is no doubt that it is the light of aspiration and consciousness that Hardy values, and he mourns that it should be housed within the "dying animal" of the flesh, as "ephemeral" as the "ephemerons," the merely natural part of man. Thus in 1892 he wrote in his notebook of himself:

Hurt my tooth at breakfast-time. I look in the glass. Am conscious of the humiliating sorriness of my earthly tabernacle. . . . Why should a man's mind have been thrown into such close, sad, sensational, inexplicable relations with such a precarious object as his own body! (*Life*, p. 251)

Lawrence, on the other hand, values the body and the dark force from which it has come, not the "bright" mind:

But was the deity chained within his ephemeral human carcass, or within his limited human consciousness? Was it his blood, which rose dark and potent out of Egdon, which hampered and confined the deity, or was it his mind, that house built of extraneous knowledge and guarded by his will, which formed the prison? (*Study*, p. 29)

Thus Lawrence finds darkness an image of "the vast, uncomprehended and incomprehensible morality of nature or of life itself, surpassing human consciousness," and values it in external nature and in the self, while light becomes the image of the "prison house" of conscious mental knowledge, not a value but a limitation. The differences from both Hardy and Eliot are profound.

Lawrence's vitalism also lends to a radical reinterpretation of the image of the wild beasts gathered in the darkness. To Hardy the wolves are images of all those forces, social, natural, and even psychological, that threaten human aspiration and happiness. As such a story as "The Fox" makes clear, Lawrence interprets the image in quite a different way. The beasts are threatening only if we view them through the vanity of limited human purpose and knowledge. Seen in terms of the "morality of life itself" they are not threatening at all, but are angels, for they represent the "primal impulses" in nature and in himself with which man should be atoned. They are "terrible and not to be denied" (a judgment with which Hardy could have agreed), but they are also "lordly" and to be revered (a judgment quite antithetical to Hardy).

Their handling of two common sets of images, then, reveals in microcosm many of the major differences in the personal visions of Eliot, Hardy, and Lawrence. Each "looks upon the world with his personal eyes" and interprets it differently, and this difference is apparent not only in larger structures of plot and character, but also in the smaller details of figurative and literal imagery. George Eliot's ethical humanism, Hardy's tension between humanism and naturalism, and Lawrence's vitalism are as evident in the local imagery as in the total structures of their works.

NOTES

¹ *Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings*, ed. Harold Orel (London: Macmillan, 1967), p. 122.

- ² Florence Emily Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy: 1840-1928* (1928, 1930; rpt. London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 225; hereafter referred to as *Life* and cited in the text.
- ³ For a fuller account, see my "Thomas Hardy's 'Idiosyncratic Mode of Regard,'" *ELH*, 42 (1975), 453-59.
- ⁴ *Adam Bede* (New York: Rinehart, 1948), p. 298.
- ⁵ *Experiments in Life: George Eliot's Quest for Values* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1965), p. 244.
- ⁶ *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), V, 358.
- ⁷ *Apocalypse* (1931; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974), p. 126.
- ⁸ *Lawrence on Hardy and Painting*, ed. J. V. Davies (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1973), p. 31; further references will be to this edition and will be cited in the text as *Study*.
- ⁹ *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 58; further references will be to this edition and will be cited in the text.
- ¹⁰ "The Problems with a Poetics of the Novel," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 9 (1976), 105.
- ¹¹ Review of *Westward Ho!* from *Westminster Review*, 64 (July 1855); reprinted in *Essays of George Eliot*, ed. Thomas Pinney (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 126. The image of the microscope also appears elsewhere in her work, as in Chapter XXII of *Felix Holt, the Radical*: "But very close and diligent looking at living creatures, even through the best microscope, will leave room for new and contradictory discoveries" (Chicago: N. A. Donohue, n.d.) p. 213. The image appears in passing again in "Leaves from a Notebook," where she compares the use of borrowed judgments with "the constant reading and retailing of results from other men's observations through the microscope, without ever looking through the lens oneself" (*Essays*, p. 443). The concept of the artist as "seer" is close to that expressed in G. H. Lewes's *The Principles of Success in Literature* (see Paris, pp. 37-39).
- ¹² *Desperate Remedies: A Novel* (London: Macmillan, 1953), p. 242.
- ¹³ *The Return of the Native* (London: Macmillan, 1974), p. 297; further references will be to this edition and will be cited in the text. The creatures in the "tepid pool" occur in a more explicitly naturalistic context in the Fore Scene of *The Dynasts* when the Spirit of the Years, the spokesman for Hardy's naturalism, uses the image figuratively to represent the victims of Napoleon's manipulations:
- . . . regard the frail ones that his flings
Have made gyrate like animalcula
In tepid pools.
- In context the image does not emphasize Napoleon's power, but rather the plight of all life in the grip of the Immanent Will, for Napoleon himself is seen by the Spirit of the Years as a "twitching puppet," one of "Earth's jackaclocks," himself manipulated by "the Prime Mover of the gear" (London: Macmillan, 1958, p. 6).
- ¹⁴ *The Rainbow* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1949), p. 436; further references will be to this edition and will be cited in the text.
- ¹⁵ "Democracy," in *Selected Essays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1950), p. 91.

- ¹⁶ *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (London: Macmillan, 1974), pp. 236-37; further references will be to this edition and will be cited in the text.
- ¹⁷ *Jude the Obscure* (London: Macmillan, 1957), p. 27; see Kathleen R. Hoopes, "Illusion and Reality in *Jude the Obscure*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 12 (1957), 154-57.
- ¹⁸ As F. B. Pinion has noted, these passages in the heath-scene "were transferred almost verbatim" into *The Return of the Native* from *Desperate Remedies* (p. 251; see *A Hardy Companion: A Guide to the Works of Thomas Hardy and their Background* [London: Macmillan, 1968], p. 18). The earlier version had "under the sky" rather than "under the sun," so that the latter change may have been a conscious effort on Hardy's part to bring in an echo from *Ecclesiastes*.
- ¹⁹ *Thomas Hardy* (1949; rpt. Norfolk: New Directions, 1964), p. 114.
- ²⁰ Review of Robert William MacKay's *The Progress of the Intellect*, *Westminster Review*, 54 (January 1851); reprinted in *Essays*, p. 31. Eliot even uses the light imagery to characterize belief in this law: it "sheds a bright beam of promise on the future of our race" and "lights up what once seemed the dreariest region of history with new interest."
- ²¹ "Colour and Movement in Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*," *Critical Quarterly*, 10 (1968), 238-39; Richard Swigg also relates the passage to Hardy, but refers to the gambling scene and the scene of Clym "labouring in his microscopic work on Egdon" in *The Return of the Native* (*Lawrence, Hardy, and American Literature* [London: Oxford University Press, 1972], p. 126).
- ²² See Mark Kinkead-Weekes, "The Marble and the Statue: The Exploratory Imagination of D. H. Lawrence," in *Imagined Worlds: Essays in Honour of John Butt*, eds. Ian Gregor and Maynard Mack (London: Methuen, 1968), p. 379.
- ²³ Tanner, p. 239.
- ²⁴ *D. H. Lawrence's Bestiary: A Study of His Use of Animal Trope and Symbol* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), pp. 18, 19.