

BALLAD TECHNIQUES IN HARDY'S POEMS

— SOME CRITICAL ANALYSES —

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INTRODUCTION

(I)

When a poet or a novelist is great, it is very difficult to assess what he and his literature are by pursuing just a single line of inquiry. We are forced to approach him—and his work—from various angles so that we may obtain a complete image of him. This is to say, any great literary man has flexibility in his literary manifestation.

Thomas Hardy is such a man. He is one of those who have seen life as a complexity. And in order to unfold the complexity he has adopted various methods—both in form and subject. Sometimes he tried impatiently to explain away the complexity and brought in the concept of the “Immanent Will.” And at other times he was patient enough to make clear “the tragical mysteries of life” through the observation of nature. He explains his second attitude as follows :

“I don't want to see landscapes, i. e., scenic paintings of them, because I don't want to see the original realities—as optical effects, that is. I want to see the deeper reality underlying the scenic, the expression of what are sometimes called abstract imaginings.

The 'simply natural' is interesting no longer. The much decried, mad, late-Turner rendering is now necessary to create my interest. The exact truth as to material fact ceases to be of importance in art —it is a student's style —the style of a period when the mind is serene and unawakened to the tragical mysteries of life."¹

Hardy's great sympathy with J.M.W. Turner should be more emphasized than it usually is. He writes of this English landscape painter that "each [of Turner's watercolours] is a landscape *plus* a man's soul He first recognizes the impossibility of really reproducing on canvas all that is in a landscape ; then gives for that which cannot be reproduced a something else which shall have upon the spectator an approximative effect to that of the real. . . . Hence one may say, Art is the secret of how to produce by a false thing the effect of a true."² In this way Hardy has come to deny the so-called realism in Art :

"Art is a disproportioning . . . of realities, to show more clearly the features that matter in those realities, which, if merely copied or reported inventorially, might possibly be observed, but would more probably be overlooked. Hence 'realism' is not Art."³

There is no doubt that Hardy showed here not only his attitude towards painting but also his own view of literature, as he is particularly a writer who is much concerned with nature and with her connection with man. Just as Turner recognized "the impossibility of really reproducing on canvas all that is in a landscape," Hardy also recognized the impossibility of really reproducing on paper all that is in life. And as Turner used colours in his own special way, Hardy has come to use his own imagery to point out the truth behind the realities.

Imagery is certainly one important method for him in unfolding the

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1. Florence Emily Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy 1840—1928* (London : Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1962 ; originally published in 1928 and 1930 respectively as *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy 1840—1891* and *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy 1892—1928*), p. 185.
 2. *Ibid.*, p. 216.
 3. *Ibid.*, p. 229.

complexity of life. In my previous paper on Hardy I analysed his own special use of imagery in *The Woodlanders*.⁴ The realities in a small forest village, called Little Hintock, were distorted and were presented in the form of images. This is in other words Hardy's "distorted" attitude towards life, which has led him to be ironical —most characteristic of Hardy. In order to be ironical one must always be detached from the object and remain dispassionate.

Detachment and dispassion are most characteristic in the ballad world. The ballad —the traditional ballad —is not only anonymous but also impersonal. This means that neither the poet, nor the narrator, nor any character in the story, intrudes his personality. The poem only emphasizes actions —often unusual ones —, and focuses on situations or episodes. There is no emotional response to the actions which are displayed. In this way there exists perfect detachment. This is the basic artistic form of the ballad.

From the following note, too, it is clear that the ballad had much influence on Hardy :

"A story must be exceptional enough to justify its telling. We tale-tellers are all Ancient Mariners, and none of us is warranted in stopping Wedding Guests (in other words, the hurrying public) unless he has something more unusual to relate than the ordinary experience of every average man and woman. The whole secret of fiction and the drama —in the constructional part —lies in the adjustment of things unusual to things eternal and universal. The writer who knows exactly how exceptional, and how non-exceptional, his events should be made, possesses the key to the art."⁵

Hardy always wanted to be *an Ancient Mariner* when he wrote novels, tales, and poems. He wrote many ballads and many other poems in

4. See Mitsuyoshi Yamanaka, "The Theme and Imagery of *The Woodlanders*," *The Jimbun Ronshu* (November 1969; Kobe University of Commerce), pp. 1—58.
5. F. E. Hardy, *op. cit.*, p. 252. His similar views of art are frequently recorded : pp. 150, 177, 239, 362, 363.

which ballad techniques were adopted.

(II)

In the present paper I have chosen four of his ballads for analysis — “A Trampwoman’s Tragedy,” “The Sacrilege,” “San Sebastian,” and “Valenciennes.” The first two belong to the sensational type of ballad, and the other two are war ballads. Hardy considered “A Trampwoman’s Tragedy” as his most successful poem.⁶ There is a perfect detachment of the poet as well as the narrator from the violent and ironic action in the poem. But in the other three — particularly in the last two war ballads — the perfection is not sustained. The poems themselves, however, should not be faulted for this. There is an inescapable meaning in the fact. Jean R. Brooks says that “If Hardeian reflections on life run the risk of destroying both dramatic illusion and the impersonal tone of ballad narration, one could answer that a modern poet cannot revive the original climate that produced traditional country ballads.”⁷

Hardy had three wars in his world of experience : two — the Boar War and World War One — in his lifetime, and one not in his lifetime, but all the same close to him as its trailing note still lingered in his younger days in the countryside — the Napoleonic Wars. All of them were important subjects for his novels, tales, and poems. This is to say that Hardy could not live unaffected by the experiences of war. Although Hardy was born and grew up in Dorset, and however closely he lived to the Dorset country — a country potentially fit for the ballad climate — he, as a modern poet, could not but reflect on those experiences. This is because war most typically represents human nature. It is not only a battlefield of material powers, but also a critical scene for human nature — critical, in the sense that there the contradictions that man and his civilization involve are all exposed. Civilization is supposed to be the destination that he has been struggling for both spiritually and materially up to that time, so that it is expected to show *some progress*. But the fact which war exposes is very far from progress. Hardy writes

6. *Ibid.*, p. 312.

7. Jean R. Brooks, *Thomas Hardy* (London : Elek Books Ltd., 1971), p. 115.

in his short poem "Christmas : 1924" :

"Peace upon earth !" was said. We sing it,
And pay a million priests to bring it.
After two thousand years of mass
We've got as far as poison-gas.⁸

On August 28, 1914, immediately after the outbreak of World War One, Hardy wrote a letter to Sidney Cockerell :

"...the recognition that we are living in a more brutal age than that, say, of Elizabeth, or of the chivalry which could cry : 'Gentlemen of the Guard, fire first !' (far more brutal, indeed : no chivalry now !) does not inspire one to write hopeful poetry... but simply make[s] one sit still in an apathy, and watch the clock spinning backwards...."⁹

In "A Night of Questionings" there is a dialogue between the wind and those who are dead now and eager to know "What of the world now." The wind replies first with a general statement on the essential sameness of the mortal lot :

"Men still
Who are born, do good, do ill
Here, just as in your time :
Till their years the locust hath eaten,
Leaving them bare, downbeaten ;
Somewhiles in springtide rime,
Somewhiles in summer glow,
Somewhiles in winter snow : —
No more I know."

The report does not stop here, however, on this level of recognition of the nonprogressive cycle in the human world as in the natural world.

8. *The Collected Poems of Thomas Hardy* (London : Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1962), p. 872. Quotations from Hardy's poems are all taken from this edition, which will be abbreviated to *CP*.
9. Carl. J. Weber (ed.), *The Letters of Thomas Hardy* (Waterville, Maine : Colby College Press, 1954), p. 100.

Later in the same evening the wind replies moanfully to the questioning ghosts of soldiers that "heave and fust in the flats of France" :

"As when
You mauled these fields, do men
Set them with dark-drawn breaths
To knave their neighbours' deaths
In periodic spasms !
Yea, fooled by foul phantasms,
In a strange cyclic throe

Backward to type they go : —

No more I know."

(Italics mine)

This is Hardy's sense of historical regression. There is no doubt that he knows he lives in a world which has rapid industrial and material progress. He cannot help looking behind the realities, however, and observing the regression simultaneously making its way. He well recognizes that the modern world and man in it are so complex that it is not easy to explain what the realities are. In so far as the realities do tend to go backward to type, however, bringing them into types is one way to explain them. This is to say that Hardy has found a method to explain complexity by simplicity.

Then what are the types to be found ? They are love, death, jealousy, fight, adventure, ambition, violence, plunder, rape, and so forth. And we know that these very things form the subject matter of the ballads. Now we know why Hardy was attracted by the ballad world. It is *not* the world where he might escape from the difficulties of the modern world. It is the world from which he has learned how to observe his own world with detachment and dispassion and how to explain the complexity.

(III)

Before we go on to analyse his ballads it will be useful to observe briefly how the circumstances in which Hardy was born and bred led him to be interested in the ballad and himself produce some ballads of excellent qualities.

The traditional ballad was originally sung and enjoyed by the people, and transmitted to later generations by word of mouth. In this sense Hardy, who was later to hear ballads sung, was happy as he was born into a family which was traditionally interested in music. Hardy's grandfather played the violoncello in the church of his parish (Stinsford Church). And "as if the superintendence of the Stinsford choir were not enough distraction from business...he would go whenever opportunity served and assist other choirs by performing with his violoncello in the galleries of their parish churches, mostly to the high contentment of the congregations."¹⁰ He was joined later by his two sons, one being Thomas the-second, the poet's father. Thus the Hardys became well known as violinists, and were considered "among the best churchplayers in the neighbourhood."¹¹ They were devoted not only to church music, but also "to mundane, of the country-dance, hornpipe, and early waltz description."¹²

Born and bred in this family Thomas Hardy the poet was "extraordinarily sensitive to music"¹³ from early childhood. He was "of ecstatic temperament" and dancing to "the endless jigs, hornpipes, reels, waltzes, and country-dances" that his father played of an evening in the home, he was often moved to tears by some of the tunes. "This sensitiveness to melody...remained with him through life."¹⁴

Though he was not a skilled musician, he loved to play the fiddle at village weddings, on New Year's Eve, and in farmers' parlours. And his mother was sympathetic to his "adventures with the fiddle," possibly "from a feeling that they would help to teach him what life was."¹⁵ She was unusually well-read, and always selected books for her children. She also loved to recite ballads; she was "a woman with an extraordinary store of local memories, reaching back to the days when the ancient

10. F. E. Hardy, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

ballads were everywhere heard at country feasts, in weaving shops, and at spinning wheels."¹⁶

As early as a small boy of nine or ten Hardy had a chance to hear village girls singing old ballads at a harvest supper. The particular ballad which he remembered well was the one variously called "The Outlandish Knight," "May Colvine," "The Western Tragedy," etc., which is a Dorset version of the ballad recorded by Child as "Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight." "He could recall to old age the scene of the young women in their light gowns sitting on a bench against the wall in the barn, and leaning against each other as they warbled the Dorset version of the ballad... :

'Lie there, lie there, thou false-hearted man,
Lie there instead o' me ;
For six pretty maidens thou hast a drown'd here,
But the seventh hath drown-ed thee !'

... ..

'O tell no more, my pretty par-rot,
Lay not the blame on me ;
And your cage shall be made o' the glittering gold,
Wi' a door o' the white ivo-rie !' "¹⁷

Hardy had a particular sentiment towards the scene. Later he wrote a poem on it :

Nell and the other maids sat in a row
Within the benched barn-nook :
Nell led the songs of long ago
She'd learnt from never a book.
She sang of the false Sir John of old,
The lover who witched to win,
And the parrot, and cage of glittering gold ;
And the other maids joined in.¹⁸

16. *Ibid.*, p. 321.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

18. From "The Harvest-Supper," *CP*, p. 739.

As late as 1924 he visited with his wife for the first time since childhood the old barn at the back of Kingston Maurward. He pointed out to his wife the corner where the girls had sat singing old ballads. And he regretted that he had endeavoured "to revive a scene from a distant past," feeling that "he was the only human being left of that once gay party."¹⁹

This sense of pastness is not only his personal sentiment. It has a larger meaning, social and cultural ; it is recorded that "this harvest-home was among the last at which the old traditional ballads were sung, the railway having been extended to Dorchester just then, and the orally transmitted ditties of centuries being slain at a stroke by the London comic songs that were introduced."²⁰ In March, 1902, Hardy wrote a letter to Rider Haggard, and said in it (this is a rather long quotation, but will be allowed as it is a precious document of the social changes of those days, and his sentiment towards them) :

"But changes at which we must all rejoice have brought other changes which are not so attractive. The labourers have become more and more migratory —the younger families in especial, who enjoy nothing so much as fresh scenery and new acquaintance. The consequences are curious and unexpected. For one thing, village tradition—a vast mass of unwritten folk-lore, local chronicle, local topography, and nomenclature —is absolutely sinking, has nearly sunk, into eternal oblivion. I cannot recall a single instance of a labourer who still lives on the farm where he was born, and I can only recall a few who have been five years on their present farms. Thus you see, there being no continuity of information, the names, stories, and relics of one place being speedily forgotten under the incoming facts of the next. For example, if you ask one of the workfolk (they always used to be called 'workfolk' hereabout —'labourers' is an imported word) the names of surrounding hills, streams ; the character and circumstances of people buried in particular graves ; at what spots parish personages lie interred ;

19. F. E. Hardy, *op. cit.*, pp. 426—27.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

questions on local fairies, ghosts, herbs, etc., they can give no answer; yet I can recollect the time when the places of burial even of the poor and tombless were all remembered, and the history of the parish and squire's family for 150 years back known. Such and such ballads appertained to such and such a locality, ghost tales were attached to particular sites, and nooks wherein wild herbs grew for the cure of divers maladies were pointed out readily."²¹

He recorded by himself "such snatches of the old country ballads as he could hear from aged people."²² Noteworthy is the fact that in his journal can be found recorded village stories which correspond vividly to the world of the traditional ballad. The following example is from the journal of March 4, 1889:

"Mary L., a handsome wench, had come to Bockhampton, leaving a lover at Askerswell, her native parish. William K. fell in love with her at the new place. The old lover, who was a shoemaker, smelling a rat, came anxiously to see her, with a present of a dainty pair of shoes he had made. He met her by chance at the pathway stile, but alas, on the arm of the other lover. In the rage of love the two men fought for her till they were out of breath, she looking on and holding both their hats the while; till William, wiping his face, said: 'Now, Polly, which of we two do you love best? Say it out straight!' She would not state then, but said she would consider (the hussy!). The young man to whom she had been fickle left her indignantly—throwing the shoes at her and her new lover as he went. She never saw or heard of him again, accepted the other. *But she kept the shoes, and was married in them.* I knew her well as an old woman."²³

"A Trampwoman's Tragedy," which Hardy himself considered his most successful poem, is a ballad based "on some local story of an event

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 312—13.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 217—18. See for other examples, pp. 247 & 297.

more or less resembling the incidents embodied, which took place between 1820 and 1830.”²⁴ It is, further, interesting to note that Hardy first had an idea of writing *The Dynasts* in the ballad form. In May, 1875, occurs the first mention in Hardy’s memoranda of the conception of a work on the war with Napoleon : “Mem : A Ballad of the Hundred Days. Then another of Moscow. Others of earlier campaigns —forming altogether an Iliad of Europe from 1789 to 1815.”²⁵ And later, on March 27, 1881, “A Homeric Ballad, in which Napoleon is a sort of Achilles, to be written.”²⁶ This entry is superseded a few days later by the following : “Mode for a historical Drama. Action mostly automatic ; reflex movement, etc. Not the result of what is called *motive*, though always ostensibly so, even to the actors’ own consciousness. Apply an enlargement of these theories to, say, ‘The Hundred Days’ ! ”²⁷, thus taking the present form of *The Dynasts*. In this way for nearly six years Hardy was brooding over the ballad form for his most ambitious work.

Hardy’s interest in the ballad had increased not only through the songs and stories he actually heard in the country, but also through the existing documents on which he directly put his hand to read. Hardy and his wife had “a very charming time in Scotland, visiting many Scott scenes, including Edie Ochiltree’s grave, and one that Hardy had always been anxious to see —Smylho’me Tower —the setting of the ‘Eve of St. John’ —a ballad which was among the verse he liked better than any of Scott’s prose.”²⁸ By reading his novels and coming across quotations in them we know that Hardy read and was much interested in Scott’s *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* and Percy’s *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*.²⁹ Through all of these experiences Hardy obtained his own view

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 311—12.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*, p. 239.

29. For the details about his quotations see F. B. Pinion, *A Hardy Companion* (London : Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1968), pp. 205—206.

The connections of subjects and characters in Hardy’s novels with the ballad in general are closely discussed in Donald Davidson, “The Traditional Basis of Thomas Hardy’s Fiction,” in *Hardy : A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Albert J. Guerard (Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), pp. 10—23.

of literature in which he confessed that he wanted to be an Ancient Mariner.

Chapter I "A Trampwoman's Tragedy"

"A Trampwoman's Tragedy," a ballad which Hardy considered "his most successful poem," has its best quality derived from some characteristic ballad techniques —the refrain, and the emotional detachment of the narrator from the violent and ironic action.

First of all the poem has a well-proportioned beauty of structure. It consists of thirteen stanzas, each one having eight lines, rhymed a a b c c b, the same number and length of lines and their rhymes being kept without any change from the first stanza to the last. With Hardy, loyalty to form does not necessarily mean the power of producing a good poem, as is often proved in his sonnets. In "Revulsion," for instance, he follows the sonnet tradition in structure as well as in the theme of the unhappiness of love :

Though I waste watches framing words to fetter
Some unknown spirit to mine in clasp and kiss,
Out of the night there looms a sense 'twere better
To fail obtaining whom one fails to miss.

For winning love we win the risk of losing,
And losing love is as one's life were riven ;
It cuts like contumely and keen ill-using
To cede what was superfluously given.

Let me then never feel the fateful thrilling
That devastates the love-worn wooer's frame,
The hot ado of fevered hopes, the chilling
That agonizes disappointed aim !

So may I live no junctive law fulfilling,
And my heart's table bear no woman's name. (CP, p. 11)

The poem does not violate the rules of the sonnet form, but it is entirely undistinguished and entirely unlike Hardy. There is no phrase or image

that sounds like Hardy. It asserts emotion without evoking it — that is to say, it is sentimental.

Here in “A Trampwoman’s Tragedy,” however, the good proportion of the poem has produced a certain tone of its own. Hardy has succeeded in producing the meaning of the poem by way of the sequence of thirteen stanzas with identical tone. The same and regular tone corresponds to the monotonous tone of the narrator’s mind. And the whole success has been achieved by another structural device — the refrain.

The refrain is one of the most popular technical devices in the ballad. It helps produce by its own nature a certain rhythmical tone. In the present poem, in each stanza, the latter half of the first line is repeated in the second line :

Sts.

1. the livelong day / The livelong day
2. we jaunted on / We jaunted on
3. side by side / Ay, side by side
4. my man and I / My man and I
5. O deadly day / O deadly day !
6. at last we won / At last we won
7. all a-row / All four a-row
8. I had never heard / I had never heard
9. and with his knife / And with his knife
10. the gloomy tale / The gloomy tale
11. alone / Alone, alone !
12. As I lay weak / As I lay weak
13. I told him then / I told him then

All the repetitions shown in sequence are composed as they unfold the story by themselves : each one has its own sense for each stanza, and the variations of the refrain constitute the plot of the story. A poem succeeds when the structure defines and refines the content.

The poem opens as follows :

From Wynyard’s Gap the livelong day,
The livelong day,

We beat afoot the northward way
 We had travelled times before.
 The sun-blaze burning on our backs,
 Our shoulders sticking to our packs,
 By fosseway, fields, and turnpike tracks
 We skirted sad Sedge-Moor.

It is not yet known whom "we" are composed of, but they are trampers—those who travel from place to place on foot, following an itinerant business. Their life is all pain, ennui, and monotony. The first repetition—"the livelong day/ The livelong day"—indicates all of it. And the last line—"We skirted sad Sedge-Moor"—is quite prophetic of a coming event in their future: Sedge-Moor is a place in Somerset where the Duke of Monmouth, an illegitimate and popular son of Charles II, claimed succession to the throne and was defeated in 1685. He was captured at Shag's Heath, east of Wimborne Minster (cf. "At Shag's Heath," *CP*, p. 712), and executed on Tower Hill, London. The story of the poem is to be unfolded by one of the group, who tells a lie to her lover that she is likely to bear their friend's child, which leads him to kill his rival, and be executed "at Ivel-chester jail" in Somerset. Thus in the first stanza is introduced some of the basic tone of the poem.

In the second stanza we learn that the group was composed of "My fancy-man, and jeering John,/ And Mother Lee, and I." They "jaunted on,/ . . . jaunted on." Their journey was so painful and monotonous—yes, but "I" and "my fancy-man" were happy because they could be together. Though they had "faced the gusts on Mendip ridge,/ Had crossed the Yeo unhelped by bridge," they were *happy* "side by side/Ay, side by side" (st. 3).

When I say "happy" this does not mean that the narrator herself directly expresses her emotion of happiness. She continues to control her emotions—happiness, unhappiness, and loneliness—as she unfolds her story. This is an important ballad technique. In the traditional ballad, the narrator is detached, uninvolved, almost invisible, and the action itself is recorded dispassionately. The focus is not on the meanings of the events or the emotions appropriate to them. In the present poem

the trampwoman, as a narrator, *is* involved in the action, but certainly is *not* involved in the emotion. She narrates their journey and her small happiness in it in this way :

*Lone inns we loved, my man and I,
My man and I ;
"King's Stag," "Windwhistle" high and dry,
"The Horse" on Hintock Green,
The cosy house at Wynyard's Gap,
"The Hut" renowned on Bredy Knap,
And many another wayside tap
Where folk might sit unseen.* (St. 4 ; italics mine)

Her controlled passions are most powerfully displayed in the stanza that recounts her fancy-man's murder of "jeering Johnny," and in the stanza that immediately follows it :

Then up he sprung, and with his knife—
And with his knife
He let out jeering Johnny's life,
Yes ; there, at set of sun.
The slant ray through the window high
Gilded John's blood and glazing eye,
Ere scarcely Mother Lee and I
Knew that the deed was done. (St. 9)

The taverns tell the gloomy tale,
The gloomy tale,
How that at Ivel-chester jail
My Love, my sweetheart swung ;
Though stained till now by no misdeed
Save one horse ta'en in time o' need ;
(Blue Jimmy stole right many a steed
Ere his last fling he flung.) (St. 10)

The trampwoman's emotions, if any—her fear, her sense of an unexpected tragedy—are explained not frankly but obliquely by the image

of "the slant ray through the window nigh [gilding] John's blood and glazing eye." And she continues to narrate neither her unhappiness nor her regret : she merely tells in short that her sweetheart was hanged at the jail for the murder, and she takes *more* time in telling of horse-stealing. She wants to say that her lover stole only one horse, while Blue Jimmy, a notorious horse-stealer of Wessex in those days, stole more than a hundred horses before he was caught and hanged at the same jail.¹ Horse-stealing has nothing at all to do with her present emotions. There is a total lack of emotional demonstration at this critical moment.

All the unhappiness occurred simply because the trampwoman wanted to tease her man to kill time. Their journey was unbearable unless she had some play. She narrates :

Now as we trudged —O deadly day,

O deadly day ! —

I teased my fancy-man in play

And wanton idleness.

I walked alongside jeering John,

I laid his hand my waist upon ;

I would not bend my glances on

My lover's dark distress.

(St. 5)

She had no intention of being "wooded and won" by John. But even when her man asked "Whose is the child you are like to bear ? —/ His? After all my months o' care ? " she nodded —"still to tease." Immediately after that the violence occurred. Of course she did not expect that when she nodded. And the thing happened. This is an ironical course of events.

The place where the tragic violence happened implies another great irony. After a long journey beset with many troubles they finally "won" Poldon top, and settled in the inn "Far-famed as 'Marshal's Elm'." She describes the excellent *reward* for their hard life :

Beneath us figured tor and lea,

From Mendip to the western sea —

1. The historical fact is explained by the poet in the note (*CP*, p. 185).

I doubt if finer sight there be

Within this royal realm.

(St. 6)

In such a fine place the tragic event took place. This sixth stanza stands just halfway in the whole story. But "Marshal's Elm" is at the top, both physically and metaphysically, of the preceding inns, "King's Stag," "Windwhistle," "The Horse," "The Hut," and many others all reminding them of their hard journey. The importance of physical things in the traditional ballad is adapted variously to Hardy's vision of the importance of the physical world. The traditional roll-call of familiar names and places, which implies a certain security in an unpredictable world, is extended here to include inns. Together with the added ironic emphasis on number, which was to be decreased by a murder, a hanging, and a natural death (of Mother Lee) :

For months we had padded side by side,

Ay, side by side

(St. 3)

Inside the settle all a-row —

All four a-row

(St. 7)

Thereaft I walked the world alone,

Alone, alone !

(St. 11)

—'Tis past ! And here alone I stray

Haunting the Western Moor.

(St. 13)

we feel a great contrast between the unchanging world and the transience of human life.

It is often said that Hardy is a pessimist. It may be true that he saw more of the darker side of the world than its brighter side. But his pessimism, if any, is far from sentimentalism. He has a cool head. This dispassionate attitude towards life comes from his ironic view of it. He knew that the world or existence was often violent and tragic, but also that it was difficult to explain why. The more difficulty he felt, the harder he found it to put his ideas into a systematic form. He left it in belief then. If he were required to explain why the trampwoman's tragedy happened, he could only say that it was because she teased her lover to kill time. It is too simple to give any philosophic idea to the poet's

intention. But the simplicity *is* important ; because existence, and experiences in it, are open to multiple interpretations, of which no *one* is simply right. Samuel Hynes quotes from one of Hardy's letters to Alfred Noyes, —“Yes, the whole scheme is incomprehensible, and there I suppose we must leave it —perhaps for the best. Knowledge might be terrible,”² and he adds :

“[Hardy] is confessing his philosophical failure, but he is also inadvertently suggesting the nature of his poetic greatness. For it is this superstitious sense of terrible knowledge, of the irrational violence in the world which reason could not explain away, that gives Hardy's poetry its peculiar power.”³

In a different place Hynes says that “[Hardy] is at his best when he is content simply to realize such ironic incongruities ; he is at his worst when he moves from the felt irony of existence to explanation, at which point the Immanent Will, the President of the Immortals, and such personae take over.”⁴

This ironic view of life corresponds to the ballad view of life. In the ballad world there are violence, unhappiness, cruelty, loss of love, and many other types of event, but there is no explanation. Only the events are displayed.

The last event in the present poem is the appearance of the ghost of the hanged lover. After the tragedy the trampwoman travels alone. Then one night his ghost appears and says : “Ah, tell me this ! / Was the child mine, or was it his ? / Speak, that I rest may find ! ” (st. 12). She tells the truth this time, and the ghost disappears smiling. With the ghost in Hardy's poetry and its connection with the ballad tradition, I shall deal in a later chapter.

2. Quoted in Alfred Noyes, *Two Worlds for Memory* (London and New York : Sheed and Ward, 1953), p. 147.

3. Samuel Hynes, *The Pattern of Hardy's Poetry* (Chapel Hill : The Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1961), p. 41.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

Chapter II "The Sacriedge"

In "A Trampwoman's Tragedy" we have come to the isolated existence of man in the physical world. The subject is developed and more concentratedly handled by another use of the refrain in "The Sacriedge." In this ballad there are two kinds of refrain. One is the repetition of the first line of each stanza in the third line of the same stanza, with variations in the following stanzas, thus unfolding the whole story :

"I have a Love I love too well
Where Dunkery frowns on Exon Moor ;
I have a Love I love too well,
..... (St. 1)
"And since this Love, for one mad moon
On Exon Wild by Dunkery Tor,
Since this my Love for one mad moon
..... (St. 2)

This is the kind we have come upon in "A Trampwoman's Tragedy."

The other—a new use of the refrain—is the insertion of another refrain between the first and the third lines of each stanza. It is occupied with landscape-painting, seemingly having nothing to do with the story. It has further to be pointed out that the landscape has been painted with two different kinds of vision. In the one the landscape is personified, and expresses a certain mood, while in the other it is nothing but a statement of the location. For the sake of convenience I shall call the former "the refrain of personification," and the latter "the refrain of description." The complete list of this twofold type of refrain is as follows :

Sts.

1. Where Dunkery frowns on Exon Moor
2. On Exon Wild by Dunkery Tor
3. Where Dunkery frowns on Exon Moor
4. On Exon Wild by Dunkery Tor —
5. While Dunkery frowns on Exon Moor
6. From Marlbury Downs to Dunkery Tor

7. As Dunkery pouts to Exon Moor
8. On Exon Wild by Dunkery Tor —
9. Where Dunkery frowns on Exon Moor —
10. On Exon Wild by Dunkery Tor
11. Where Dunkery frowns on Exon Moor
12. By Mendip east of Dunkery Tor
13. Where Dunkery sights the Severn shore
14. In Toneborough Town by Exon Moor
15. From Toneborough Deane to Dunkery Tor
16. And Dunkery smiled to Exon Moor —
17. As cleaves a cloud to Dunkery Tor
18. While Dunkery frowned on Exon Moor
19. And Exon frowned to Dunkery Tor
20. From Marlbury Downs to Exon Moor

The poem consists of twenty stanzas, nine in Part I, and eleven in Part II. Both the refrain of personification and the refrain of description are equally distributed in ten stanzas each. Down to the fourteenth stanza each type of refrain occurs in alternating stanzas. The regularity is broken in the next stanza, where the refrain repeats the same kind as in the preceding stanza (the refrain of description). Another breaking of the regularity comes in the nineteenth stanza, this time by the refrain of personification.

It is important to notice that these two points are connected with the two critical points of the story. The first of the latter points is that the narrator's brother fails in robbing a church of "divine treasure" for his lover —the gay trinkets in which ballad heroines usually deck themselves —and is hanged (st. 14) ; following the wishes of the dead brother, "I" —the narrator —then begins to try to win the bereaved lover lest the dead brother's rival, Wrestler Joe, be the lover's "bedwinner" (st. 15). The second point is that the lover is won by Wrestler Joe and so "I" decides to be revenged, cheating her into the belief that the newly chosen Joe is drowned in the swollen river (st. 18), and causing her to fall into the river (st. 19).

Then what is Hardy's intention in adopting these two different kinds

of the landscape-refrain ? The first kind of the refrain which expresses a certain mood of the personified nature, reflects a human mood as well. Nature always "frowns" on the brother's scheme as it comes from his mad love. She reflects the human mood *ironically* and *critically* here. In another place Nature "pouts" when the lover "pouts" as she knows he is reluctant to satisfy her. While it is not certain whether he has succeeded or not, Nature "frowns" again (st. 11). But when finally the news comes that he has failed, Nature looks the fact in the face :

Yes ; for this Love he loved too well
Where Dunkery sights the Severn shore,
All for this Love he loved too well
 He burst the holy bars,
Seized golden vessels from the chest
To buy her ornaments of the best,
At her ill-witchery's request

 And lure of eyes like stars.... (St. 13 ; italics mine)

When Wrestler Joe makes painful efforts to win the lover, Nature smiles (st. 16). It is not certain whether the smile is to bless his success, to scornfully pity his efforts of adorning his van with "a bright brass knock-er" and "window-curtains white and clean", or to show a cynical prediction of their tragic catastrophe. And when the lover is cheated and thrown into the river, Nature frowns again (sts. 18, 19).

The second kind of the refrain, that of description, on the other hand, has nothing to do with human mood ; it merely repeats the place. The landscape here is perfectly indifferent to the human world, to human passions.

It is quite significant that the ballad is opened by the refrain of personification —"Where Dunkery frowns on Exon Moor" —, and is closed by the refrain of description —"From Marlbury Downs to Exon Moor". The opening refrain implies the course of events which is to proceed against the expectation of the human being. Having heard the whole story, we know that the implication was right, and recognize that there exists, *and has always existed*, Nature —Nature who is indifferent to

the human world, and who continues to exist independently of the mutability of man. This recognition is what we obtain from the traditional ballad world.

In "The Sacrilege" as in "A Trampwoman's Tragedy" the narrator unfolds his story with his emotions well suppressed. But this time there are two occasions in which the suppression is broken. Once, when the dead brother's lover switches her love to Wrestler Joe, he narrates :

...every day I said,
"A pity it seems to part those two
That hourly grow to love more true ;
Yet she's the wanton woman who
 Sent one to swing till dead !"
That blew to blazing all my hate,
..... (Sts. 17, 18)

And at the end of the narration, he refers to himself by the third person, and confesses :

How that befell no mortal knew
From Marlbury Downs to Exon Moor ;
No mortal knew that deed undue
 But *he who schemed the crime,*
Which night still covers...But *in dream*
Those ropes of hair upon the stream
He sees, and he will hear that scream
 Until his judgment-time. (St. 20 ; italics mine)

In so far as he refers to himself by the third person we may say that he has detached himself from the immediate emotions. In spite of that, however, there remains the fact that he has revealed to us his sense of guilt, his fear, and perhaps also his regret, *expressly*. Furthermore we may say that Hardy, the poet, has also revealed himself to a certain extent by making third-person reference to the narrator. He has not succeeded in completely detaching himself from the story.

In the Introduction I quoted Jean R. Brooks' opinion that Hardy, as a modern poet, could not revive the original climate that produced

traditional country ballads, and could not help running the risk of destroying the impersonal tone of ballad narration. And there I indicated that this stems from the fact that he could not live without being conscious of the historical regression of man and civilization which is most keenly felt through war experiences. "The Sacrilege" is not a war ballad, but the narrator's own sense of guilt has made him fail to maintain the impersonal tone of traditional ballad narration. And the failure here derives from the narrator's hallucination — "in-dream / Those ropes of hair upon the stream / He sees, and he will hear that scream / Until his judgment-time." The hallucination, which is often correlative to the sense of guilt, is meant to represent the state of mind of the narrator. It is not too much to say that a modern poet cannot often avoid adopting this method when he writes a poem in ballad form, because originally this 'other world' was in fact an important part of the ballad world, in which the dead or their spectres moved about as *living* creatures. This is to say that the 'other world' in the traditional ballad has nothing to do with any specific consciousness of the living towards it — there is a perfectly *natural* sense of the reality of objects there —, while in the literary ballad the 'other world' cannot often avoid some specific, *modern* consciousness of the living towards it, and then it takes the form of hallucination — a characteristically compelling sense of the reality of objects perceived in the absence of relevant and adequate stimuli. This is a problem connected with Hardy's ballad techniques which we should discuss in more detail through analysing his war ballads.

Chapter III "San Sebastian" and "Valenciennes"

In "A Trampwoman's Tragedy" the dead lover appears to the living narrator to make certain whether the child is his own or the other man's. He only intends to discover the truth, and the narrator herself neither reveals her regret nor her nagging sense of sin. She continues her story to the end in a cool manner. There is no poet revealed behind the story. The poem maintains the impersonal tone perfectly. Towards the end of the last chapter I pointed out, on the other hand, the failure of this ballad technique in the last part of "The Sacrilege." The

failure, however, comes only towards the end of the poem, and is compensated for by another technical success — the use of the refrain — in keeping the ballad tone in the preceding stanzas. On the whole, therefore, we can say that the poem has kept the impersonal tone to a great extent.

Concerning this problem of emotional detachment, we have two unmistakable instances that prove the truth of Jean R. Brooks' statement — "San Sebastian" and "Valenciennes," both on the Napoleonic Wars. "San Sebastian" is narrated by a sergeant who took part in the invasion of a port city in northern Spain, while "Valenciennes" is narrated by a corporal who once participated in an attack on an old city in northern France. Both the narrators are supposed to be pensioners now,¹ but their attitudes towards their experiences, and therefore the ways of narrating their stories, are considerably different.

In "San Sebastian" the state of the war is described *in detail*, which helps to a great extent in producing an effect of emotional detachment :

"We'd stormed it at night, by the flapping light
Of burning towers, and the mortar's boom :
We'd topped the breach ; but had failed to stay,
For our files were misled by the baffling gloom ;
 And we said we'd storm by day.

"So, out of the trenches, with features set,
On that hot, still morning, in measured pace,
Our column climbed ; climbed higher yet,
Past the fauss'bray, scarp, up the curtain-face,
 And along the parapet.

"From the battered hornwork the cannoneers
Hove crashing balls of iron fire ;
On the shaking gap mount the volunteers
In files, and as they mount expire

1. The following notes are added to the titles of the poems: "WITH THOUGHTS OF SERGEANT M —(PENSIONER), WHO DIED 185—" to "San Sebastian," and "IN MEMORY OF S. C. (PENSIONER). DIED 184—" to "Valenciennes."

Amid curses, groans, and cheers.

“Five hours did we storm, five hours re-form,
As Death cooled those hot blood pricked on ;
Till our cause was helped by a woe within :
They were blown from the summit we'd leapt upon,
And madly we entered in. (Sts. 5-8)

While the narrator is telling his story in such a descriptive manner, we, the listeners, become aware of the cruel reality of the war itself, and realize the independent existence of this particular reality —corresponding to the existence of a Nature indifferent to the human world in “The Sacrilege.” This technique of presenting violence in a detached manner is what we find in the ballad world.

In so far as war is violent and cruel, however, a modern poet cannot overlook the violence and cruelty *committed by man*. Man is inevitably involved in the reality of war. In this sense it comes about that war itself has two realities (or we might say more moderately, two aspects of the same reality) : violence itself which, extracted from the cause, takes on an independent existence, and the cause and effect of violence which remain in the human world. “San Sebastian” is, from the very beginning, intended not to show the former, but to show the latter aspect of war. The narrator tells his story to answer why he strays on the Ivel Way “As though at home there were spectres rife.” He had “a proud career” and his “sunny years with a gracious wife” have brought him “a daughter dear.” His daughter is the prettiest girl in the village. It seems to others therefore that he has nothing unhappy at home. He answers the question in the third and fourth stanzas :

“My daughter is now,” he again began,
“Of just such an age as one I knew
When we of the Line, the Forlorn-hope van,
On an August morning —a chosen few—
Stormed San Sebastian.

“She's a score less three ; so about was *she* —
The maiden I wronged in Peninsular days....

to do with the modern consciousness of that violence and sin which a war brings about. In it, a dead woman and a living woman hold a conversation about their same lover, a soldier away from them now, and "a martial phantom" of him appears to report to the living one that he has joined the dead woman as "the foe this day has pierced me through, / And sent me to where she is" (st. 11). In "San Sebastian," on the contrary, the hallucination of the wronged girl is not given a living life. It remains a hallucination. In this case, however, it is given, *as a compensation*, a symbolic meaning through her eyes. It is a so-called new modern mask attached to the traditional hallucination. A sense of sin continues unavoidably to obsess the narrator throughout his life. He *has to* conclude his story in this way :

"And I nightly stray on the Ivel Way
As though at home there were spectres rife ;
I delight me not in my proud career ;
And 'tis coals of fire that a gracious wife
Should have brought me a daughter dear ! " (St. 15)

In "Valenciennes," another war ballad, there are the same violence, cruelty, sense of sin, told by the narrator. He is not obsessed, however, by his past experience. The man who tells this story is now resigned to the will of God :

...Heaven wi' its jasper halls
Is now the on'y Town I care to be in
Good Lord, if Nick should bomb the walls
As we did Valencieën! (St. 14)

Even the last two lines —though "Nick" is the Devil— are somewhat indifferent to the sense of pain about the past experience at Valenciennes. He is now of tranquil mind, and so he can dispassionately tell everything about the war reality.

Unlike the narrator of "San Sebastian" who is checked by his obsessed mind, the narrator here, in beginning his story, goes straight into the middle of the war :

We trenched, we trumpeted and drummed,
And from our mortars tons of iron hummed
Ath'art the ditch, the month we bombed
The Town o' Valencieën. (St. 1)

The war brings tragedies on *both* sides :

Such snocks and slats, since war began
Never knew raw recruit or veteràn :
Stone-deaf therence went many a man
Who served at Valencieën.

Into the streets, ath'art the sky,
A hundred thousand balls and bombs were fleën ;
And harmless townsfolk fell to die
Each hour at Valencieën ! (Sts. 5-6)

It brings a serious wound to himself —“A shell was slent to shards
anighst my ears” (st.7). He tells :

...No voice o' friend or foe
Can reach me now, or any livèn beën ;
And little have I power to know
Since then at Valencieën !

I never hear the zummer hums
O' bees ; and don't know when the cuckoo comes ; (Sts. 10-11)

This eleventh stanza reminds us again of the ballad technique of the contrast between the unchangeable world of nature and the changeable world of man. At any rate he is now suffering from acoustic illusions :

...night and day I hear the bombs
We threw at Valencieën... (St. 11)

He goes further to confess that “O' wild wet nights, when all seems sad, / My wovnds come back, as though new wovnds I'd had” (st. 13). It means that he is suffering both physically and mentally. Mentally, because he once joined in the war which brought so many tragedies to both sides alike. In this sense, it may be said, he is bound by the

same mental obsession as the narrator of "San Sebastian." But the difference is that while the latter cannot be proud of his career on account of the obsession, the former is honest and confident enough to boast that "at times I'm sort o' glad/ I fout at Valencieën" (st. 13). In a different place he says that his commander, the Duke of York, was "not far/ From great at Valencieën" (st. 12).

What he narrates as a whole, therefore, is about what the war was like, and not what it committed. He is honestly and disinterestedly telling us that the war was both a sad event and a proud, happy experience. Here Hardy has adopted a different use of the refrain. The repetition of "Valencieën" in the last line of each stanza throughout the narration gives some basic undertone to the poem. "Valencieën" is symbolic of the narrator's whole life. The intensity of his life was once focused on the place—his life including both happiness and unhappiness. "Valencieën" was, and is, everything for him. The sound, "Valencieën," pronounced in the Dorset dialect, closes a stanza, but it echoes back to the narrator, always reminding him of his experiences, and alluring him into resuming his story. The regular repetition of this pattern gives the poem a formal beauty characteristic of the ballad, and checks the narration from falling into any over all sentimentalism about war experiences.

The discussions on Hardy's ballads are not to finish here. He wrote many others. I have chosen the four poems in this paper to show his basic principles. Each poem has its own place in revealing Hardy's literary attitude. As I mentioned in the Introduction, it is not easy, and nor indeed is it wise, to assess his literature from a limited viewpoint. Hardy has his own flexibility in his literary manifestation. This being so, we must try to obtain a complete picture of him by analysing his other poems.

At any rate it is clear that the ballad world both in form and subject was most appropriate for him—for his fundamental attitude towards life and literature. It was the world which granted his wish always to be an Ancient Mariner.