

THE TREATMENT OF NATURE  
in FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD

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Far From the Madding Crowd, like The Woodlanders and Under the Greenwood Tree, bears the sign of nature-loving Hardy in its title. The very name suggests that the action is to take place in natural surroundings, far from the din and smoke of cities. The characters also play their assigned role against the eternal background of Nature. In fact, the life of nature moves Hardy only in so far as it illustrates the life of man.

Hardy's picture of Wessex is the most elaborate study of landscape in English literature. The descriptive passages in the novel in discussion reveal an eye for the detail of the country-scene only possible to a man who had lived in it since adolescence. Hardy discriminates the feel to the foot of path, of fern, of heather. He records nature primarily in its relation to the life of man, and appreciates the ordinary necessary activities of agricultural life. The process of tending and rearing the sheep is presented to us with sober accuracy. We do not suspect that Hardy has selected only the ~~landscape~~ picturesque aspect of his subjects and left the readers out. But he responds to the sentiment of the scene so intensely that it infuses the whole picture making its most prosaic features tremble with beauty. Ploughing, sowing and tending of sheep may seem picturesque enough to the readers but to the labourer or shepherd himself they are only part of his daily prosaic work. It seems as if to represent them poetically were to misrepresent them. ~~we do not feel this with Hardy.~~ We do not feel this with Hardy.

Hardy's nature descriptions seldom has the impersonalness of the camera. In a majority of cases the natural scenery shown to us at any point in a story will be bound to have an emotional connection with the events happening at that moment. Some of the passages in the novel bear out this statement. For example, the picture of the dead pool that stared up at Oak after the death of his sheep. The scene of day break is more indirect in its human association. The tone of the picture is emphatically one of joy, but Bathseba is intensely unhappy at the moment. As a matter of fact, Hardy's landscape is much more ready to show sympathy with people in distress than the happy ones. Even the cheerful morning picture is quickly followed by one of an astonishing dismal swamp which suitably lowers the tone, but the innocent and lightfoot Liddy trips across unharmed.

When Porsgrass is taking Fanny Robbins's body in the waggon to the burial ground, quick fog comes on, and the trees, after standing awhile 'in an attitude of interest', begin to drop water hollowly upon Fanny's coffin "like Byron's trees before Quatre Bras, grieving as it inanimate ever grieves." We find nature changing her mood ~~at~~ in the novel when Boldwood first emerges into the air after receiving the disturbing valentine, and is nervous, excitable and vacant.