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# 1

## Introduction

Place is frequently seen as of great importance in Hardy's fiction. The famous opening chapter of *The Return of the Native* epitomises the emphasis he apparently lays in all his novels on particular geographies and the influence they wield over their inhabitants. 'Novels of Character and Environment' seems such a well-chosen generic title because it reflects the way that his books join character and environment together, making the two appear equivalent to one another. 'Story' in Hardy, as John Bayley remarked, 'isn't to be read in isolation from context.' And despite Hardy's writing about London and other urban centres at points throughout his career, this context is nearly always seen as rural. Michael Irwin has recently called him 'that rare thing a landscape novelist' and lists the items in Hardy's landscape as 'hills, rivers, trees, animals, birds, clouds, stars, sunsets, weather' plus 'a scattering of man-made objects: buildings, roads, walls, fences'. In other words, Hardy's is 'a landscape context', 'a particular natural environment'.<sup>1</sup>

So far, so uncontroversial perhaps. The presence of a rural landscape is hard to avoid or forget when reading Hardy's novels. Moreover, this landscape is not only a generally 'rural' one but 'particular', specific to 'Wessex' – that is, to Dorset and the surrounding counties. As Simon Gatrell points out, this is something as hard to forget as Hardy's rural settings:

So powerful and widely disseminated has been Hardy's imaginative creation that, even during his lifetime, Wessex was being used to denote a region of vague extent in south-western England. Now, at the end of the twentieth century, a glance at a directory to any town to the south and west of Oxford will probably throw up a business or two with Wessex in its name; and this is Hardy's doing.<sup>2</sup>

Because Wessex forms so large a part of readers' experience when reading Hardy, he has become identified with this aspect of his achievement: he is to many the historian of Wessex, the Wordsworth of Dorset. And, as Gatrell's essay very carefully shows, Hardy was aware of this: he adapted himself and his work to his readers' perception of him. Moreover, partly developed because his novels were already attracting what Hardy called 'explorers' – people on the hunt for equivalents between fictional and actual places – Wessex has continued to attract them. Anne-Marie Edwards, *Discovering Hardy's Wessex* (1978), Desmond Hawkins, *Hardy's Wessex* (1983) and *Thomas Hardy's England*, edited by John Fowles, text by Jo Draper (1984), are only a few of very many books inviting an exploration of Dorset which will reveal the world of the novels.

More harmfully, I think, treating Hardy as someone who records particular places and times, using invented names as only a thin disguise, leads people to read the novels too literally. Gatrell regrets this with respect to Egdon Heath, which was unclearly located when *The Return of the Native* was first published and incorporated into the Wessex topography later: 'What was once of mysterious extent and shifting definition is now a limited tract of land any tourist can tramp over.'<sup>3</sup> And the confident, blinkered tourist can use not only guidebooks but critical writing if s/he wants to find an exact correspondence between fictional and real worlds. When the match is absent or faulty, such critics condemn Hardy for inaccuracy. Keith Snell, for instance, states that the harsh conditions of nineteenth-century Dorset have been replaced in Hardy's novels 'by a romanticising and pastoral gloss which, from the viewpoint of the social historian, is simplistically misrepresentative [and] reveals its political partiality in all that it deliberately omits and discounts'.<sup>4</sup> This judgement seems to be missing something important in the books but rejecting it may lead to an opposite position where 'Wessex' is entirely fictional:

Artists don't copy landscapes, they make them in the discourses of their work. 'Truth to Nature' may be preceptive, but 'the landscape' is constituted and exists only in its artificial image. So we may say that Hardy 'the poet' creates an English landscape – 'Wessex'.<sup>5</sup>

Peter Widdowson is employing doubtful oppositions here – copying and making often overlap; 'Truth to Nature' may be possible only via an 'artificial image'. He uses them to insist that Hardy 'creates' in Wessex a world independent of anything to which it may apparently refer.

Hardy's locations still tend to be understood in these ways, within either a realist framework or an anti-realist one. Both are mistaken, I believe. The difficulty lies in describing exactly how Hardy and his locations are linked together – how they interact with one another. This is what the following chapters attempt to address, in Hardy particularly and more generally, too, as a theoretical question for literary studies. It is an unusual project because, broadly speaking, Hardy criticism has in recent years set aside the question of his depiction of Wessex and concentrated instead on other issues: his portrayal of women, his subversiveness, the innovativeness of his narrative forms, his relation to Victorian popular fiction and to Victorian scholarship.<sup>6</sup> Among other things, this work has revealed that Hardy was not a straightforwardly realist novelist and by no means a simple historian of his time and place. It has also shown his preoccupation with contemporary issues – a preoccupation which makes it difficult to see him as the creator of a self-contained, fictional world. Other approaches to Hardy have, in other words, brought out qualities which cast into doubt received accounts of Hardy's Wessex and it is partly in the light of them that I am attempting to characterize that 'partly real, partly dream-country'<sup>7</sup> – one which is recognizably the West of England and, at the same time, a transformation of that real place into something different.

In his novels' use of dialect and their maps Hardy startlingly juxtaposes a real and a dream-country. His maps put fictional names and fictional places into an immediately recognizable map of south-western England. His novels present dialect in such a way that it is both easily intelligible and strange. His rustics speak a language that is not simply and quaintly rustic; rather, it is at once English and not exactly English. These strategies mean that the artist as recorder and artist as creator are made to coexist. Consequently, the presentation of Wessex illuminates Hardy's understanding of how imagination and observation are combined in perception. His sense of place informs, in other words, his sense of mental operations and of personhood (male and female). Secondly, the maps and the dialect – along with other comparable features of the novels – argue against provincialism: Hardy's Wessex emerges as a world unto itself within the world of England, even though most readers would have considered (and perhaps still consider) Dorset to be a somewhat backward province, remote from the centre. Societal differences, leading to political disagreements, are both implied and addressed by the novels' portrayal of a particular region of England. Dominant cultural geographies are acknowledged and countered. Issues central to Hardy, then, arise out of how and where he places Wessex and as a

result a study of his geography helps make sense of some of his most pressing concerns. Naturally, Hardy's understanding of geography is governed to some extent by the practice of the discipline in his lifetime. More peculiarly, twentieth-century critical readings of his geography and his work are linked to changes in that practice.

### Hardy's geography

Hardy boasts mildly in his autobiography about being good at geography: at his first school 'he worked at Walkingame's *Arithmetic* and at geography, in both of which he excelled'; visiting Hertfordshire with his mother when aged eight or nine, he was 'mercilessly tyrannized over by the bigger boys whom he could beat hollow in arithmetic and geography' (*Life*, pp.21–2). Hermann Lea reports that, much later in life, Hardy loved maps:

It always gave him intense pleasure to map out the route a day or two before we started, and many an hour have we spent over the ordnance maps spread out on the table at Max Gate planning each road, and so arranging that we took in any place he wanted to see, or to show Mrs Hardy, that lay not too far off the actual route.

(*IR*, p.55)<sup>8</sup>

These journeys were made in 1914–16. When Hardy was at school, in the 1840s and 1850s, geography was largely the domain of eight-year-olds, being thought too elementary for older children; it was taught in a catechetical, mnemonic way and involved little more than memorizing detailed lists of a country's rivers, counties and principal towns.<sup>9</sup> By the time, sixty or seventy years later, that Hardy was travelling around the West Country by car, geography had risen enormously in prestige and was being taught as a complex 'science of synthesis' which linked together the sciences and the humanities.<sup>10</sup> It was established as a degree subject in Oxbridge in 1887–8 not least because it was seen to be 'a matter of imperial importance that no reasonable means should be neglected' of training the nation's youth in 'sound geographical knowledge'. Anglo-German rivalry and German's perceived excellence in geography may have contributed to its 'imperial importance'.<sup>11</sup>

The emergence of geography occurred in Hardy's lifetime, therefore, and it follows a pattern which is paralleled in his career and his reception. Of particular importance, I think, are the liberal claims for the subject made by its early advocates. Archibald Geikie, at one time pro-

fessor of geology in Edinburgh, recommended geography to school-teachers in 1887 on the grounds that:

even among the youngest children and in every rank of life, an intelligent interest may be awakened and stimulated in the world around them; [ . . . ] they may be encouraged to look at things with their own eyes, and draw from them their own conclusions, and [ . . . ] in this way their conceptions of their immediate surroundings, of their country, and of the whole globe may, from the very outset, be made vivid, accurate, and enduring.<sup>12</sup>

Geikie constantly recommends the avoidance of ‘mere pages of definitions and statistics mechanically learnt by rote’ which, he says, will be forgotten soon enough. Instead, geography should offer a training in observation and in reflection upon what is observed. Analysis constantly leads outward from ‘immediate surroundings’ to the country beyond and from there to the whole world. Chapter 11 of his book is entitled: ‘Relation of the School Locality to the Rest of the Country, and of the Country to the Rest of the Earth’. Geikie suggests that study should begin with a large parish plan of the local area, move first to a county map, then a wall-map of the country and, lastly, a globe. ‘And thus, by a continuous chain of illustration, the minds of the learners are led upward and outward from their school surroundings to realise the shape and dimensions of the earth.’<sup>13</sup>

Children start on this movement ‘upward and outward’ by being prompted to notice the connections between their home territory and the world outside – roads and railways converging on a point off the local map show the presence and influence of ‘some great town in an adjoining county’; streams and rivers crossing the map can be traced to their source and their mouth: this will reveal the watersheds and the drainage basin of the local and surrounding areas. Secondly, Geikie urges teachers to use maps imaginatively: journeys outside the local area are usually not practicable; a map makes possible ‘imaginary ones, the teacher acting as leader and guiding the scholars in traverses across the map’. This method is ‘more lively than mere narrative’; and, in addition:

pupils are incited to find out for themselves what the map can teach them, their eyes are kept on the alert, their powers of observation and reflection are continually appealed to, and recognising feature after feature, they experience something of the zest of personal discovery.<sup>14</sup>

Seeing the place of the 'immediate surroundings' in the world as a whole is coupled in Geikie's work with seeing the present day in an extending historical context. Local place-names show the traces of Saxon, Roman and, further back still, Celtic occupation; roads, coins, even telegraph poles can be used to lead the pupils' minds to places outside their knowledge and to times when communications were more difficult, coins less commonplace or when roads were being built along lines which have been followed since.<sup>15</sup> Geikie's geography combines many kinds of knowledge – historical, geological, scientific – in order to depict the part within the whole and the whole within the part. Through studying and thinking geographically, moreover, collections of dry, received information can be instantiated and the pupils given 'the zest of personal discovery'.

Geikie is by no means the only geographer making such claims and practising the subject in this way. Around mid-century, Francis Galton and Thomas Arnold also saw geography uniting different disciplines,<sup>16</sup> and T.H. Huxley's popular success, *Physiography* (1877) shares with Geikie the view that students of the subject must start from experienced particulars and understand them in the widest context possible:

I endeavoured to show that the application of the plainest and simplest processes of reasoning to any one of these [particular and local] phenomena, suffices to show, lying behind it, a cause, which again suggests another; until, step by step, the conviction dawns upon the learner that, to attain to even an elementary conception of what goes on in his parish, he must know something about the universe; that the pebble he kicks aside would not be what it is and where it is, unless a particular chapter of the earth's history, finished untold ages ago, had been exactly what it was.<sup>17</sup>

By the end of the century, however, this emphasis had been replaced by a less expansive account of region and of geographical practice. Influenced by the work of the German geographer, Ratzel, and particularly that of the French geographer, Paul Vidal, the Oxford school of regional geography developed. Regions began to be treated as autonomous areas, determined by the features of their natural landscape. Within them, human culture was seen as reflecting the qualities of the local environment. Holt-Jensen in his history of the subject points out the conservative impulse underlying Vidal's work:

[His] method [. . .] was best suited to regions which were 'local' in the sense of being somewhat isolated from the world around them and dominated by an agricultural way of life. These circumstances favoured the development of local traditions in architecture, agricultural practices and the general way of life.<sup>18</sup>

Similar priorities govern H.J. Mackinder's *Britain and the British Seas* (1902) even though it was increasingly perceived that autonomous regions of this kind no longer existed in England. This perception clashed with a desire, especially marked after the First World War, to institute political decentralization. Mackinder and C.B. Fawcett both argued for political and economic devolution to regional centres. This would help to restore regional autonomy and so would counteract the harmful consequences of uninhibited *laissez-faire* capitalism.<sup>19</sup> Mackinder and Fawcett divided Britain into different regional areas but both seek to encourage local loyalty and regional identity in order to prevent local differences from being eroded any further.

The Oxford school of regional geography, then, identifies distinct, self-sufficient regions even where they barely exist any longer. It invokes Hardy in its cause; Fawcett writes:

Wessex is a well-marked natural region, with a very considerable regional consciousness and patriotism, which in its modern revival owes much to the writings of Thomas Hardy.<sup>20</sup>

Critical writing on Hardy from around the same period refers constantly to his depiction of country life and customs in Wessex.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, this Oxford school account of geographical region (as opposed to that of Geikie and Huxley earlier in the nineteenth century) has continued to influence readings of Hardy. It has been until recently an unquestioned assumption that Hardy portrays Wessex as an Oxford school regional geographer would, treating it in isolation and as a whole unto itself.<sup>22</sup> The actual geography of Hardy's novels, though, resembles Huxley's and Geikie's much more closely. His writing constantly and in many different ways emphasises connections between places, their interdependence with other places and other times. Also, like Geikie, the books welcome maps because they are seen as a means of access to experience.<sup>23</sup>

Critics have recently attacked Hardy's supposed regionalism, seeing it as a version of his work imposed on him late in his career by conservative interests who supported a national culture founded on a 'pastoral

myth of rural England'.<sup>24</sup> His regionalism must be stripped away, such critics argue, before his real subversiveness and radicalism can emerge. My own view is that Hardy's radicalism occurs within his regionalism. Certainly, his concentration on one rural area gives him points of contact with the conservative 'Englishness' of his Edwardian admirers and with Oxford school geography. The similarities, though, are superficial. Hardy's writing resists the idea that Wessex is a separate, autonomous region and thinks of region much more as Geikie and Huxley do. Arguably, in attacking Christminster (Oxford) in *Jude the Obscure* (1895), Hardy is attacking, among other things, the emerging Oxford school idea of regions which ignores economic interconnectedness and personal mobility. That novel and its predecessors, however, also see such a perspective on regions as encouraging outsiders to idealise, stereotype or condescend to the inhabitants. Where the region is predominantly rural, Hardy's readers employed a set of ruralist assumptions, which derived from the Romantic picturesque and were pervasive in mid-century. These assumptions rendered the countryside and its people idyllic or barbaric according to their degree of cultivation. Overall, therefore, Hardy's writing of Wessex seeks to give a sense of region which avoids becoming regionalist and seeks to present the rural without making it ruralist. His work corresponds to the geography of the 1870s and 1880s, when most of the novels were written.

The following chapters attempt to articulate Hardy's distinctive sense of the local and the regional. They do so by first discussing how Dorset was perceived in his day – where it was placed on the map(s) of England drawn by the economic, cultural and imaginative geographies of the Victorian period. In Hardy's response to the associations of particular places (Dorset, the West Country, the Thames Valley) and particular kinds of place (the countryside, the provinces), we can see him reacting to and modifying his period's dominant understandings of locality. These responses colour several of his novels, especially the more 'pastoral' ones such as *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *The Return of the Native*. They can also be seen at work in less familiar texts where, in addition, Hardy's own, personal relation to his home territory is of particular importance. Combined, these readings aim to show the development of Hardy's personal, independent geography of Wessex, a geography which countered provincialism, ruralism and the nationalism which underpinned both as well as differing from the regional geography of the late nineteenth century.

The geography of Hardy's novels indicates his distinctive sense of interconnected place; one that has parallels in the geographical think-

ing of his day (Huxley and Geikie) and has been (mis)understood according to a slightly later geographical model (Oxford school regionalism). Modern geography runs up against similar questions about the relation between locality and region, region and nation. Geographical studies of region constantly test the relation between empirical and theoretical, struggling to describe how material and abstract interact. Moreover, the critical divide over Hardy's regionalism is representative of a wider division within English studies, one again which is repeated within geography. The local in geography has the same elevated and questionable status as 'minute particulars' have in the study of literature. It either stands apart from the wider world or is irrelevant to the working out of general principles in the same way that literature's formal and linguistic intricacies either tend to be read in isolation from what is external to the text or are ignored by theory.

It is currently fashionable to draw geography and literary criticism together; this book is dependent upon and in part a response to that interest.<sup>25</sup> Literary studies influenced by geography, however, often prove to be either mechanically specific or rather loosely metaphorical, too particular or lacking in particularity altogether. 'Geography' is given either too narrow or too broad a definition. Hardy's writings explore where the regional begins and ends, how local and national impinge on people and their sense of themselves. His geography is highly specified and his locations identifiable, yet they lead into and are created by larger, external forces, including the literary language Hardy uses to present them. His works suggest, therefore, a way of thinking geographically about other writing – an approach to the geography of literature – and not least because they raise questions about the terms themselves.

### **Literary criticism, local knowledge and Tess**

Hardy's presentation of Wessex, as a region and a place, can be seen then within a wider debate about particulars in literature which raises questions about the nature of the literary and the practice of criticism. Thinking about his geography leads one to think about the literary. One reason for this is Hardy's own recognition that rural places were perceived via literary models – models in which the local was elided with the pastoral. The rural became suffused with the literary and epitomized the contemplative and reflective moment which literature was thought especially to promote. Since Hardy's day, and determining how his books are read, literary criticism has frequently been committed to a

form of localism. Deriving from Arnold (who in turn was developing ideas from Carlyle and Burke), literary study has tended to place the cherishing of minute particulars in opposition to an engagement with the abstractions of theory. David Simpson, for instance, has recently accused the English literary critical tradition of being wedded to 'an anti-theoretical rhetoric of exceptionalism' and as deriving 'disciplinary energy [. . .] from its efforts to impose restraints on the runaway tendencies of general ideas'.<sup>26</sup> Literary criticism of this kind, Simpson argues, parallels postmodernism. Both are opposed to grand narrative, replacing it with localism – with what Ernesto Laclau calls the 'attempt to show the essential contingency of all universality [and] construct the beauty of the specific, of the unrepeatable, of what transgresses the norm'; and what the geographer Doreen Massey has called 'the pastoral of the old perpetual place'.<sup>27</sup>

Although emphasis on literature's 'minute particulars' is characteristic of an anti-theoretical stance present in the tradition of practical criticism and close reading, something similar can be found not only in postmodernism but in Marxist readings of Hardy – ones, that is, which appear to be resisting a conservative localism. These have been influential readings and their shortcomings illustrate, I think, the elusiveness and peculiarity of Hardy's regionalism. Raymond Williams writes in *The Country and the City*:

we miss almost all of what Hardy has to show us if we impose on the actual relationships he describes a neo-pastoral convention of the countryman as an age-old figure, or a vision of a prospering countryside being disintegrated by Corn Law repeal or the railways or agricultural machinery. [. . .] we cannot suppress [Hardy's actual society] in favour of a seamless abstracted 'country way of life'.

Images of Wessex as either a pastoral idyll or the powerless victim of change are both, according to Williams, falsifications of the novels. If so, Hardy may exemplify what Simpson commends (and what Geikie's geography aspires towards): his novels may be encouraging their readers to think outside the immediate and local and to see both as involved in the processes of the wider world. Williams's own work, however, substitutes for an idealized countryside an idealization of labour relations – a neo-pastoral convention of work. This emphasis reinstates localism by re-endowing the countryside of Hardy's novels with a redemptive power:

Feeling very acutely the long crisis of separation, and in the end coming to more tragically isolated catastrophes than any others within this tradition, [Hardy] yet created continually the strength and the warmth of people living together: in work and in love; in the physical reality of a place.<sup>28</sup>

Williams supports this position with a quotation from Hardy's description of Tess working in the rain-soaked fields of Flintcomb-Ash beside her friend from Talbothays, Marian. The scene, however, is tonally much more ambiguous than Williams suggests. Certainly, Tess and Marian, despite being soaked through, are protected from the cold and wet by remembering, as Hardy puts it, 'when they lived and loved together at Talbothays Dairy'. Hardy, though, presents their 'warmth' as perhaps the single fortunate consequence of a collective infatuation with Angel Clare. There is a sardonic invocation of cliché in the phrasing 'lived and loved together', as if the comfort they feel had no basis, despite being effectual – that paradoxically and pathetically they were kept warm by a fantasy. Marian is also, as Hardy mentions down the page, drinking heavily to keep out the cold.<sup>29</sup>

John Goode makes a similar claim to Williams's about a scene in *Far from the Madding Crowd*:

Bathsheba and Gabriel find in physical contact on the hayrick in the storm [...] as a physical rhythm, the fundamental expression of man's relation to the world around him.

Where Williams praises Hardy's accurate portrayal of real conditions, Goode's more positive Marxism emphasizes the transformative power of labour.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, he stresses physicality as much as Williams does. For both, Hardy celebrates labour for the insights it makes possible into fundamental truths: its escape from the deceptions of thought. Intellectual abstractions are overcome by physical realities in a version of the sublime where individuality is lost when communal personhood is affirmed. For Williams especially, work generates a local community: 'the physical reality of a place' guarantees the unalienated quality of the human warmth achieved in and through working together.<sup>31</sup> In both the incidents cited, however, Hardy's writing complicates the presentation of labour, showing its relative powerlessness or, in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, how the communal bonds of cooperation are easily overridden by private concerns.

John Barrell's frequently-cited and sophisticated account of Hardy's geography, published in 1982, presents another version of this Marxist-pastoral account of Hardy – though one which directs the pastoral of Wessex back at his readership. Instead of a celebratory account of rustic life, of small, remote communities or of collective labour, Hardy, according to Barrell, engages with the problematics of access, with how, if at all, pre-modern forms of experience can be rendered to a modernized readership, given that the myth of pastoral colours all modern perceptions of the pre-modern. Barrell's account employs, therefore, the dichotomy between local and general forms of knowledge which Simpson sees as endemic in English literary criticism. The reading it produces of Hardy's *Tess* may therefore be seen as in some respects symptomatic of how that broad tradition approaches Hardy. That is one reason why the essay has been so widely quoted. Nonetheless, it is a reading of the character and the novel which strikes me as both powerful and mistaken.

Barrell observes a gap between the narrator's understanding and *Tess*'s:

For the transitions [...] which, properly concealed [...] should enable the reader to step innocently over into the consciousness of the characters, seem quite impossible to conceal, and so work only to insist upon the disjunction between the two sorts of knowledge. (p.114)<sup>32</sup>

The novel and others by Hardy strictly divide knowledge into local and general; the local is attained only by inhabitants, the general only by visitors, tourists and readers, and they can never be joined.

The reader can certainly grasp from *Tess* that there is such a local knowledge, in Hardy's Wessex if not in nineteenth-century Dorset; but he can grasp only the notion of its existence, not the knowledge itself. (p.113)

Local knowledge is not present in the novels because, in Barrell's view, it cannot be: 'local knowledge' is 'a myth deployed by the novel to describe us, its readers, as alienated' (p.118). Hardy's manipulation of clashing registers disrupts the complacent assumption, made by 'a smart tourist who knows about landscape-painting' (p.118), that locality can be seen and brought into harmony with a wider perspective.

So Barrell reads the novels as enacting a drama of modernity whose plot (and purpose) is to show the gradual recognition of the reader's

distance from the local. The reader is being educated by the novels into a better sense of the 'absolute otherness' (p.113) of locality. This reduces the social commentary of the novels, making all the changes they describe (in agriculture, education and society) exemplify the problem of epistemology which Barrell is concerned with. The reader is seen as engaged with the possibility of seeing and knowing, regardless of which among several different available objects is currently being attended to. And, in every case, according to Barrell, the reader is brought to a sober sense of impossibility – the local can be characterized as local but local knowledge cannot be shared. Nothing is allowed to occupy a middle ground between the two poles of local and general: the reader is shown to be a violator whenever he or she attempts to acquire local knowledge; the good reader will learn from this and withdraw.

Similarly, characters are either local or foreign. When they try – or when they are forced – to move between the two, they are destroyed:

the fact of the labourers becoming less 'local in feeling' [. . .] involves, in *Tess* particularly, not so much the exchange of one, 'local', for another, 'regional', sense of space, but the destruction of a local sense and the substitution of nothing in its place. (p.101)

Barrell says of Tess that, in her migrations, her identity vanishes, 'destroyed by her new habit of travelling without reference to a constant centre in Marlott or Talbothays' (p.110); 'Tess, in becoming less "local in feeling", has become more nothing' (p.112).<sup>33</sup>

There is limitless pathos to this account of the novel, but a pathos which underestimates Tess, as Hardy portrays her. Barrell's repetition of the word 'nothing' blocks out the thought that, in her migrations, Tess changes, becoming not necessarily better though certainly different. Barrell gives as an example of Tess's extinction a passage describing her walk in chapter 44 from Flintcomb-Ash to Emminster, a journey she undertakes with the aim of speaking to Angel Clare's mother and 'enlist[ing] her on her side'. Barrell does not mention Tess's purposiveness at this point – the fact that she 'took advantage of the state of the roads' under a hard frost 'to try the experiment' of visiting Angel's parents; nor that the distance is fifteen miles each way, to be completed within a day, and that her friends 'heard her footsteps tap along the hard road as she stepped out to her full pace'.<sup>34</sup> These exclusions make it easier for Barrell to present Tess's experience as depersonalized and empty. He quotes the following:

Keeping the Vale on her right she steered steadily westward; passing above the Hintocks, crossing at right-angles the high road from Sherton-Abbas to Casterbridge, and skirting Dogbury Hill and High-Stoy, with the dell between them called 'The Devil's Kitchen'. Still following the elevated way she reached Cross-in-Hand . . . Three miles further she cut across the straight and deserted Roman road called Long Ash Lane; leaving which as soon as she reached it she dipped down a hill by a transverse lane into the small town or village of Evershead, being now about half-way over the distance. (p.111)<sup>35</sup>

He then remarks:

There seems almost nothing to notice, here, but distances and directions, the intersection of one straight road with another: none of the features, the colours, the *differences* that marked the accounts of Tess's apprehension of places earlier in the novel. And yet, what has replaced that earlier mode of cognition is not the extended, educated, inquisitive geography of the tourist or traveller. (p.111)

Barrell sees Hardy's heroine stranded between two alternative modes, neither of which is available any longer – she has lost her childhood security without gaining educated poise. The result is a kind of blank in which, again, there is 'almost nothing to notice'. Hardy, though, presents this mode of perception as a form of self-assurance not of anomie: as Tess nears Emminster, he says in the next paragraph, 'her confidence decrease[d]' with the result that 'she was sometimes in danger of losing her way'. Earlier on her journey, it appears, she was more confident and 'breakfasted a second time heartily enough' at Evershead. The distances and directions which Hardy gives here in such detail mimic Tess's careful memorizing of a route and her use of the landmarks of popular legend in conjunction with good orienteering. Tess 'steered steadily westward', with self-certainty and independence. She employs her local knowledge (of Dogbury Hill, High-Stoy, 'The Devil's Kitchen' and such like); at the same time, she conceives of her route as following a (rough) bearing; it is, for her, both a list of landmarks and a line across a map; both strategies are used in making sure she does not lose her way.<sup>36</sup>

Barrell is also misleading when he claims that Hardy includes nothing except 'distances and directions'; after 'Cross-in-Hand', Hardy goes on, 'where the stone pillar stands desolate and silent, to mark the site of a miracle or a murder, or both. Three miles further [. . .]' According to what Barrell argues elsewhere, this mention of a more antiquarian interest should be read as the intrusion of an 'educated, inquisitive geogra-

phy' which attempts to 'penetrate Tess's consciousness of place, and to imprint upon it his own' (p.117). Because this description of the journey does not conform to Barrell's idea of Tess's 'consciousness of place', he excludes the interruption as uninteresting. Yet the presence in the original of this off-hand and sardonic historical note ('to mark the site of a miracle or a murder, or both') complicates the oppositions Barrell wishes to sustain. It is possible, for instance, to read the history of the pillar as an image of Tess and a foreshadowing of her future destiny: she is, in some ways, desolate and alone at present; when Angel returns to her, she feels it to be a miracle ('he told me a lie – that you would not come again; and you *have* come!'), a miracle that leads to a murder.<sup>37</sup> Secondly, the tone in which this resonant information enters the text suggests a surprising disregard for it. That casual indifference can be read, I think, as part of Tess's consciousness; for her, other more pressing matters diminish the interest of a stone pillar. She knows but cannot remember clearly the stories attached to it and hurries on.<sup>38</sup> Educated knowledge does not reinforce the reader's alienation from Tess's innocence; instead, it corresponds to the novel's concern with how immediate needs overcome the power of omens, how, necessity stifles insight, how, at the moment of danger, the sense of danger blinds you to the signs of it and to the means of escape.

This aspect of the novel may be equated with the oppositions Barrell employs: necessity could be read as imprinting itself upon a subtle and differentiated apprehension of the world in the same way that landscape painting imposes its lines and structures on the local knowledge of place. Maybe, but in both areas Hardy recognizes a gain: Tess may miss the omen present in the stone but her determination to act on her own behalf and seek out Angel's parents is seen as admirable, as a coming back to life and energy confirmed when 'she stepped out to her full pace'. Likewise, Tess looks into her old home and sees it as imprisoning:

In time she reached the edge of the vast escarpment below which stretched the loamy Vale of Blackmoor, now lying misty and still in the dawn. Instead of the colourless air of the uplands the atmosphere down there was a deep blue. Instead of the great enclosures of a hundred acres in which she was now accustomed to toil there were little fields below her of less than half-a-dozen acres, so numerous that they looked from this height like the meshes of a net. Here the landscape was whitey-brown; down there, as in the From Valley, it was always green. Yet it was in that vale that her sorrow had taken shape, and she did not love it as formerly. Beauty to her, as to all who have felt, lay not in the thing, but in what the thing symbolized.<sup>39</sup>

The following paragraph is the one Barrell quotes. This preface to it rules out the idea of Tess's being deracinated into blankness. Hardy shows her instead weighing up alternatives, seeing the harshness of her present circumstances and choosing to go on in them. She lives in 'the great enclosures', not perfectly free but nonetheless self-steering and responsible. Her past life, in the Vale of Blackmoor as at Talbothays, offers the security suggested by 'always green'; it is a security, however, which is 'like the meshes of a net'.<sup>40</sup> Tess's awareness now is comparative, both between places and between times, so that lacking a home base, she becomes self-reliant.

The change in Tess creates tragic feeling at the novel's end, whereas Barrell's account can engender only pathos. It suggests moreover that, for Hardy, there is a regional sense of space, engendered by the greater mobility of those who were once locally fixed. Tess enters it and moves through it. Her experience of rootless mobility brings a sense of responsibility for her own affairs. Clearly, the novel at many points yearns after a paradisiac state of absorption into nature and Tess's separateness, as it gradually comes about, is blamed on successive acts of male cruelty. Separateness, though, is not nothing. In Tess's case, it brings a translation of the local into the immediate – her priorities control (to some extent self-consciously) what she attends to, so that nearby things are placed within a narrative sequence and on a mental map. Hardy's language creates a clash of registers which is sometimes internal to her and, at her few lucky moments, is resolvable by her; its multiplicity works to suggest her maturity and self-will.<sup>41</sup> The reader, consequently, is not simply described by the novel as alienated; more like Angel, he or she is brought to a sense of equality with Tess – an equality which is less 'the brotherhood of man' and more like what Wordsworth called 'kindred independence'.

An understanding of social life as well as of individuality and of place follow, then, from Hardy's presentation of Tess's endurance. Her 'steering steadily westward' implies too a geographical sense of one's own location – a geographical sense which (as Geikie and Huxley recommend) locates this particular place within a region and knows the region to be, in turn, a specific part of a larger whole. For Barrell, Wessex could be anywhere in Britain; the conflict between local, primal knowledge and educated pastoral is universal. For Hardy, Wessex is definitely western; the wider geography of England impinges on it as an aspect of where it is located and as part of its definition. Tess becomes aware of where she is within Wessex and senses that the world beyond bears on Wessex – on what and where it is.

## Regional geography

David Simpson's discussion of localism and literary criticism is most convincing in its diagnosis of the problem. Understandably, perhaps, he finds it more difficult to give examples of the kind of reading he prefers, one whose mixture of theorization with 'openness and flexibility' would accommodate and replicate the condition of being both locally particular and subject to larger forces, personally distinctive and constituted by general ideas. Recent historically informed and yet formally attentive critical writing seeks to resolve the difficulty that Simpson identifies. Because Hardy is preoccupied so often with exactly these concerns, he seems an especially good subject for a book which similarly tries to combine formal detail with wider concern and to suggest that these two apparent opposites continually interact in our modern, deracinated, regional minds.<sup>42</sup>

The currency of the problem is shown by contemporary geography and spatial studies which frequently repeat the opposition Simpson discerns in literary studies. Doreen Massey's excellent work begins from the perception that 'modernism seems to have problems in really, in the end, taking seriously the autonomy of others [but] postmodernism certainly has its difficulties in doing anything more democratic than recognizing the existence of others'.<sup>43</sup> The local is either ignored or isolated. In response to this, Massey tries to recover and re-express the interconnection between local and general, particular and universal. The difficulties she meets in doing so centre on finding an adequate language. Massey writes with unusual alertness to the attractions and shortcomings of other possible ways of talking and adopts for herself complex, nearly contradictory, metaphorical formulations. Yet these seem to be necessary and more satisfactory than the languages other geographers use. There is a parallel here, I believe, with Hardy's jagged, ambitious and densely-textured style. Complexity, even paradoxicality, seem inherent for both writers in how local and general coexist. In both, a highly literary style does not celebrate localism, it reaches towards an understanding of regionalism – of the kind that can be found in *Tess* and as that term applies to persons, communities, places and countries. If this is true more widely, then criticism which valorizes literature in terms of localism not only diminishes criticism (as Simpson argues, reducing its political impact and intellectual energy), it also shrinks the literary. Imaginative literature's minute particulars are prevented from leading anywhere.

Massey's metaphors arise from a conflict very similar, as I have said, to the one Simpson finds in literary criticism. Though seemingly

irrelevant to a discussion of Hardy, Massey's writing illustrates in a different context the problems and problematic solutions Hardy confronted. They and their context are worth a brief digression. Massey is wary of geographical analyses which employ solely topographical or chorographical descriptions, and so divide specifics from their context. This approach ignores socioeconomic relatedness and causes problems of epistemology. Also, like Simpson, Massey sees postmodernism repeating a traditional, conservative 'pastoral of the old perpetual place'. At the same time, she is unwilling to embrace a Marxist geography which believes local detail to have little explanatory value. On the one hand theory dominates, on the other it is excluded and, in consequence, local particulars are either disregarded or fetishised. According to Massey:

The global is in the local in the very process of the formation of the local. [. . .] 'identities' are constructed through the specificity of their interaction with other places, rather than by counterposition to them. [. . .] The geography of social relations forces us to recognize our interconnectedness, and underscores the fact that both personal identity and the identity of those envelopes of space-time in which and between which we live and move (and have our 'Being') are constructed precisely through that interconnectedness.<sup>44</sup>

That stable, local identities are being washed away by rapid communications and globalization has become a familiar judgement in recent human geography. Massey argues that the local and the global are not opposed to one another; instead, they continually intersect. Massey quotes from bell hooks a more celebratory version of this idea:

home is no longer just one place. It is locations. Home is that place which enables and promotes varied and everchanging perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference. One confronts and accepts dispersal and fragmentation as part of the construction of a new world order that reveals more fully where we are, who we can become.<sup>45</sup>

Despite the similarities in conception, the two writers are moving in opposite directions, leading to differing accounts of the relation between one place and the rest of the world. hooks takes us away from singleness towards a dispersal that makes possible a 'new world order' and *becoming*. Massey, in a language of constraint and ineluctable

reality – of ‘forces us to recognize’ and ‘underscores the fact that’ – moves inward, to the need to confess that personal identity cannot be isolated from others. It is, instead, vulnerable to them and formed paradoxically through violation. Massey’s language implies a sense of interdependence, of personhood retrieved from isolation and paranoia by the recognition of mutuality. bell hooks, by contrast, thinks of the self as liberated through fragmentation; liberation turns ‘one’ into ‘we’, impersonality into solidarity, the isolated and singular into the communal.

bell hooks presents a Utopian vision, fervent and exciting, and this Massey views as liable to become pastoral. The fluid, postmodern self (constantly moving between subject-positions and so no longer subjected to them) becomes hard to distinguish from the unalienated life, often communally conceived, of both Marxist and conservative nostalgia. Ideal stability and constant mobility both ignore immediate oppression – whether that oppression be the constraining limitations of each subject-position as it is successively inhabited or the determining forces of natural circumstance. Nostalgia and revolutionary Utopianism both effect a form of the sublime, freeing the self from contingency.

On the other hand, the self as Massey describes it (and as Hardy describes Tess) is in danger of being shattered by contingency. How it remains distinctive becomes the difficulty she is most concerned to portray. The geography of social relations, she says,

underscores the fact that both personal identity and the identity of those envelopes of space-time in which and between which we live and move (and have our ‘Being’) are constructed precisely through that interconnectedness.

We are who we are as a result of our relations with others; the places where we are, similarly, acquire distinctiveness through being connected with other places. This account risks sounding vague and Massey adds the word ‘precisely’, urging interconnectedness as something to welcome rather than something to be frightened of. Still, the anxiety survives that by stressing interconnectedness you will reduce the self to a collage of fragments gathered from other ‘selves’. For this reason, Massey adds in parenthesis ‘and have our “Being”’, using the religious term to suggest something ineffable about experience and personal identity. Neither of them can be reduced to the sum of its parts, and neither will slot readily into the received ideas we have of ‘Being’.<sup>46</sup> Her writing is more stretched and tense than hooks’s; it throws customary

ideas of personal identity into question in order to suggest not that it is an encumbrance to be thrown off but, rather, to suggest that a better conception lies just out of language's reach. Likewise, Massey says later that 'What gives a place its specificity is [...] the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus.' The confused metaphor (in which a constellation meets and weaves) shows Massey declaring the existence of agency within determining structures and resisting both entire stability on the one hand and free mobility on the other.<sup>47</sup>

What is true of language is true also, in Massey's opinion, of regional studies – the geographical discipline that describes localities. Such studies either tend to adopt a Marxist perspective in which local differences are placed second to the universal power of class or capital accumulation, or, more traditionally (following the Oxford school), they treat localities as 'internally introspective bounded unities', whose characteristics can be delineated without reference to their interconnectedness with other places (*Space, Place and Gender*, pp.135–42). The discipline has not yet, according to Massey, found a way of describing the global within the local.

Massey is resisting here the claims made by the recent geographical sub-discipline, spatial studies, to have found a way of joining theorized and particularized description. Spatial studies begins with Henri Lefebvre's *The production of space* (1974) which presents what Derek Gregory calls 'a tensely organic spatiality [...] rooted in the taking place of practical activity'.<sup>48</sup> Lefebvre focusses on the *production* of space because that shows the world being constructed practically instead of intellectually. It reveals the categories of human understanding as they exist before being distorted by intellectualism. By studying space, one can reach back to the genuinely human relation to the world. This creates the narrative structure of Lefebvre's project and it is repeated in his concept of absolute space:

a time, long before the inauguration of either 'historical' or modern, 'abstract' spatialities, when the body's relationship to space has 'an immediacy which would subsequently degenerate and be lost'.<sup>49</sup>

The study of space conducted in this way will recover the immediate relation between body and space, a relation that implies mind and body in proper harmony.<sup>50</sup>

The similarity between Lefebvre and Raymond Williams is clear and reveals their shared indebtedness to Marxism. Lefebvre has, moreover,

been adopted as a forerunner of postmodern geography. Ed Soja's influential *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (1989) cites Lefebvre repeatedly while advocating a new, spatial approach to regional studies. Soja argues in a recent essay that new theoretical inquiry into space – by geographers and others – has produced

a fusion of the traditional distinction between objectively defined material geographies (what Lefebvre described as the realm of 'spatial practices' or perceived space) and more subjectively defined mental, cognitive, or ideational geographies (Lefebvre's 'representations of space' or conceived space).<sup>51</sup>

This 'fusion' is equivalent to 'the opening up of a *thirdspace*', corresponding to Lefebvre's *lived space*'. In the new mode of spatial thinking, Soja argues, 'it is this heterotopological thirdspace, this open-ended, fragmented, limitless *lived* space [...] that is being explored'. Soja welcomes the new thinking because it overcomes divisions, achieving within the discipline an equivalent to bell hooks's wider liberation.

Spatial studies seem to display therefore a recoil from 'intellectualism' back into the materially definite coupled with Soja's version of the sublime, where the collapse of categories into one another makes possible limitlessness and freedom, although at the expense of material specificity. How the local is 'in the global' without becoming lost in the global remains a difficulty in analysing locality and expressing its nature. Conforming as it does to the pattern Massey sees in geography generally, spatial studies is for her unable to articulate a regional perspective, such as that of the grown-up Tess. A further example will, I hope, help suggest the dominance of this problem in geography, plus the difficulty of finding a language in which to solve it.

Brian Jarvis and Julie Kathy Gibson-Graham are geographers also attempting to recover the immediate within the theoretical. Brian Jarvis, in *Postmodern Cartographies* (1998), summarizes the position of cultural geographers such as Soja and Fredric Jameson for whom space and spatiality have become key terms in the understanding of postmodern culture. He observes in them, however, a loss of particularity:

All places become simply a palimpsest for Capital. Like their neo-conservative counterparts producing reassuring (or, in Baudrillard's case, reassuringly apocalyptic) visions of postindustrial, post-capitalistic places, the broad brush strokes of macrogeographical models tend to obscure critical details and differences.<sup>52</sup>

The new macrogeographical models are as normalizing as the old ones, despite their claim to have revealed 'how relations of power are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life'.<sup>53</sup> Jarvis, in phrases reminiscent of Doreen Massey, insists on locality:

It is essential to integrate analyses of micro- and macrogeographical processes – to uncover the specificity of individual sites (streets, suburbs, nature and second nature, national and individual bodies) whilst understanding their position within larger spatial systems.<sup>54</sup>

According to Jarvis, regions – even those of postmodernity – provide a counter to the totalizing ambitions of theory; for him, this does not imply a rejection of the theoretical. Places show instead the presence of the larger system within the specific site and the need for 'understanding' in the process of 'uncovering'.

Jarvis's use of 'uncover', however, suggests that these sites' specificity exists independently of the larger system. It is hidden and can be found. What we need to guard against is either forgetfulness of the system or disregard for the particular object. Their separateness is not in question. When Gibson-Graham finds 'the identity of Capital confronts us at every turn', it prompts her to ask, 'Do we only ever dwell in a capitalist space? Can we ever think outside the capitalist axiomatic?' If we cannot do so, she concludes, 'We risk relegating space/life to emptiness, to rape, to non-becoming, to victimhood.' Gibson-Graham draws on Deleuze and Guattari's paradox that Capital is everywhere and yet leaves gaps: 'this mechanic enslavement abounds in undecidable propositions and movements [. . .] that provides [*sic*] so many weapons for the becoming of everybody/everything'. She uses too a comparison between Cubist space (which 'evokes a closed system of determination [. . .] The space of modernism, of phallogentrism and capitalism') and space in Impressionism:

a space of mists and vapours, of movement and possibility, of background that might at any moment become foreground – a 'space of excess' and indeterminacy within the modern space of fullness and closure.<sup>55</sup>

By attending to the fissures, to what is un-closed within the closed, we may, Gibson-Graham says, recognize things that are not determined by capitalism. The local will supply this alternative but only if it is viewed differently – viewed as the undecidable or indeterminate within the system, whose indeterminacy places it beyond the system.

Jarvis and Gibson-Graham both invoke the local as a counterweight to dominant ideology, a counterweight which, they both claim, cannot be separated from the system within which it is found. Yet Jarvis makes 'local differences' objective, placing them within the observation of empirical and material study, so reinstating traditional geography and its scientific, universalist account of space. Gibson-Graham, on the other hand, moves the local close to the undecidable, the point outside cognisance because lying outside the grasp of the system – a vaporous and vague, feminised 'other' to the system's masculine definition and closure. Despite his language of integration, then, Jarvis places the local on one side of a clash between methods, one arrogantly theoretical, the other doggedly materialist. His concepts of locality and specificity do not really allow the integration with a larger system which he aspires towards. In Gibson-Graham's essay, the local and particular remain systemic exceptions, *aporias* which the system necessarily produces. The quotidian becomes, in her presentation, the crux: an elusive and tantalizing point of transformation where system is – or will be – overturned. In both, the specific remains the 'other' of theory, either in the head-to-head conflict between empirical and theoretical geographies or as the postmodern 'thirdspace of political choice' where a 'new cultural politics of difference' is enunciated.<sup>56</sup>

This comparison indicates the problems in method and perception which Doreen Massey's version of locality studies is trying to address. Massey's alert, sometimes paradoxical language works to give voice to a sense of how particular and general are interconnected within locality, a sense which Jarvis and Gibson-Graham largely share but also find difficult to express. Massey's work declares that the particular is unavoidable in a full description of the whole, yet it cannot be separated from the whole, either as independent of the larger theory/system or as the exception within and beyond it. Indeed, for a particular to remain particular it needs to be neither an independent specific nor an exceptional indeterminate: both of these revert to being one side of binary oppositions (which make the specific the opposite of the general and the indeterminate the opposite of the determinate). In these arrangements, attempted isolation from the larger whole entails subjection to it. Particularity, then, requires an interaction between the specific and the general which avoids becoming a dialectic. This is sought, in Massey's work, through a language of multiple relations: the local is understood as part of the global but not as the exception to it; instead, the global is seen as consisting in innumerable factors and differing forces, allowing one to recognize a

'constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus'.<sup>57</sup>

These at times arcane problems confronted by modern geography may seem of little relevance to a discussion of Hardy. Like their modern counterparts, however, nineteenth-century accounts of locality and region were fond of seeing them as either escapes from or instances of a larger whole. The rural was defined as country by contrast with city and rural locality was regarded either as instantiating national virtues or as escaping national vice. As I discuss at greater length in Chapter 5, Hardy like Doreen Massey used constellations as a metaphor for social experience; he also sought to represent the particularity of individuals as something inseparable from their relations with others and their relations to the structures which joined communities together. His sometimes jarring and uneasy style endeavours, again like Massey, to find a way of describing precisely this interdependence. Lastly, Hardy's sense of how individuality existed and how communities were formed brought him into conflict with the more conventional understanding of locality and nation and of individual and community – accounts, that is, which made these terms into polar opposites of one another. In this, too, his project is analogous to Massey's and it finds comparable solutions.

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