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## The Pull of the Earth: Thomas Hardy, Willa Cather and Writing the Land

Eliza Holmes

*Bard College*

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# The Pull of the Earth:

Thomas Hardy, Willa Cather and Writing the Land

Senior Project submitted to  
The Division of Language and Literature  
of Bard College

by  
Eliza Holmes

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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*To Betsy, who left the farm and then gave me my first copy of My Ántonia. To my Dad, for returning. To my Mom, for making it home. To Perry, my co-native, my best friend. And to that ridgetop itself, lodged as it is somewhere below my ribcage.*

## Acknowledgements

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This project comes from a dual love of land and reading, and a fear that I cannot have both. I am lucky enough to have been proven wrong, again and again, in the form of my mother's garden, or my father's voracious reading, or my brother's writing. By Betsy who gave me more books than I can count, and by Baba who painted the land, and Big Steve who took us canoeing and then read to us in the most beautiful voice, bedtime story after bedtime story. By Sally and Doug and Zulma who arrive at the farm with the city in their hands and workboots on their feet. By Jonny, who also left but still returns, who gave me a subscription to the New York Review of Books when I was eleven, even though I was not up to it yet. By Uncle Perry who inspired my Dad, and in turn all of us. By the wild, and wonderful, and lovely Davenports of California. By the people of the farm, who have formed the backbone of my life, and of this paper. I cannot name them all, but they taught me to plant, and milk, and work hard, and trust my hands, and they will continue to do so for the rest of my life. This is the place I circle back to, the place, the people, I will always call home.

And finally, by my friends, who have made such beautiful things, I am so glad and proud to know you.

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## Introduction

I am writing about Thomas Hardy, a nineteenth century British poet and novelist, and Willa Cather, an American novelist born in 1873, and the way they envision the relationship between humans and land. I want to find out why they return imaginatively to their rural hometowns in novels again and again, even though in many ways both of them have distanced themselves from the lifestyle and location of their childhood. I want to find out how they live within this fear of being away and this fear of being at home; both Hardy and Cather see a terror in a land-rooted existence, a fear that in a landscape without the human markers of roads and buildings and language the human being can be swamped either by a space too large, or a time too large. Yet escape is partial and equally terrifying, and they see, in the un-rooted, un-landed modern man, a loss of self-definition equal to this swamping space. A home based in land is also a self based in land, and the loss of this placedness is something I believe they both enact and mourn.

I want to argue that reading is a form of being, it only exists as process, and both Cather and Hardy envision and then write their way into land not through a solid definition of self and place and the relationship between the two, but through processes of being. They walk over land, or build on it, or work their way into it. Language and labor, or language and the body, or language and land, are not things that go together easily. The heath or the prairie, and the self dependent on these places, are often outside of the worded realm of books and speech. The educated man cannot articulate the un-educated childhood spent in contact with a wild land. (Williams) Yet Cather and Hardy, in their emphasis not on the specific words that will define and hold down place and our relationship to it, but instead on the shifting, changeful, process of being, have created a way of trying to pull land and self, home and changed person, back

together. In this process of *being* they can inhabit a space in between the world of the earth and the world of the mind, and solidify neither but work instead in both.

While exploring these questions, I come back to several clusters of words with a certain frequency. They circle mostly around the two entities that I see as often engaged with each other: the land and the self. Land, as used in this project, means literally the “solid surfaces of the earth” and the various things that grow out of it, the texture of hills and fields and prairies. It is both the literal dirt of the ground and the spreading out space of it. Topos is Greek for place, and it is a word that runs beneath most of our language around land and home. A literary topos is a standard way of organizing rhetoric, it is the often repeated unit of an argument, or of a novel. Place can be a figure for this unit of transmission, this repeated and stationary tradition of saying something, or telling something in a way that is clear and bounded. It is an order and a way of building from one thing to the next in an expected fashion. Hardy and Cather, however, are interested instead in creating a “topography”, a written place. If in rhetoric place is merely the unit, here it is underlying, running throughout. It is not place as a boxed meaning, but place as a thing being written, as the act of seeing, feeling, creating a new map of what is there. Places here, function as modes of expression, or what Raymond Williams calls “structures of feeling,” in his book *The Country and the City*. (13) Topos here, then, is the language and structure of your home, both the literal land itself and the words and ways of being that are attached to it. Topophilia, literally “love of place”, is the line of connection between person and environment. As Yi-Fu Taun writes in his introduction to *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes and Values*, it can be defined “broadly to include all of the human being’s affective ties with the material environment.” (93) These ties, he continues, can be tangible, and aesthetic, or “more permanent and less easy to express”, the ties between a human and the place they are

from, “the locus of memories, the means of gaining a livelihood.” (93) Topophilia, along with the urge to delineate a topography of home and self, is the tracing out of these ties, and the ways we either try to make them stronger or shake them off.

The self for both Hardy and Cather, is more problematically defined. It is both the physical parts and pieces of a human body (arms, legs, hands), and the unnamed interiority of a single character. In the anxiety of death and dissolution, there is an equally intense interest in the idea of wholeness – of a person that is complete within their own body, that has and follows their own will, that cannot be swamped by a world too big or spread out by the speed of the train; it is a desire to be “complete in itself”. In the desire, and attention to, this “whole” self, there is an intense attention as well to the territory between the land and the space of the human body. A person’s true quality, Hardy argues, can “only be approximated by putting together a movement now and a glance then”. (*Woodlanders*, 36) To make a whole you have to piece together the not-whole. As much as these processes are processes of reading, of working, of walking into land, they are also processes of holding. Holding history, holding memory, holding the marks of the world on your skin, holding all the bits and pieces of yourself in one seeming whole. Words, so discrete and separate, and the land, so far-away seeming, and the pieces of yourself, so in danger of disappearing, must be “grasped, or carried, or supported with your hands.” Writing, I would suggest, allows for this holding; a binding together of the discrete and separate into something larger and more whole.

A project based around processes of being, or the individual relationship between a person and the ground, does not lend itself immediately to historical study. While of course this has been the background of the project, and the placement of Hardy and Cather within both their own history and the history of the world, is deeply important, it is not the main focus of this



paper. Most important to my approach has been a combination of phenomenological and narratological criticism; or the study of the individual experience of the world or the book. I turned first to Jonathon Bate's *The Song of the Earth*, which centers around "the capacity of the writer to restore us to the earth which is our home." (vii) He takes much of his own reading of "dwelling" in the world through poetry from Martin Heidegger, and he writes that for Heidegger, and for himself, "we achieve being not when we represent the world, ... but when we stand in a site, open to its being, when we are thrown or called. The site is then gathered into a whole for which we take insistent care..." (261) The "being" that I return to is something akin to this placedness and openness – it is the process not of representation, but instead of standing, or walking, or building into a site and then trying to gather it back to yourself. (161) Dwelling and being are a "presencing", they bring the individual into a direct, and changing, and unfixed, relationship with place and land – while both may partake of memory it is a memory that exists within the body and within, therefore, the present. (262) Bate also often turns to Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, particularly in relation to ideas of the home. As Bate explores the links between human and land, Bachelard explores the links between human and dwelling, or "the sorts of space that may be grasped, that may be defended against adverse forces, the space we love." (xxxv) He is doing a reading of these spaces we love through dreams and obsessive returnings, to houses that we have left and now only remember. He is both the critic of the actual structure of the home, and of the haunting of it. Maurice Blanchot lends a similarly experiential reading of language to the project, as I borrow from "Literature and the Right to Death" to trace the possibilities and dangers that words hold in the project of inhabitation.

Gillian Beer and Peter Brooks form the basis of my narratological study of both Cather and Hardy. Beer is more specifically relevant to Hardy. In her book entitled *Darwin's Plots*:

*Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, she traces the effects Darwin's ideas had on Hardy's perception of the human time scale and on his multi-plotted novels. While, since Cather and Hardy are rarely written about together, this has nothing to say about her, Beer's idea of biology and plot mixing formed the backbone of my argument on the formation and confusion of the marriage and homestead plots in both of the authors' work. Brooks' *Reading for the Plot*, provides an underlying structure for the novelistic form of being, or the idea of the middle, the space between beginning and end, or as Brooks implies, the birth and death of an individual. Mikhail Bakhtin's essay "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics" provides the idea of the chronotope, the essential blending of space and time within the structure of a narrative. While neither a critical work, nor a work contemporary to Hardy and Cather, I have used Marilynne Robinson's novel *Housekeeping* extensively, as an almost philosophical description of ways of inhabiting space and land. As a meditation on the limits of stillness and the draw, and fear, of transience, it is a new reflection of the ways in which Cather and Hardy have chosen to dwell and remember. Elaine Scarry's essay on Thomas Hardy and work and Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition*, are the final two most influential critical works on which I draw in this project. Scarry's insistence on Hardy's embodiment and her idea of the laborer and his or her material merging, helps to define both the fear and the possibility of my final chapter, and Arendt's definition of work versus labor helps create a line between what Cather and Hardy have left behind, and what they have decided to do as writers in its stead.

I have broken Cather and Hardy's processes of writing, and processes of coming into being they represent, into three sections: walking, homemaking and laboring. The first chapter is an exploration of the relationship between humans in motion and the land they traverse. I argue

that walking is a reaction to a space so large it threatens the edges of the individual. In Hardy and Cather's vision of walking, the person can both be close to the land they are covering and still separate from it, constantly moving over that which is often still. Their novels of leaving and return, in particular Hardy's *Return of the Native*, and Cather's *My Ántonia*, are novels of walking into and out of place, and this structure of coming and going leads to a diachronic structure to the novel. Diachronic logic is a road-like logic of sequence and forward motion. The road, and the diachronic structure of the novel, is aligned with metonymy and sequences, relationships built off of contiguity and connection. These novels follow a logic of before and after – Jim longs for home, but by leaving it he has physically and temporally distanced himself from Black Hawk. They are books built around longing, and a longing that relies intensely on a sense of time that runs horizontally and cannot be restored.

The second chapter turns to the poetics of stillness based around the building of a house. Where the first chapter is responding to a space too big, a space threatening the body with dissolution, by walking – here Hardy and Cather are responding to a biological, darwinistic time of replacement that threatens to erase the individual in the swarm of the general. In response to this hugeness of time, rather than walking – a process that only emphasizes a horizontal and replacement-based logic of time – they turn to building houses to try to contain a historical sense of the individual. Houses, as both the end of the marriage plot, or the homesteading plot, and the foundation for any narrative of the return of the native, become a locus of both biological time (desire and generation) and individual time (personal memory-making). Hardy and Cather try to create, in the house, a vertical time-frame with layer after layer adding up to form the walls of the house, to hold the past and the present within a single structure. This chapter points to books, and houses, that are farmed according to synchronic logic; they are built rather than run through

and work not by metonymy, linking one thing to the next, but in the overarching leap of metaphor. Home and house are the key words of this chapter, house being the actual structure of a building – rooms, and walls- that is related to a more general, shared, structure of history (so the house does not necessarily belong to anyone, it simply collects time). Home on the other hand, is a shell-like extension of the individual into the land and time around them. It is the physical shape of settling, putting down roots and holding stillness.

The third chapter centers on the underlying fact of living on the land: labor. In labor, both Cather and Hardy find the synthesis of motion and stillness. Labor, as Hannah Arendt defines it, is the physical activity relating solely to the biological continuance of the body – food and shelter; it “leaves nothing behind”, and instead exists purely in its enactment. Labor engages both diachronic and synchronic logic, related as it is to the seasons and to a world that is marked by all time that is passed, and to the repetitive, associative, patterns of the body in a tethered relationship to a particular part of the earth. Labor, in its direct, physical engagement with the material world, binds you to the earth, forms a merged space between person and place, and links you more and more firmly to the seasons, to the ephemerons, and to the language of “inarticulate things.” It encompasses both metonymic linking, and metaphoric merging. And it is too, the activity that Cather and Hardy have most intensely left behind themselves – they may walk back over the moors, or return to their prairie town house, but they have cut themselves off from the world of labor and instead moved into work as something very different. As Arendt defines work, it is the opposite of labor, a process that leaves something “durable” in its aftermath. Work is the “work of our hands” rather than the “labor of our bodies”, writes Arendt, where laboring “mixes with” working “works upon”. (136) The durable things created by work – a table, a house, a book – give “the human artifice the stability and solidity without which it could not be

relied upon to house the unstable and mortal creature which is man.” (136) As writers Hardy and Cather are theoretically engaging in the durable things of the world, are moving away from the unending, swallowing repetition of labor and towards an immortal creation made by their mortal hands. Yet, as Arendt, and Blanchot, and even Hardy and Cather argue, this fabrication is necessarily violent – it destroys as much as it makes, and the safe space of the written world is not as safe as it may appear. As Blanchot writes, in order to name something you must destroy its particularity first, therefore naming, or by extension, writing, inherently destroys the thing it is trying to capture. Arendt warns of the “dead letter” and in tying ourselves to the world of the word we are tying ourselves potentially to this empty set of signs. So instead, Cather and Hardy have to envision a combination of the two – a writing that becomes a process of living, of re-entering the land they have left. Through writing there is the hope of merging with the material that is written, or enacting Hardy’s merger of laborer and material. Labor represents both the most appealing process of being for these two and the most terrifying; the seemingly most far from the work of writing they have chosen, but ultimately the closest to the unending work of writing about land. A combination of labor and the work of writing, of merging with labor, or the unending rhythms of plowing, cutting, feeding, eating, through a labor-like process of writing, can enact the link between body and mind, past and present, the unsayable and the articulate, or the things that promise to be lasting and the ephemerons of this world that we cannot quite give up.

Thomas Hardy and Willa Cather are not the most obviously paired writers. Born decades apart, on different continents, of different genders, even with fairly different writing styles (one long and dramatic and written for the periodical press, the other shorter and more nostalgic and with quieter plots), they seem to have little in common aside from an interest in land and labor.

Tolstoy writes of labor, and Eliot writes of small towns, and Ole Rolvaag wrote the pioneer story. Anyone who writes about their hometown, or the joys and sorrows of labor, or the beauty of a landscape, by this logic, could be matched to Hardy or to Cather. Yet these two, for all their dissimilarities, have an underlying similarity of expression and ideology that links them across the Atlantic and the gender divide and the decades between one life and the next. They are both novelists of transition, existing between the Victorian novel they both studied and read, and the modern novel that was fast approaching. They are not akin to Faulkner, or Woolf, the modernist lost in the world of language and the mind, nor Sinclair and Zola, naturalists determined to display the truth of matter, but instead exist in between, just as they exist in-between the modern world and the rural world, the city and the country. They have no clear place to rest.

This is, inherently, a transatlantic study, and by placing Hardy and Cather next to each other and therefore out of the literary traditions that insist on there being a “distinct species of literature in America,” or that English novels come solely out of their literary history which is separate from the “new” history of America, the two novelists are both freed and uprooted. Again they are “trans-”figures located between continents and traditions. Hardy is no longer only writing in relation to George Eliot, nor is Cather solely a pioneer-writer. Instead, I hope, we can look at them through the prism of land, through topophilia, through the ways they choose to engage this memory of home, and by extension the material body. They are not obvious neighbors, and I do not expect them to be completely aligned in their visions of the world. But they both have a similar and specific ache for something that is almost (but not quite) outside of language, and their novels are continually returning to and re-wording and re-mapping their present and remembered landscapes. In each other’s company, in their shared web of influences (they are from different historical and geographical zones, but they read many of the same books,

including, most-likely, Darwin), in their shared English language, and in their differing lands – the heath and the prairie, the small island and the ever-spreading continent – we see a transience, an insistence on not being named, or known, or ended, but in constantly *being*. This transatlantic study is useful not only in reshaping our sense of the people and words we link together, but too in emphasizing the in-transit, transmissive, nature of these two writers. Their overwhelming concern not with the final scene, the clear and defined word, but with the process of walking, or homesteading, and working, or, finally, most notably, writing – pulling together the bits and pieces of the world around them, and hopefully, in this pulling together, being pulled back down into it as well.

## Obscurity and Open Skies:

### Narratives of Walking

*We learn a place and how to visualize spatial relationships, as children, on foot and with imagination. Place and the scale of space must be measured against our bodies and their capabilities. A 'mile' was originally a Roman measure of one thousand paces. Automobile and airplane travel teaches us little that we can easily translate into a perception of space. ... That's the way to see the world: in our own bodies. - Gary Snyder, The Practice of the Wild*

We walk all the time. From the car to the house to the upstairs room. Through a garden, through a museum, to the store, to school, to work. Often, I think, we associate walking either with the city or with exercise, we walk to get fit, we walk from building to building or through the park or to take in the sights. We walk arm in arm and we walk alone, in new places, in places we know so well we hardly have to look up to see where we are. We walk away and we walk home again. It is a movement we do not spend much time thinking about, or musing over, we do it to get from point a to point b. There is something strange though, about walking, in the age of cars and trains and planes, of speed, for it is inherently slow. It is close to the ground. It means your body is moving and moving and hitting against the bannister, or a tree branch, or brushing a coat sleeve, or stepping in dirt. It means things are very close, but we are not sitting still contemplating them, we are moving into them, with them, against them. The bounds of the body are being reinforced and worked against, touched and pulled at. Elaine Scarry, in her essay "Work and the Body in Hardy and other Nineteenth-Century Novelists", writes that "the human creature," is, for Thomas Hardy, "not now and then but habitually embodied: it has at every moment a physical circumference and boundary." (Representation, 50) The rhythm and pattern of walking reinforces the edges of the body and reinforces thought. It is something we have long turned to for thinking and writing. Charles Dickens and Virginia Woolf both wrote of city walks



started in the middle of a writer's block, or in the middle of a sleepless night, leading them out into the world and into some new place or thinking, or rhythm. It is a form of unconscious placing: we walk into a town, or we walk out of it. We learn streets so we do not need to remember their names but simply the when and way it feels to turn left and then right. We know a place in our blood and bones, in our hands, in our feet. If you dropped me here blindfolded I would still know it, I would still find my way home again.

For Thomas Hardy and Willa Cather walking becomes a way of bridging places and times, reader and writer and memory. It is a pattern they hope they can follow back into a place they left a long time ago. Hardy starts many of his novels with traveling. In *Far From the Madding Crowd* Gabriel Oak watches Bathsheba arrive on a wagon full of her things, and soon he too moves by foot from hiring fair to hiring fair, eventually ending at her farm which is the central location of the novel. *The Woodlanders* starts with a rambler who "for old association's sake" travels on an old coach road that eventually ends up in the orchards of Little Hintock. *Jude* starts with the schoolteacher's departure, and *Tess* starts with the title character's father walking home. *The Mayor of Casterbridge* begins with two figures on the road, traveling into a new town. Hardy walks us right into the beginning, into place and character and style, so that it feels like we too have just arrived, dusty and weary, in that new town, or the old one we thought we had abandoned for good.

Willa Cather also starts many stories with a character's arrival, or with a description of a town that is structured around a walk through it, from one store to the next. In *O Pioneers!* we follow Alexandra, Carl and Emil in their wagon back to their homesteads on the Divide. In *My Ántonia*, the young Jim Burden arrives, gets off the train, and travels through the night to his grandparents' house, miles from the station. In the context of nineteenth century realism, this

form of introduction, walking the reader into the place, a physical scene setting, is not unusual. Balzac begins *Eugénie Grandet* with a view of a street and then a house, George Eliot begins *The Mill on the Floss* with a description of the Floss as seen by a wandering rememberer. It is a useful device - the walk in - for the reader is instantly, seamlessly, placed in the scene, while simultaneously the story begins – the boy arrives at his new home, the stranger comes to town, characters meet unexpectedly. Story and place happen all at once.

In Hardy and Cather's novels the structure found in the initial walking is changed, and reversed, yet still used, throughout the rest of their books. While for many this beginning is simply useful, a slow way of transitioning from not reading into reading, from exterior to interior, for Cather and Hardy it sets up a form of being in a place that they both, in varying ways, are continuously drawn to. It has the potential to orient a person in a landscape. In contrast to the speed of the modernity they are writing from the slow walk is a way of not only entering a new town, but of returning to an old one. Both Hardy's *The Return of the Native* and Cather's *My Ántonia*, the focus of my discussion in this chapter, along with novels of land, are novels of departure and return, of the split between what was and what now is. In *Native*, Clym Yeobright walks back onto Egdon Heath after years spent in Paris and London, while simultaneously Diggory Venn comes back to the place he left after being rejected by Clym's cousin, Thomasin, with his reddlman's van and traveling trade. In *Ántonia*, Jim enacts a different, though related, form of return; after seeing Ántonia and being urged to write about her by an old playmate, he takes up his pen and tries to set down exactly what it is about her, and about his childhood on the plains, that keeps haunting him. Walking inherently follows the road-like structure of diachronic logic, which moves through space and time sequentially, not with the associative links of synchronicity, but the forward-moving, backward looking motion of a traveling man. While *My*

*Antonia* is structured, through the character of Jim Burden, as an act of reclamation, literally reclaiming *Antonia* with possessive “my” and with the attempt to write the specificity of Jim Burden’s prairie town and “burning summers when the world lies green and billowy beneath a brilliant blue sky”, it is an act of reclamation that exists in relation to a horizontal or sequential sense of time. (*Antonia*, intro) The novels enact a spatial return, and long for a temporal one, but the longing itself is based on the impossibility of time moving backwards. These texts are structured around plot and anticipation, the expectation that things move solely in one direction, so that the split between now and then is all the more present and insurmountable. While Hardy and Cather’s novels of movement also hold elements of synchronic logic, repeating images and ideas, ghosts and hauntings, even these divergences are held within the structure of forward, sequential movement. Time is visualized horizontally in these two novels, speeding up or slowing down according to forms of travel, but never stopping, never fully looping back. You may physically return to a place, but to return to a time before the one you are in takes a breaching and overcoming of the rush of forward time.

Yet walking, both by its acknowledgement of the diachronic, and its spatial ability to relocate a person in space, in the land of their childhood, and its physical connection to past movements, past slow ways of being, holds the possibility of integration, of connecting space, time and memory across a divide – be it a place left, a person gone, or a moment forgotten. In novels filled with both a desire to stay and a desire to escape, peopled by characters deeply imbedded in a place longing to leave, or separate from a place wanting to return, walking can become a form of hope, of linking, of making whole and tangible a world long lost, or a place created in the writer’s head from bits and pieces of things left behind.

These two authors try in walking to unite something we too might feel is broken.

Moving between modernism and realism, between home and the city, between writing and working, they inhabit, and reflect on, a world changed. Both were, by virtue of their return again and again to rural, unknown corners of the world, deemed “regional” writers, fit only to write stories about the idyllic spaces they were from, or had created in their fiction. Hardy was told to stay away from the more popular and highly regarded novels of manners and stick to the laborer and his small town in the isolated countryside. He writes that beautifully. He writes his Wessex beautifully, and intensely, but as he neared the end of his career as a novelist (switching to poetry after the harsh critical response to *Jude the Obscure*) he, like Jude, was interested also in a larger world, a space outside the customs and patterns of an ideal agrarian past. He writes about characters “too modern for their time,” stuck as laborers even as they struggled against this fate and dreamed of books. Cather was also told to write what she knew, and while this world and this writing worked well for her it was also restrictive. Her hometown of Red Cloud, Nebraska, for all its literary charm, was also a place she did not want to return to and often railed against. By the end of her career she broke out, writing the more bluntly modern *The Professor's House*, imagining not pioneers in Nebraska but a cosmopolitan professor remembering New Mexico and his travels through Europe. Yet even as she was trying to break out into the new and the untried, Cather was haunted by the place of her growing up and returned to that landscape again and again, with six different names in six different stories. Hardy too returned and rewrote, in poems and in novels, the place he was born into, the group of people with whom he was raised. Hardy and Cather are situated somewhere between loving and longing and wanting to leave, both need to communicate place, time, past, memory and a desire to start over again. Hardy aspires not to be “Hardy the regionalist” but “Hardy the writer,” or “Hardy the intellectual.” They wanted to break away and they also wanted, so badly, to return. For Hardy and Cather, walking represents

an accommodation of conflicting desires: it is both a deeply physical, wearing, act, one tied to ground and place, and a meditation that also promises motion, and through motion something they seem to have lost between childhood and adulthood, between leaving and coming home.

### I. The Long View

The initial walking into or out of a place, while setting the rhythm and scene of the novels, also, more generally, is a reflection of the nineteenth-century obsession with vision. By beginning with a clear image, or sense of perspective, the writer implies that the reader is thoroughly in control of the setting. The whole backdrop for the book has been placed before us in one long, clear view. *Return of the Native* begins as the rest of Hardy's books do, instead of a walker, however, it starts simply with the heath, and we are looking down upon it as if from a far height; "a Saturday afternoon in November was approaching the time of twilight, and the vast tract of unenclosed wild known as the Egdon Heath embrowned itself moment by moment." (*Native*, 2) The view we are given is one clear-eyed and far away, similar to our view of the walkers in the beginning of *Mayor*, or of the town at the beginning of *Pioneers*, or truly of any place at the beginning of most novels; we are shown what is before us as if we are a paused walker observing it, the world at our feet. The assumption of scene setting is an assumption that viewing is a way of mapping and containing a place both in the eye and on the page. We can grasp "the lay of the land" and by simply observing the "embrowning" of the heath, the "vast tract" before us, the world is known and navigable.

The eye, in *Native*, has the power of bringing places close and making them comprehensible. Clym Yeobright, recently returned from Paris, in a double act of imagination, pictures himself looking into the future: "His eye traveled over the length and breadth of that

distant country ... till he almost felt himself to be voyaging bodily through its wild scenes.

Standing on its hollow hills, traversing its deserts, descending its vales and old sea bottoms, or mounting to the edges of its craters.” (*Native*, 154) While the scene he is looking at is in fact imaginary, even within the metaphor there is an assumption that the eye can enact travel.

Without moving the body the eye can pull into light the “vales and old sea bottoms” or carry you up to the edges of craters. The idea of the eye’s ability to look everywhere and see everything, much as if by standing on a mountaintop you could see into every fold of the land before you, is akin to contemporary ideas of the panorama. In 1788, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, the painter Robert Barker exhibited the first panoramic painting, creating the word from pan “all” and the Greek horama, “view”. He also referred to it as “nature at a glance,” describing this act of representation as something that holds all the lines and marks of nature in a single view. Standing at the center of this visual world, the viewer is in complete control; everything has been stilled, drawn, painted for his benefit, and now he can simply look and look and look.

In relation to the possessive comprehension of the panoramic view, another form of looking and knowing came into vogue in the eighteenth century, the picturesque, an aesthetic best exemplified by the painted landscapes of Claude Lorrain. Anne Wallace, in her book *Walking, Literature, and English Culture*, describes the British relation between walking and writing as based on the shape of picturesque landscapes. As walking moves from being solely associated with vagrancy and poverty, the road a dangerous place occupied by footpads, to the glorified views of the romantic poets – Wordsworth and his *Excursion*, and his and Dorothy’s wandering of the Lake region – walking becomes understood as a series of view-takings. You hike to the summit, you walk to a view. In the age of the picturesque it became popular to carry

what was called a “Claude glass” on walks, “the traveler happening upon a good view could, by turning his back and looking into the varnish-tinted, slightly convex mirror of the Claude glass, see the landscape as if it were a framed picture” (Wallace, 46). To walk like this, from view to view, Wallace argues, “one might as well fly as walk,” for the desirable picture was perceived “not upon movement but upon standing still” (Wallace, 47). While the figure may be moving in these openings, what the readers see is a long view from a fixed point. We are given the promise of the ability to map out and see all there is to see in one moment: the vast unenclosed wilderness, or the orchards of Hardy’s Little Hintock, or even the Divide as Cather’s Alexandra travels out from town. The walker has a long view, “The old man frequently stretched his eyes ahead to gaze over the tract that he had yet to traverse. At length he discerned, a long distance in front of him, a moving spot.” (*Native*, 6) He may be in motion but his vision is not altered by the workings of his body. Although his movement is alluded to, he seems to be watching the long distance in front of him from a fixed point. Sight and comprehension are completely cerebral and disconnected from the rest of the body. In these terms a person can almost literally read the landscape, see it before him and unfold its meaning. To the seeing man, there is little that is left untouched or unreachable.

The long view comes not only in the form of paintings and grand tours, but also in the moving frame of a train window. As the eighteenth century moves into the nineteenth, and the rural world starts to be crisscrossed by railroad lines, speed and motion offer a new take on the framed view. While I will be discussing this in greater depth later, for Cather the moving view of the train window forms the backbone of this panoramic, or framed, sense of knowing the world. In Wolfgang Schivelbusch’s *The Railway Journey*, he cites a Parisian journalist describing railroad travel; his view out the train window discloses “an evanescent landscape whose motion

made it possible to grasp the whole, to get an overview” (61). The long look from afar, out over a valley, through a painter’s tool, or from the moving window of a train, has the potential, here, to make what may seem hard to possess— all of Nebraska, for example — into a single, comprehensible, entity. In the fictional introduction to *My Ántonia*, the narrator describes Jim Burden’s job with the railroad that often keeps him “away from his office for weeks together,” crossing and recrossing the country by train. This traveling through America, both the narrator and Jim seem to believe, and looking at it as a moving image, is a way of relating to the country. Jim “loves with a personal passion the great country through which his railway runs and branches. His faith in it and knowledge of it have played an important part in its development.” (*Ántonia*, intro) While his knowledge of the country may come from places he has lived, or general reading and traveling, the implication in this passage is that it is the railway, that “runs and branches,” and its movement that are the source and site of his knowledge, and therefore his reciprocal shaping of the country. While this definition of the view from the train is complicated by its connection to a modern rather than past vision of the world, here it establishes the norm that Jim Burden is leaving behind when he steps out of the train in Black Hawk, Nebraska. It is his entry into the prairie, his sense of knowing the world.

The emphasis on the panoramic view, on the knowledge of place or landscape gained through the eye, presupposes not only a nineteenth-century interest, and trust in, sight but also a sense that the world can be known. No vale or old sea bottom is too deep for us as long as we look out over it; then we can understand exactly where we are and what is around us, we can feel both separate from, and in sympathy with, the elements at our feet or out our window. Via train travel, or the Claude glass, the picturesque traveler the land as a “landscape” within a frame, through the confined space of window or contraption, just as we are given the broad shape of a



thing in the brief outline of an opening paragraph, a road disappearing in the distance, or the town laid out before us. With an introduction depicting either the details of a train journey (complete with date, background, and state-names) as in Cather's *My Ántonia*, or the long view of a heath, showing both land and sky and the slow change of the seasons as in Hardy's *Return of the Native*, the reader expects this place that we arrive at, the landscape, the state, or the home, to remain still and solid, to be explorable and knowable. This is a scene we can paint, a landscape we look at and get the immediate truth from, the "whole thing," the "overview." The world, it simply states, and more specifically this world, the one you are now entering as you turn the page, is here, is true, is known.

## II. Obscurity

*She would say I fell asleep, but I did not. I simply let the darkness in the sky become coextensive with the darkness in my skull and bowels and bones. Everything that falls upon the eye is apparition, a sheet dropped over the world's true workings. The nerves and the brain are tricked, and one is left with dreams that these specters loose their hands from ours and walk away, the curve of their back and the swing of their coat so familiar as to imply that they should be permanent fixtures of the world when in fact nothing is more perishable. .... Darkness is the only solvent. - Marilynne Robinson, Housekeeping*

The long view however, is predicated on distance. What then is to be seen on the ground? If we are not elevated, or moving at a great speed over and through the land but instead walking the earth, being close, we run the risk of getting lost. For all their interest, and belief, in sight, almost immediately for Hardy and Cather this clear-eyed vision runs straight into a dense, impenetrable obscurity, a place seemingly unknown and unknowable. The broad sweeping views of the heath at the beginning of *Return of the Native*, are followed by an ever-increasing insistence on its illegibility and its darkness. A description of Eustacia Vye's house details the placement of gardens and a stream that marks "the margin of the heath in that direction," making clear what is heath and what is meadow so that the reader, or observer, feels sure of where they

stand, but, in truth this is an almost guessed at delineation, for at this moment of looking “the thick obscurity permitted only sky-lines to be visible,” all the rest of the markers of space and boundaries are erased or invisible in this “thick obscurity” (*Native*, 33). The world we were handed so calmly is suddenly denied, made shaky and vague in the coming on of night.

Sudden fuzziness of vision is generated not only by lack of light, but also by a vagueness, and shiftingness, and hugeness, in the land itself. Directly after the November twilight and the vast landscape, the view changes, turning again from clear vision to a hazy darkness;

the somber stretch of rounds and hollows seemed to rise and meet the evening gloom in pure sympathy, the heath exhaling darkness as rapidly as the heavens precipitated it. And so the obscurity in the air and the obscurity in the land closed together in a black fraternization towards which each advanced half-way. (*Native*, 2-3)

While it seems this confusion of sight, the covering over of paths and lines and trees and valleys, comes from nightfall, or “the evening gloom,” it in fact represents not a separate darkness, and but rather an exaggeration of an obscurity already present in the land itself. The heath is “exhaling darkness,” the rounds and hollows are as much the source of confusion as the change from day to night is. The heath is an amplifier of the un-bounded and terrifying; in storms the heath “was found to be the hitherto unrecognized original of those wild regions of obscurity which are vaguely felt to be compassing us about in midnight dreams of flight and disaster, and are never thought of after the dream till revived by scenes like this.” (*Native*, 4) At night, in storms, in the haze of heat or a long day, the heath rises up and seems to cover itself over – to become a world almost terrifying in its confusion, in its dark circling.

Hardy, when referencing the heath, comes back again and again to the word “obscurity.” It (or the similar “obscure”) is used thirteen times in *Return of the Native*, emphasizing again and

again the darkness and unknowability of the heath. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, “obscure” comes from the Anglo-Norman and Middle French *obscur*, meaning without light, or dark in color, as well as hard to understand or of lowly birth, all of which are ideas and images Hardy uses frequently in his novels. The Latin *obscurus* has just as many meanings if not more: “dark, dim, hidden from sight, not clear to the mind, incomprehensible, uncertain, imperceptible, dark or dingy in colour, undistinguished, insignificant, humble.” The list of current, or evolving definitions is a reiteration of these, the many versions of dim and dark, of hard to see, of edges that bleed into the background and bodies that are hard to define. Instead of a single definition we get a matrix of words around a single problem of the indefinable and shadowed area. Egdon locals at their fire on the November night at the beginning of the book, look out at the heath and cannot see any of its features but instead “the whole made itself felt as a vague stretch of remoteness.” (*Native*, 11) The land is not seen clearly as any one thing, with lines and boundaries; it is simply felt to be big and shadowed, big and beyond sight. This darkness, coming from heath and sky, implies that vision can be taken away, that our sense of the world unfolding around our feet, visible and legible in its whole, is always in danger of running into the obscure or obscured. The world looked at so fondly in the first paragraph is one that can also exhale darkness, that does not allow for a surety of vision but can quickly become hidden, become almost, perhaps, terrifying. It is obscure in terms of the physical heath, but also this is an obscure part of the world, and an obscure group of people. It is an area outside of the view of the rest of the country, let alone the rest of the world. It can barely be accessed; it is rarely visited.

For Cather the confusion of the world is differently envisioned and differently worded. While the original stability of vision, and its eventual dissolution, is placed by Hardy in a style close to the picturesque, or the panoramic, for Cather the movement between sight and confusion

is understood, at least initially, in terms of the difference between the view from a moving train window and the view from the ground. In *My Ántonia*, the landscape at the beginning of the novel is barely seen. Jim Burden, the narrator, is traveling by train from his home in Virginia, where his parents recently died, to his grandparents' claim in a tiny town on the edge of the Kansas-Nebraska boarder. The world outside is one long blur, he does not see the rivers he crosses or the terrain out the window, he simply notes place-names: "the only thing very noticeable about Nebraska," he writes, "was that it was still, all day long, Nebraska." (*Ántonia*, 5) Outside there is not much to even bother to define, only big blocks of land passed over. The inside of the train, on the other hand, is sharp and present, with red plush seats and dust and adventure novels and fellow passengers. The passenger compartment is a fully realized world and within it he has a clear sense of where he is - he is in Nebraska, he is on a train, there is not much to see. It is only when he steps out, in the night, that this clarity gives way to a confused sense of placement: "I had been sleeping, curled up in a red plush seat, for a long while when we reached Black Hawk. ... We stumbled down from the train to the wooden siding ... I couldn't see any town, or even distant lights; we were surrounded by utter darkness." (*Ántonia*, 5) The red plush seats, bright and tangible, give way to the act of disembarking which ends in "utter darkness." From the light and movement of the train, the world named and passed by, the designation of inside and outside, of seat and person, Jim arrives in a place with nothing to distinguish it, nothing to mark it as even truly a place, except the boards beneath his feet and the lit, moving machine he just left behind.

The darkness is slightly alleviated by starlight as Jim's eyes get used to the night, but the confusion of the place only continues to increase. Where Hardy sees darkness as "obscurity," a dimness covering over, hiding and making vague a world you cannot fathom, to Cather this

world is more rightly illegible, existing almost in a different language, or perhaps without a language at all. It becomes a problem of finding words. There seem to be no “fences, no creeks or trees, or hills or fields.” All markers of human life and distinction, all of the things seen in even the most wild of landscapes – hills, trees, water – do not seem to exist here. Rather than simply disorienting Jim, this blankness almost completely erases his whole self – memory and body. On the ride from the train to his grandparents’ house he looks out over the edge of the wagon:

There was nothing but land: not a country at all, but the material out of which countries are made. No, there was nothing but land – slightly undulating, I knew, because often our wheels ground against the brake as we went down into a hollow and lurched up again on the other side. I had the feeling that the world was left behind, that we had got over the edge of it, and were outside man’s jurisdiction. I had never before looked up at the sky when there was no familiar mountain ridge against it. But this was the complete dome of heaven; all there was of it. I did not believe that my dead father and mother were watching me from up there; they would still be looking for me in the sheep-fold down by the creek, or along the white road that led to the mountain pastures. I had left even their spirits behind me. The wagon jolted on, carrying me I knew not whither. I don’t think I was homesick. If we never arrived anywhere, it did not matter. Between that earth and that sky I felt erased, blotted out. I did not say my prayers that night: here, I felt, what would be would be. (*Antonia*, 7-8)

Part of the overwhelming power of this place is the fact it is so different from everything else Jim has known, from the home that, until now, has shaped his life and expectations. It is a place lacking defining forms and names, a place he literally cannot see. If the world has been left behind than what is this? What is this place and this darkness? It is beyond “man’s jurisdiction,” a place his parents cannot see, a place prayers do not belong in, a place without direction, without even the language to write about it. Cather, therefore, falls to negatives: it is “nothing but land,” “not a country,” there are no mountain ridges, or sheep folds or creeks, there are none of the markers that made up home, that designated land, in Jim’s past, as livable. Rather than being full of the marks of life and living, cultivation, this vast blankness is almost inert – not the

changeable, describable, fields but the “material out of which countries are made.” The land is filled both with the vague, overwhelming power of the not and nothing, but also with a huge potentiality: inert in its current shape but capable of being shaped into a country, the whole future of America.

*My Ántonia* is set, clearly and firmly, in America. After dissatisfaction with her first novel, *Alexander's Bridge*, which was set in several major European cities and used narratives and themes (adultery and international travel, drama and death, architecture) as well as a set of characters far removed from a small Nebraska town, Cather decided, famously with the help of her friend Sarah Orne Jewett, herself a regionalist, to start writing what she knew, the place and people of her youth. She turned first to *O Pioneers*, a story of homesteading, then to *The Song of the Lark*, about a young girl leaving her small Colorado town for the big city and life as a singer, and then to this. *My Ántonia* comes as almost the summation of the story started with *Pioneers*; it is the story of a small town and its growth, of a prairie changing, of a young person leaving home. She wrote it as an American story, and specifically as an American pioneer story, in the tradition of Manifest Destiny and westward expansion, and therefore the land Jim is surrounded by is a land holding, for Cather, the potential roots not only of a single town and farm, but also of a whole nation. While the land may not have the markers of habitation that Jim is used to, leaving him lost, and blotted out, he is blotted out in the face of this great material, this potential power, that has the chance to be made into the foundation, the center, of the whole country. It also, however, holds the simultaneous possibility, or fear, of a blankness that could resist all attempts to mark and traverse it, or shape it according to a human will.

The young Jude, in Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, looks out over a field in his small, new town, and also sees almost nothing there. He too is an orphan, having been deposited in the town

of both his aunt and his entire extended family “by the carrier from a railway station southward, one dark evening some few months earlier” (*Jude*, 9). His disorientation, unlike Jim’s, is expressed only in one brief sentence. Instead we see a longer-term dissatisfaction with the place he was left in in the dark and has stayed in ever since. He looks out at the curve-bottomed field that “went right up towards the sky all around, where it was lost by degrees in the mist that shut out the actual verge and accentuated the solitude,” and murmurs “‘How ugly it is here!’” (*Jude*, 9) This solitude, similar in some ways to the complete loneliness, even personlessness, felt by Jim, is caused both by the cupped land that closes off all the rest of the world (including the beloved schoolteacher who is just leaving for Christminster), and by Jude’s sense that this place not only has no other humans in it now, but seems never to have. While the land is plowed and supports the farmer and the community, in Jim’s eyes the harrows lend “a meanly utilitarian air to the expanse, taking away its gradations, and depriving it of all history beyond that of the few recent months.” To Jude, this land has the pure materiality of the land Jim sees around him – nothing but a channeled, brown earth. There is, in fact, history here – every stone, and part of the earth has held, the narrator declares, generations of life; it has “been the site, first or last, of energy, gaiety, horse-play, bickering, weariness.” (*Jude*, 9) Rather than the open potentiality of Jim’s narration, this earth has been used and known for centuries, holding the traces of humanity in every piece of it. Yet Jude cannot see it, and the activity described is not actually present – rather than the harvests or the lovers, seen in the past, this field holds now only the boy and the crows and another man’s crops.

Hardy may paint the back-story to the land, may show us the traces worn into soil and place, but the living beings are just as much not-present for the reader as they are for Jude. We can hear the stories but we do not see their actual bodies, we perceive only vague outlines, and

this land which has more meaning than Jude sees, is hidden beneath the surface and inaccessible except through the imagination of the author. The growth and marking of the land for Cather's Jim is not present, but it is hinted at by the language as a future possibility. He stands at the beginning of an era that may be hugely productive. Where Jim, and Cather, stand on the edge of the great rural expansion, of the West, of a new bright history, of a future productivity, the vastness of the land both terrifying and promising, Jude looks back on a land almost lost, on a rural world fading in the light of the trains that brought him here and the cities to which he longs to travel. With Jude it seems we stand at the end of an age of potential, on a land depleted of all this bright, life-giving intensity and left closed off from the future that follows the schoolteacher down the road to Christminster.

Hardy and Cather inhabit different ages; in the England of *Jude*, or of any of the Wessex novels, the land is about to be left for the allure of the city and the machine. In "The Darkling Thrush," written several years later, the land the narrator sees before him – wintry and wind-bitten and harsh – appears to be the "Century's corpse outleant, / His crypt the cloudy canopy, / The wind his death-lament." The frosty land becomes the century and the nation as a whole, in a winter that seems unending, for "The ancient pulse of germ and birth / Was shrunken hard and dry." While this may be a momentary feeling, broken by the hopeful song of a thrush, the poem ends doubting that the thrush really has all that much to hope for. The land, to Jude, and to Hardy, is exhausted, on the verge of dry non-generation; the obscurity of the heath, or the cold loneliness of the field, comes less in the wild and ranging potential of the pioneer-American, but instead in the fear of an ending, of a land sucked dry. This end has not necessarily arrived. Yet there is little hope of future fertility. The only escape, in the eyes of Jude, or Eustacia in *Return*, from the wilderness of the heath is to the brightness of the city. The potential



fruitfulness held in the “material out of which countries are made,” is absent in Hardy’s vision of the vastness encompassing Eustacia or Jude or Clym. The heath or field’s vastness, each equally hard and beyond complete understanding, is obscured, neither holding the promise of Jim’s new prairie.

For both, the known world of signs and names is shot through with the darkness and unknowability. The future, or the past, or the simply the outline of heath or prairie, is unbounded and unknown. The promised knowing of sight is consistently overturned. The heath and the prairie, far apart geographically and historically, not to mention differences of season and inhabitants and character, are alike, in these books, in their consistent shifting away from vision, their promised unfolding that then crinkles up on itself, either in a valley too shadowed or a landscape too wide and long to master through vision alone. These places are seemingly unmappable. In the middle of this “vast tract” of wilderness you cannot see to name and make known there has to be another way of interacting with the land aside from the long view. The place Clym has returned to, or Jim Burden is resurrecting, is one they stay in rather than pass through. The framed vision cannot hold and make livable, or navigable, this space that spreads out around them, and the long view of a road or a railway track does not lead them from place to place within the landscape but only over it and out of it. Merleau-Ponty writes, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, that “in visual experience ... we can, at least at first sight, flatter ourselves that we constitute the world, because it presents us with a spectacle spread out before us at a distance, and gives us the illusion of being immediately present everywhere.” (369) Here, the illusion is continuously dispelled and instead of the viewer looking out over all of the space and feeling he or she can touch and be in it all, he or she is confined to the confused blind body that is almost unable to move for the darkness.

With the inability to see and to map and place objects, comes a similar inability to map and place the edges of the self. With the topography of the land shifting, the topography of the being shifts as well. Without sighted lines the body has a tendency to cease to hold itself together. In blindness, or in darkness, or in the world without boundaries, there is the possibility of being “blotted out,” of inner darkness coming to meet the outer one, as Marilynne Robinson envisions, letting “the darkness in the sky become coextensive with the darkness in my skull and bowels and bones.” (*Housekeeping*, 116) When Jim gets off the train there is no longer the push of color, of shape and line, to tell him this is where you end and this is where I begin. Instead the vagueness is all encompassing, is all darkness. It soaks in and dissolves the line between one place and the next. For Jim this “blotting out” is not so much terrifying as it is simply overwhelming. There is no space for memory, for boy, for self. He ends by saying “what will be, will be,” which fits with Robinson’s idea of “letting” the darkness, in, of allowing self and world break through the thin skin and merge so that body, self, person, is simply the darkness that was once simultaneously encased and held out and now is free roaming, now is more place than person. At times there is even a happiness to this dissolve. Jim, sitting in his grandmother’s garden feels that he is part of the pumpkins he is leaning against and the sun shining down on him. The older, narrating Jim hypothesizes that “perhaps we feel like that when we die and become a part of something entire, whether it is sun and air, or goodness and knowledge. At any rate, that is happiness; to be dissolved into something complete and great.” (*Antonia*, 18) While Jim calls this “happiness,” a warm feeling of completion, it is also associated with death. For a minute, it is perhaps a positive thing – maybe death is as good as this feeling of glorious dissolution. Yet death is not glorified in this way throughout the rest of the novel. It comes more frequently in winter and in storms, in gory stories of wolves and guns and harshness, so the

mention of death here does not immediately summon up happy, childhood stillness, but instead it recalls stillness to Mr. Shimerda's wintertime suicide; his folding up of arms and clothes, his sleep-like intention to give in to the hard, harsh misery of his cold dugout, his hungry children, this dark new land. Death may here be imagined as lightness, but when it actually occurs in Cather's fiction, when it becomes present in the text, it is an ending. With complete cessation of movement and of possibility, Cather's perspective, unlike Jim's, holds not the possibility of glorious merger but of a complete ending, or if not ending a long, cold haunting.

While some of Jim's feeling of erasure comes from the displacement of arriving by train in a new place having left behind parents, home, town, he declares he does not, actually, feel homesick. The place itself is disorienting. "Between that earth and that sky," he writes, "I felt erased, blotted out." It is that earth and that sky that erases him, not simply the arrival in the dark in a new place, but a deeply specific feeling about the land he is in. Cather makes the reader pause over those two words by placing "that" as a beat before them, not only pointing to their specificity but also pointing to their power. This is not a landscape that overwhelms in all its color, its parts, its changeability; it is a landscape that overpowers in its pure materiality. All that can be made out is the darkness of the sky touching the darkness of the earth. In this darkness, in the pressure of sky hitting earth, there is nothing like the plush red seats of the train, or the windows, or the light, to tell Jim where his body ends and where, or if, he exists at all.

This confusion, while intensified by night, is present when Jim wakes up as well. Now he can see a barn, a house, a road, yet there is still this sense of the "edge of the world," that the landscape before him could simply disappear. The prairie of Nebraska is so long, and flat and wide, it is so overwhelmingly ongoing, that even the shade of the house extends only so far. Most of what is seen is cloud. And grass. And the rare marks of a stream. He longs to look

beyond his grandparents' land, but when he finally can see past their cornfield "there was only red grass like ours, and nothing else, though from the high wagon seat one could look off a long way." (*Antonia*, 19) The long view, while promising some great new orientation, a world to see and know, instead shows simply more of the same, more land, undifferentiated. This world is at once clear – there is red grass, there is sun – and confusing. Jim is convinced that at a certain point if he keeps going the dissolution of the wagon-ride in the night will repeat itself, or a new version of it will occur; rather than blotting out however, he may just fly off, lose all connection to the ground, to sight and self; "the light air about me told me that the world ended here: only the ground and sun and sky were left, and if one went a little farther there would be only sun and sky, and one would float off into them, like the tawny hawks which sailed over our heads making slow shadows on the grass." (*Antonia*, 16) This floating is distinctly warm and pleasant, his sureness that the world might disappear over the edge of any slight ridge, is here associated with a lack of weight. Yet this also implies a world that will not hold still, that is not clearly seen and known; the framing of a view that is possible from a train window, from the name Nebraska, from an introductory paragraph, is impossible in a world that threatens to dissolve into air and sun and floating.

For Jim this feeling that sight is untrustworthy, or that sight cannot actually place you, is temporary, but for Clym Yeobright the obscurity becomes literal; after over-studying he goes mostly blind, unable to read or see much farther than his own feet. The darkness of the heath takes up permanent residence in his eyes, trapping him and Eustacia in their new cottage: he cannot start the local school he dreams of, and she can no longer even hope for a life in Paris. Instead he turns to furze-cutting, tying himself utterly to the small circumference of known land that surrounds his house. Even brief moments of clarity are denied him. His lack of vision has

the ability to confine him to a room and to halt the narrative. Without his motion the rest of the novel falls apart; without his motion his very personhood may become lost in the swarm of heath and night.

Death in *Native* happens almost exclusively in moments of inner-darkness. Mrs. Yeobright, Clym's mother, falters on the path back from his house and collapses under both an overwhelming exhaustion and the conviction that Clym has willfully locked her out of his home, and therefore his life. It is only in stopping that this dark, inner fear has the chance to take her over, to make it impossible to resume movement. The second Mrs. Yeobright, Clym's wife, dies in a moment of blindness very close to the essential obscurity of Egdon Heath. Rushing from her house, planning to escape her miserable existence, she halts suddenly, in air almost as thick as water and as dark as water, and looks at the heath she cannot penetrate with an interior guilt and horror she can't seem to shake:

Any one who had stood by now would have pitied her, not so much on account of her exposure to weather, and isolation from all of humanity except the mouldered remains inside the tumulus; but that other form of misery which was denoted by the slightly rocking movement that her feelings imparted to her person. Extreme unhappiness weighed visibly upon her. (*Native*, 275)

As she pauses it is not solely the confusion of the night that weighs upon her, but an inner darkness that matches the outer one for "never was harmony more perfect between the chaos of her mind and the chaos of the world without." (*Native*, 275) There is something within her, a darkness, a guilt, a deep misery, that if she stops moving will take over, will blend with the outside world dissolving her boundaries, so that inner and outer obscurity and confusion are one, so that inner horror takes over all there is of Eustacia's world. She pauses and rocks and rocks, trying to hold something down or shake something off. Yet this rocking is not enough, the heaviness still weighs on her and eventually it is this pause in her flight that enables her to

change her mind: instead of traveling on to meet Wildeva and escape, she throws herself in the nearby river and drowns. The physical blindness of Clym presages a different kind of blindness in both Mrs. Yeobrights, mother and wife, for here they can no longer see anything but darkness, anything but the stationary world – due to an internal misery, an internal pattern of thinking, that renders them motionless, they end up dying, drowning in heat or in water.

This darkness and this stillness threaten a cessation of the novel itself. While characters can fall by the wayside, can die and be remembered, the movement through the book has to continue, or else the text will become indistinguishable from the un-narratable flux of time and life. In *Reading for the Plot: Design and Invention in Narrative*, Peter Brooks references Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, to theorize the role of beginning and end and middle in the structure of a novel. The beginning, he argues, exists only in relation to the assumed end – we come to a book knowing that it is retrospective, that the opening line is only important in regard to the end already formed. Without it, the novel would have no motion and no logic for “the interminable would be meaningless and the lack of ending would jeopardize the beginning.” (93) It is in ending that the whole becomes a story that can be told. Brooks relates narrative closure to human ending, quoting Walter Benjamin: “a man's life ‘first assumes transmissible form at the moment of his death.’” (95) We seek therefore not necessarily human death at the end of a novel, but something that acts in the same way – a death-like drive towards “summing-up and transmission,” towards an ending that allows the reader to return to the beginning and make sense of all that came before. The death seen, or hinted at therefore in both Cather and Hardy, partakes of this longing for conclusion, this “wish for the end, for fulfillment” (111). Yet, while we want the end, long for the end, if it arrives too soon the process of reading is over and the book becomes just another object. If plot functions simply as the shortest distance between

beginning and end, the book would become “the collapse of one into the other, of life into immediate death.” Novels are carefully “cut out” of the rest of ordinary life; beginning and end, and importantly, a movement between the two, represent an extension of living in between the promise and the actuality of death. With a premature end the book loses its borders. In collapsing, or extending, the book potentially becomes not much of a book, for a sense of proportion in the middle is destroyed and it is the middle that is the space of elaboration, of return, of a drawing out of the line between birth and death, that is “the space of transformation: where the problems posed to and by initiatory desire are worked out and worked through,” where the time of the reader becomes the time of the book, so that they are locked together. The obscurity of the middle is a space defined by “metonymy,” by the linkage and elaboration of many little things. Just as inner and outer darkness for the Mrs. Yeobrights threatens lost edges of a world without things, nothing other than heat, pressure, dissolve, a world you cannot enter and make livable, it is the same for a novel. If Hardy and Cather saw their worlds as primarily obscure, if there was solely this shifting vision, this blindness, this merging of the inner and outer, there would be nothing that could be written. With darkness as a solvent, blurring edges and lines, beginning and end collapse together, the middle ceases to move, and words themselves are a part of the mixing, a part of the dissolution, until there is, potentially, nothing left to tell at all.

#### IV. Footpaths

*I used to be able to see flying insects in the air. I'd look ahead and see, not the row of hemlocks across the road, but the air in front of it. My eyes would focus on that column of air, picking out flying insects. ... Now I can see birds. Probably some people can look at the grass at their feet and discover all the crawling creatures. - Annie Dillard, Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

For all of this darkness, the threat of indeterminacy and a too-large middle that might swamp a

traveller or a reader, these novels do not end in the first few pages, the characters do not disappear, the heath remains and the land in Cather and Hardy is a place that people live and work on. Clym Yeobright goes blind. So his original plan and Eustacia's dream of escape must be abandoned. Yet he himself continues to move forward. In the absence of vision, the person, the writer, must turn to the rest of the body in order to feel his or her way onward. It is by foot, by the actual feeling of the ground, that movement continues forward even into obscurity.

Eustacia, pacing the hills around her home, follows footpaths that crisscross the heath:

Along the ridge ran a faint track, which the lady followed. Those who knew it well called it a path; and, while a mere visitor would have passed it unnoticed even by day, the regular haunters of the heath were at no loss for it at midnight. The whole secret of following these incipient paths, when there was not light enough in the atmosphere to show a turnpike-road, lay in the development of the sense of touch in the feet, which comes with years of night-rambling in little-trodden spots. To a walker practiced in such places a difference between impact on maiden herbage, and on the crippled stalks of a slight footway, is perceptible through the thickest boot or shoe. (*Native*, 45)

The road has disappeared, there is no far-seeing, but only near-seeing, or more accurately foot-seeing. By walking the same landscape over and over, not by road but in these "little-trodden spots" that hold the mark of night-ramblings and day-workings of those that live here, the world once so terrifyingly dark becomes suddenly manageable. Through touch the place may be memorized and learned, so that it exists not in an overarching image but in the discrete, yet linked, moments of contact. You touch either broken plants or solid ones and this is how you move, blind, through a land that will not reveal itself. Rather than a long walk across a landscape, ending in a panoramic view from above, this is a form of travel deeply embedded in the rise and fall of the land itself, in the small turnings of soil and vegetation. It is a view miniaturized, shrunk to but a few feet in front of your face, the path you are on, the leaves brushing your skirts, the root your boot is tripping over. It is foot-knowing but also a sight almost



turned to touch, so close the eyes are unneeded, but when used, are trained on the tangible and intimate, the small and separate.

Both Cather and Hardy cite their practice of walking as a source of their connection to their homeland. Hardy describes walking across the heath every day to get to a nearby town late into his teens, thereby knowing every house and inhabitant on his route, every tree, and dip of the path. (Millgate, 26-7) Cather too describes riding her pony (while not literally on foot she is moving in slow ways and in the rhythm of the rise and fall of footsteps) as her form of first exploring and then knowing the prairie of her youth. While she was in fact highly educated, sent to school and lived mostly in town, Cather not only told but then promoted the myth of a half-feral childhood, without school or structure. While in some areas she exaggerated, it is also apparent that she spent much of her time wandering and it was this, her walking to and from neighbors' houses, across the plains, that leads her to state "I knew every farm, every tree, every field in the region around my home." (*Person*, 37) A specific, personal topography comes partially through the ability to walk, slowly, past and through and into all of the land well known and beloved by the writer. Both in their differing landscapes, and with differing stories behind it, claim to know their land best through the foot or the saddle, through the slow movement of a person around and on a specific piece of land.

On Hardy's Egdon Heath the paths, though wild in comparison to the roads, are worn into the earth. In contrast, on Cather's prairie paths cannot seem to be made very easily for with every move the grass springs back up behind the walker – erasing the mark of his or her movement. Therefore the knowing and exploring Jim does on the prairie is more of a wandering than a clear walking forward: "the new country lay open before me: there were no fences in those days, and I could choose my own way over the grassy uplands, trusting the pony to get me

home again.” (*Antonia*, 33). While being lost is certainly a danger, Jim relies not on this foot-knowledge so much as his pony’s familiarity with the terrain. There is a space between him and the land he is crossing – yet the rhythm of the pony, the fall of his feet, is clearly transmitted to the young rider – while he may not touch by foot every inch, he is aware of the dips and falls of the land he is crossing. Too, in contrast to the heath, he is able to travel anywhere, to wander at will. Jim never even attempts to travel the prairie at night, or in the winter, with the loss of roads. In the winter, only the most experienced outdoorsman in the most serious of needs would travel anywhere further than the barn and back for, as Jim remembers, “the whole world was changed by the snow; we kept looking in vain for familiar landmarks.” (*Antonia*, 63) A sense of being literally lost is rare in Jim’s narrative. Most often we see a boy able to run or walk or ride his pony in any direction across the wide-open land.

The heath Hardy is describing has the history of hard use worn into it, whereas here the land, according to Jim, has barely any. The few marks he recognizes – a ring worn in the earth that you can see in certain weather from where Native Americans used to train their horses – he sees only as ancient history, long gone and faint. The prairie is, to him, a vast space he can wander through, whereas the heath is, to Clym, a series of known paths and sights, holding the familiar patterns of his childhood as well as his father’s childhood, and his grandfather’s childhood. Clym’s movement across a landscape that is already in his blood, is very different than the movement of Jim across this wild newness. One moves from point to point, or person to person, while the other is just trying to piece together the world around him. In the erasure of markings that occurs with each step, each springing back of grass to cover the footprint, Jim, may not be in danger of getting lost, but he is in danger of losing all sense of where he is, of where he has been, of the shape of the place around him. The pony may carry him home, but the

fear of being without mark, without the ability to make a path or see patterns, is still present. The danger of being lost on Egdon Heath is fairly literal: part of Mrs. Yeobright's eventual exhaustion has to do with the fact that she loses her way so many times in the process of finding Clym's house. Being unable to navigate, not knowing a place well enough to get you where you want to be, is similar to not knowing a language, or how to read certain signs.

Touch-sight is needed literally to find a way to cross the heath; on the prairie, however, the narrowing of vision, the movement towards touch, is important less in terms of getting lost, and more in terms of defining edges and boundaries. Jim needs markers to let him know he is in an inhabited – be it by ants or prairie dogs or humans - and a varied place. Jim remembers trailing across the prairie, moving from small thing to small thing; he visits a lone tree out in the fields, for “trees were so rare in that country, and they had to make such a hard fight to grow, that we used to feel anxious about them, and visit them as if they were persons. It must have been the scarcity of detail in that tawny landscape that made detail so precious.” (MA, 29) His world is in need of definition, of edges. Even so small a detail adds interest to the land around him and attaches him firmly to the place itself; it is harder for the world to become all tawny-hawk flying if there are things rooted in the ground. To be in a world that big without obvious signs of other living beings is lonely. His aunt tells him not to drive a woodchuck in the garden away for ‘in a new country a body feels friendly to the animals. I like to have him come out and watch me while I work.’ (*Antonia*, 17) In the middle of this huge expanse the saving details of tree and woodchuck attach the viewer to the earth. On the heath as well, this attention to detail has the ability to hold back the darkness that is always in danger of seeping out of a person and into the world. When her companion, a small boy, leaves Mrs. Yeobright she collapses, in part from exhaustion, but also in part from the seeming solitariness of her state. Believing herself

abandoned, Mrs. Yoebright does not see it, but the narrator observes a world around her filled with humming grasshoppers, alive and thriving. Blind to the small beings around her, lack of motion and the dark fear of abandonment completely consumes Clym's mother. It is in the grasshoppers that the narrator sees some hope of pulling out of the dark solitude of the self, yet they go unheard.

Walking, the movement from still observation to step-by-step progress, from eye to foot, allows a change in the way things are encountered. Merleau-Ponty, after describing the imagined power of sight, writes that "tactile experience ... adheres to the surface of the body; we cannot unfold it before us" (369). Rather than a scene viewed all at once, with touch – be it hand to object or foot to ground – only so much can be known at any given time. Rather than all of the heath, the blind Clym simply feels the single spot he is standing on. In this almost-blindness, the walker is not "everywhere and nowhere" for they are very decidedly moving from one touch to the next, one place to the next. Traversing the furze on the heath, instead of seeing out over it, the eye must look directly in front of the walker, being continuously confronted with branches, a turn in the path, the ground. In this slow movement the eye can no longer wander at will. Unable to take in the whole, instead traveling from piece to piece no more quickly than the space of contact can allow, sight becomes touch-sight. With this concentration on walking, for both Cather and Hardy, the scale, the senses, the diction and the very rhythm of the books change. Rather than the swift power of sight, whereby whole places are revealed in single sentences or paragraphs, grand outlines and maps, the scale here shrinks and the small, discrete elements of place, of self, come into focus.

Jim's daily wanderings across the prairie take him from tiny detail to tiny detail. Before describing the pioneer's love of trees, he recalls,

I used to love to drift along the pale-yellow corn-fields, looking for the damp spots one sometimes found at their edges, where the smartweed soon turned a rich copper colour and the narrow brown leaves hung curled like cocoons about the swollen joints of the stem. Sometimes I went south ... to see the big elm tree that grew up out of a deep crack in the earth and had a hawk's nest in its branches. (*Antonia*, 29)

“Drifting” brings him into such close contact with the world he is observing that he sees not simply plants but the way the “narrow brown leaves hung curled like cocoons about the swollen joints of the stem,” the damp spots, the change in color between one soil and the next. The sentence itself unfurls Jim’s curiosity, circling on beyond the point you thought it might have stopped. One detail leads to the next, the “pale-yellow fields” going deeper into the damp spots, deeper still towards the plants, and finally ending not even on the curled leaf but on the “swollen joints” of the stem. No stationary looking, the focus gets closer and closer, moving with the sentence from field to joint, reaching closer and closer towards touch before spiraling out again to the journey south, the tree that grows out of the deep crack in the earth and holds an eagle’s nest. This is Cather’s way of making the world understandable and presentable to others. The wide expanse, while wild, inspires no movement. Stillness is hard to use in language, hard to keep a story built around. In order to fend off that strange and overwhelming blankness, Cather’s Jim turns in towards the place itself. Yet this paragraph does not end in the center of the earth. Instead it moves much as walking does, out and then into close contact with the things around you – to an open view and then back into the small, marrying the “deep crack in the earth” in which the tree is rooted with the sky touched by the “hawk’s nest in its branches.” Cather’s slow spiral of sentences (the “I went” so clear and firm trailing into the mass of tiny things described after it) slows the pace of the story to match a long day’s wander across the prairie. With each detail comes attenuation of the plot, a continuous movement forward but likewise a steady decrease in speed. The desire to reach a conclusion is tested in the slow following of inclination.

Clym's this close-up vision of the world is necessitated by his partial-blindness; he can only see that which is very nearby. Much to his mother and wife's horror he takes a job as a furze cutter, crawling over the face of the earth, bundling furze. Being as close to stillness as he can get while still moving forward, Clym's life becomes "a curious microscopic sort, his whole world being limited to a circuit of a few feet from his person." (*Native*, 179) Unable to move quickly, or to see widely, he moves by touch, by the swing of his scythe and fall of his foot. The world around him, in this slowed, concentrated space, becomes intensely detailed and alive:

His familiars were creeping and winged things, and they seemed to enroll him in their band. Bees hummed around his ears with an intimate air, and tugged at the heath and furze-flowers at his side in such number as to weigh them down to the sod. The strange amber-coloured butterflies which Egdon produced, and which were never seen elsewhere, quivered in the breath of his lips, alighted upon his bowed back, and sported in the glittering point of his hook as he flourished it up and down. Tribes of emerald-green grasshoppers leaped over his feet, falling awkwardly on their backs, heads, or hips, like unskillful acrobats, as chance might rule; or engaged themselves in noisy flirtations under the fern-fronds with silent ones of homely hue. Huge flies, ignorant of ladders and wire-netting, and quite in a savage state, buzzed around him without knowing that he was a man. In and out of the fern-dells snakes glided in their most brilliant blue and yellow guise, it being the season immediately following the shedding of their old skins, when their colours are brightest. Litters of young rabbits came out from their forms to sun themselves upon hillocks, the hot beams blazing through the delicate tissue of each thin-fleshed ear, and firing it to a blood-red transparency in which the veins could be seen. None of them feared him. (*Native*, 197)

While it is not clear how much of this activity is actually seen by Clym living creatures brush up against him, all rubbing off on "bowed back" or falling at his feet. The sudden amount of detail is overwhelming; grasshoppers are shown so closely that they have hips along with the more obvious heads or backs. The flowers bend under the weight of bees, snakes move close to the ground and are still seen. While Clym himself may not notice them he is implicated in their world. It is his slow immersion in the daily, microscopic world of the heath, that allows the author to go into such overwhelming detail. We see the way in which Clym moves his hook, the

butterflies that are moved by his breath. The pace of the narrative is here almost entirely stopped – we take on the rhythm of a man methodically at work. In Chapter Three, I will discuss the ways in which man and land come into contact through labor, and in some ways this scene could fit as easily in that discussion as it does here. This labor however, is peripatetic – the heath cutter is constantly stooping, bundling, and then moving on. The space of laboring is the side of the path. Walking and cutting furze are, by their very processes, linked. Where Jim wanders, here the lines fall in linked, but complete, sections of the sentence. Each sentence, and each part of the sentence, has about the same weight as the rest of it, adding more than leading so that it feels as though this world is being built around Clym, an accretion of little tiny worlds brought out into the light of a bigger one. Paths attest to the walking of men on the heath. Here the heath is marking Clym, claiming him as well as marking him “native” in every possible sense.

This attention to detail not only determines the pace of the plot, the world present, but it also affords the characters with a link to the place they are walking in. Anne Wallace describes a poet growing more and more intricate in his description of the countryside through which he wanders. Detailed perception limits the vision of the walker, Wallace argues, “but that limitation invites further movement and observation by its very incompleteness, and by the satisfying progress of the explorations of the interior of his narrow passage.” (Wallace, 91) The space being traveled through becomes more fascinating as the outside world recedes, and the walker becomes more and more firmly placed within this “narrow passageway”. Cather and Hardy make clear that it is with walking that a person comes to know a place. Slow motion allows the world to build up around you so that you have a place in it – you are not dissolved into the elements, as earlier feared, but you have a presence, a body, a space, within the landscape. The world comes very close to Clym, defining his edges (this is where back ends and butterfly, or air, or the

buzzing flies begin), and the actual touch, the spot of contact between one element and the next. The bees hum with an “intimate air,” and the flies do not even know that he is a man, while the snakes continue about their business as if they were alone. In his slowness, and his daily presence, the furze cutter becomes almost a part of the landscape itself, or at least at home among its small inhabitants.

While Clym’s mother and his wife see him working and are horrified at how little they distinguish him from the land, but the language around his integration with the heath is all positive. Clym himself is happy in his place, contented to be walking the same paths again. While this connection between native Clym and heath is particularly apparent as he is working, he sees his work as a continuation of his life before he left for Paris;

if any one knew the heath well it was Clym. He was permeated with its scenes, with its substance, and with its odours. He might be said to be its product. His eyes had first opened thereon; with it appearance all the first images of his memory were mingled; his estimate of life had been coloured by it. (*Native*, 173)

This knowing of the place is connected both with a childhood familiarity - all of his views of life were formed here, and here too are all of his memories, here is the substance of his former life in the landscape before him – and with a simple familiarity of travel – he can walk home “without attending to paths.” The details of the heath are so familiar to him – the “purple bells and yellow furze,” the “snakes and croppers,” the arrowheads found by curious children – that by day, as a young man returning, he does not need the paths to tell him where he is. This passage ends with him gazing “upon the wide prospect as he walked and was glad.” However, this walking and seeing, this looking out, is more a remembering of closeness than an actual belonging, for the self described is a childhood self. It is more the foundation than the current man. In a horizontal view of history, these two selves are deeply divided. They cannot inhabit the same temporal space. Only in wandering in these tight passageways, or exploring with the unformed



curiosity of the young, Hardy and Cather seem to imply, is the walker at one with place that does not sweep self away in favor of sky and land, but allows self to move, fully-formed and discrete, in close contact with the world around it. Such “inwoven” travel is made by and within the place through which they walk. In this sense Clym is still deeply engaged, wound into, the landscape itself.

Tightening of the view to the small and detailed also allows the writing to slow and recognize the land in a new way. In Clym’s wide-open expanse he only sees things remembered, and the bits and pieces remembered are only bits and pieces – the metonyms for a whole childhood beyond his reach. While a writer, or a paragraph, may not be able to describe every detail in the world around Clym, through the slowness of the movement, and the tightness of the area observed and held, Hardy becomes infinitely more detailed, observing not only grasshoppers, but the way they fall on their hips, not only butterflies but the glittering tip of the hook and the breath that they flutter in, not only young rabbits but the sun’s “hot beams blazing through the delicate tissue of each thin-fleshed ear, and firing it to a blood-red transparency in which the veins could be seen.” The world revealed through this slow, regular walking, its narrowed scope, becomes small and beautiful – the tiniest detail recorded with such attention to nuance that we know the exact thickness of the ears, the tangible heat, the miracle of such a delicate thing, shining with light, existing in the middle of Egdon heath with all its storms and drownings. The world is suspended, for a moment, in this detail and attention. Time does not move forward, and the end, that inevitable ending, is put off, or maybe even forgotten, in looking at the ears shot through with light. A slow walk into the world allows a slow walk into details, into a language almost palpable, a detail dreamy in its intensity, furthering intensification of Hardy’s already deep love of metonymy.

A metonymic way of building a scene, exterior detail by exterior detail, is not limited to Hardy's writing of Clym's walking. For a novelist traversing the land between realism and modernism, Hardy employs a remarkable amount of discursive rather than interior language. More often than not we are told what Clym is looking at rather than what he is feeling. When he is introduced we are given no inside line to his thoughts, instead we see the physical marks of those thoughts on his face; "his countenance was overlaid with legible meanings. Without being thought-worn, he yet had certain marks derived from a perception of his surroundings" (Native, 109). The thoughts are not present, but the signs of the "interdependence of spirit and flesh", the marks of a too "strenuous" mind, are. We are consistently placed on the exterior, at the outer limits of a person's skin. While Hardy does go into feelings and thoughts, while he does enter the mind of his characters, a large proportion of his writing occurs in the detailing of the material world. He is fascinated by what can be seen, touched, smelled, by the marks surrounding people. These marks, and the marking that led to them, have the ability to lead us into a more interior world; he describes a family's chest with all "its finger-marks and domestic evidences thick upon it," the markings "evidences" of some long family history, some story of living we are not told but can imagine (Labourer, 7). The insights we do get are often temporary; we spend a good deal of time in Eustacia's head, yet she rarely knows her own thoughts, they change so rapidly. Clym we see wanting something he later abandons. It is in details, in the way Eustacia lingers, in the way Clym's face is neither handsome nor ugly, or the way the flies buzz around him, that we can guess at the interior. It is in details, in the metonyms, building around each other to gesture towards a whole, that an interior place, a place we can enter and explore, is created out of the wild and obscure heath. Hardy's slowness, his insistence on lists, on lengthy descriptions, makes a time-space for the reader to enter into a curled offshoot of the drive towards completion. The

reader moves forward, but we move as slowly as Clym does, word by word, so that book time and reader time align.

Peter Brooks describes plot as a “kind of arabesque or squiggle toward the end,” it is “deviance from the straight line, the shortest distance between beginning and end,” it is an expansion of the waiting for conclusion, an almost painful drawing out of the time between first page and last. (*Plot*, 104) Walking, as we have seen, and Hardy’s obsessive love of detail, like Cather’s unwavering attention to the contours of the prairie, figure to extend the middle, lengthening the space between beginning and the break of Eustacia’s unhappiness, or the inevitable departure of Jim sketched out in the introduction, his transformation from small-town boy to big-city man on a train – the almost-death of the ending. Slow movement allows space and time to be built into the narrative. These arabesques often come as an almost or repetition, they take the form of doubling back. Through repetition Cather comes closer to her hometown, Hardy learns tree from tree, and characters such as Jim and Clym become deeply familiar with the place they are wandering through. More importantly, without repetition and return there would not be much of a novel. The ending could come so quickly, Eustacia and Clym’s marriage could fall apart, he could leave, or could stay, Jim could simply hop on the train and depart, Cather and Hardy could abandon place in favor of conclusion. Yet they do not do so, and it is through this return to walking, to home, to a girl, or the return of a memory too strong to forget (the whole of *My Ántonia* is initiated by Jim’s unasked-for recollection of the title character), that the story, the actual middle and heart of the book takes place. Brooks writes:

Repetition creates a return in the text, a doubling back. We cannot say whether this return is a to or a return of: for instance a return to origins or a return of the repressed. Repetition through this ambiguity appears to suspend temporal process, or rather, to subject it to an indeterminate shuttling or oscillation that binds different moments together as a middle that might turn forward or back. (100)

Elaboration of the detailed world and the constant return to it – although Jim leaves Black Hawk it keeps turning up as he studies, or rides the train, or talks, and Hardy moves towards the end only to be turned aside by a sunset, a small house, a long walk – is the binding of the book into a whole. Our time as readers melds into the time and place of the writing so that we want to read on, so that something in the world of the book becomes part of ours as well.

Cather's novel is carved out of the straight line towards New York City by grown up Jim, even as it is pulled into a plot, a narrative, a world of language so that the dark, open space of the prairie can be written and held and not end simply in dissolution. Even as he studies classics and far away places, Jim admits that "mental excitement was apt to send me with a rush back to my own naked land and the figures scattered upon it." (*Ántonia*, 262) *Ántonia*, part girl, part prairie itself, is to Jim, "the closest, realest face, under all the shadows of women's faces, at the very bottom of my memory." (322) As he returns, as he walks back into the fields she is working in, his awareness of the land resurfaces as well, and he "recognized every tree and sandbank and rugged draw. I found that I remembered the conformation of the land as one remembers the modeling of human faces." (306) As Jim travels over the prairie, or Hardy's characters move across the furze of the Heath, we are pulled deeper into their worlds, to the particular spot where the smartweed turns a copper color and the leaves curl around the swollen joints of a stem.

#### V. Footsore and Weary

Slow-walking means that while the edges of a person are often more defined and held firm than in the rush of the train or the stillness of a pause, they are constantly being marked and scratched by the land they are moving through. When the locals walk off into the night on their dark paths, Hardy consistently refers to "the scratching of furze against their leggings," the

sounds of plant rubbing against human. (*Native*, 41) An old man walking down the road with a walking stick is “perseveringly dotting the ground with its point at every few inches interval.” (*Native*, 5) The intensity of this continuous marking seems exhausting, it measures out and punctuates the amount of road walked, so that the reader, and the walker, are aware not only that space has been crossed but that so many steps have been taken. The body is never able to disengage from walking; walking slowly leaves you not only aware of the changes in the turf but also experiencing every jolt, in constant, wearing contact with the earth. Jim tells of a madwoman sent to an institution far away, who then escapes and walks, barefoot, all the way back to her homestead and her husband. When she arrives it is her feet they all remark on, the twisted swollenness of so many miles walked. By wagon or by train, distance can be managed with little strain, but by foot each step changes the actual shape of the body. The land can never be forgotten. At the beginning of *Mayor*, two travelers are covered in a dust that seems to age them, making them look both poor and foot-weary, a collection of the places passed through in the very fabric of their clothing, in the grains of their skin. The miles walked cannot be erased or ignored, they become a part of the make-up of the walker – Clym’s bent back, the miles in a woman’s feet, the dust of travel that will not shake easily from clothes or be washed out easily from a mouth.

Walking, perhaps leads directly towards the arabesque rather than the death-drive to conclusion that Brook’s imagines, yet is still involved with the workings of mortality. Even as it is the expansion of the time between the birth and death of start and finish, it is also, unlike train or car or wagon, a movement directly connected with the decay of the body. The best horse is sent out to get the doctor for Mr. Shimerda after he kills himself, but the horse and rider must go through deep snow in pathless country. The horse returns, and the doctor is fetched, but “he was

never the same horse afterward. The long trip in the deep snow had taken all the endurance out of him.” (*Native*, 104) Walking has this danger; it can break a person with pure demand for endurance, unrelenting motion. Even as it promises to stave off dissolution, foot travel signals a slower movement towards the dark and hard to name.

Walking, also, is forced to slow to the pace the land requires. The tourist allows for breaks and changes, but as Clym works his way across the heath or as Fochs pushes the horse through the snow, progress is slow. A traveler to the heath, Hardy writes, must soon notice a change in speed;

to do things musingly, and by small degrees, seemed, indeed, to be a duty in the Egdon valleys at this transitional hour, for there was that in the condition of the heath itself which resembled protracted and halting dubiousness. It was the quality of the repose appertaining to the scene. This was not the repose of actual stagnation, but the apparent repose of incredible slowness. A condition of healthy life so nearly resembling the torpor of death is a noticeable thing of its sort (*Native*, 9).

Walking, on the heath, therefore, is done “musingly, and by small degrees,” in accord with the “halting dubiousness” of the heath itself. While this allows the walker to come into close contact with the world, it also means that movement is nearly indistinguishable from torpor: “not the repose of actual stagnation, but the apparent repose of incredible slowness.” Thomasin, waiting for Clym, mentally follows him “on his journey ... she became impressed with the intolerable slowness of time” (*Native*, 282). At the moment of most extreme drama in the novel Thomasin, and the narrative, must endure the time it takes for Clym to walk blindly in the rain across the heath, she must wait through this “intolerable slowness of time” that comes with the fact of wind and rain and obscurity, and the slowness of walking needed in response to it. Slowness wears on the body; it connects the movement of walking, or even simply seeing this heath, at this pace, with the step-by-step movement towards death.

Slow walking can also be maddening in its repetition. Thomasin cannot sit still so slow is Yeobright's walking, so she dives off blindly into the wet and dark heath, not even knowing exactly where or to whom she is running with her baby. Such motion in the landscape is restricted, for Hardy, to old paths. They are much traveled and allow almost no deviation for on the heath "once lost it is irrevocable." (*Native*, 283) Heath paths lead not to change and motion out but a continuous re-walking of the same places, shaping modern human movement to the movement of ancestors. Clym sees beauty and satisfaction in near stasis, he feels "inwoven" and a part of the land. But for his wife, Eustacia, the slowness, the repetition, is unbearable. (*Native*, 133) Slow walking, for Eustacia, then, turns inward upon itself and becomes pacing. She walks from one hill to the next and back again, she looks out over the heath and turns around and walks back to the house. Her movement has no exit, no way out, no way of being used. If slowness fits Clym's desire for being placed, for her it is a heavy weight, something she longs to shrug off. Anne Wallace argues that the internal paths of a small village, going from field to field to house, are limiting rather than freeing – walking can barely take you outside of the small orbit designated by the distance you can walk in a day. (*Walking*, 25)

When not leading out of town walking becomes instead an obsessive pacing, walking back and forth to the edges of a known area. Jim, after he moves to town and the wild rambles across the prairie are lost to the night strollings of a teenager, finds himself desperate to leave, "on starlight nights I used to pace up and down these long, cold streets, scowling at the little sleeping houses on either side, with their storm-windows and covered little back porches." (*Antonia*, 219) Small and secure things surrounding him change into something deadeningly slow. All the teenagers in Black Hawk, he says, would pace the town on summer evenings, the advent of the new dancing pavilion made all the more exciting and disruptive.

In those long, empty summer evenings, when the married people sat like images on their front porches, and the boys and girls tramped and tramped the board sidewalks – northward to the edge of the open prairie, south to the depot, then back to the post office, the ice-cream parlour, the butcher shop. Now there was a place ... where one could laugh aloud without being reproved by the ensuing silence. That silence seemed to ooze out of the ground, to hang around the foliage of the black maple trees with the bats and the shadows.” (*Antonia*, 196)

Walking, here, has turned in on itself, become useless and frustrating, merely a way of staving off the stillness of married couples “sitting like images on their front porches,” or this silence that hangs with bats and shadows. The slow speed that promised knowing, and placement, has now been connected with a silence that is stifling, foliage turned not bright in its intensity of attention but stagnate in the shadows. The paragraph speeds up and glosses over places while they tramp and tramp back and forth, each name known and said but almost unseen except in its block form, as a thing seen too many times will become invisible except in its boldest outline. The silence, the dark and still silence is the space of detail, a space he longs to break, to rush out of. A stillness and slowness that is leaving him alone at night, walking back and forth, until he declares “I wanted to get away as soon as possible,” trying to run rather than walk, dreaming of trains, and exits and education. (*Antonia*, 227)

Part of the desire to leave is a belief that the rest of the world, the world beyond heath, or prairie, or small town, is moving at an entirely different speed. Cather is fascinated by those who leave their hometowns for the city. *Antonia* looks at Jim and says, ‘Now, don’t you go and be a fool like some of these town boys. You’re not going to sit around here and whittle store-boxes and tell stories all your life. You are going away to school and make something of yourself. I’m just awful proud of you.’ (*Antonia*, 224) Staying is associated with a crippling lack of motion, the pacing back and forth wearing itself down to a nub. Instead of the newness necessary in a novel, the change from sentence to sentence, staying put means a re-telling of things long known



and long told. There are, *Antonia* implies, no new stories here. A life will only repeat. It is only in leaving that a person can “make something” of his or her self, become a separate, whole being in the world. This sense that the internal world of town and country is too small for great things is present in *Native* as well, though rather than being a part of Clym’s relation to place, it is held in those around him. Being middle-class and well-educated, being bright and handsome and thoughtful, “he had been a lad of whom something was expected. ... The only absolute certainty about him was that he would not stand still in the circumstances amid which he was born.”

(*Native*, 132) Standing still, economically or literally remaining at home, is almost out of the question for Clym; his mother, while looking forward to his holiday, still expects him to return to the bigger, outer, world and continue making a name for himself in the realm of money and print; “she looked up at him as if she did not understand the meaning of his long stay with her; her face had worn that look for several days.” (*Native*, 137) Jim longs to leave and Clym is expected to, the round and round of small paths seeming too narrow for a young man with prospects, a young man with an education and the chance of going into a city and changing it. This land is land seen to be overused, to be only able to hold the simple, repetitive lifestyles of furze-cutting and middle-class retirement, it is land too old to hold the future for a young man, too far outside of the circuit of ideas and energy that comprises the rest of the big world, the place where things happen.

The train is Black Hawk’s, and therefore Jim’s, link to the modern, big, vibrant world he sees happening outside of his small town. The railway men that pass through carry treats and gifts, things bought in cities and given to country girls as they travel back and forth from one part of the country to the next. The hotel where they stay is where the hired girls are allowed out late on their own and where music and dancing seem to originate even before the dancing pavilion

comes. The railway is the way out, and the way these brief hints at another world work their way in. It promises motion and access to the university Jim dreams of. While Jude can see Christminster from the high plains above his town, Lincoln is in no way visible from Black Hawk; Jim needs the train in order to arrive at his dreamed-of destination, his planned escape. It promises to be the end of the fatigue of too much walking, the end of the fatigue of over-repetition and boredom. The train promises the end of pacing.

## VI. The Railway Journey

*Dreamlike traveling on the railroad. The towns which I pass between Philadelphia and New York make no distinct impression. They are like pictures on a wall. – Emerson, The Railway Journey*

Trains are the clearest markers of modernity beyond the circles of these small communities. It is through them that the reality of the writer and the fiction of the novel have the potential to intersect. Either running right through the town, as in Cather's *Great Plains* states, or as a far off destination, or potential for conveyance – as in *Tess* when they take the milk to the train station and she wonders, as she watches it leaving, if anyone will ever know where it came from when it arrives on their London doorsteps the next morning – railways are the sign of a modern world, the portals to the cities in which the authors now live. The train takes Jude back and forth, in and around the towns he cannot quite settle in, and it is the train ride, perhaps even more than Chicago, that Lucy longs for in Cather's *Lucy Gayheart*. She sits on the train waiting for her suitor to leave so she can lie still in her bunk in the dark and “give herself up to the vibration of the train – a rhythm that had to do with escape, change, chance, with life hurrying forward.” (*Lucy*, 20) For small-town boys and girls the train offers a way out. The motion of the train is more than half of the excitement, this great speed rushing them forward on and on. In

Hardy's story "On the Western Circuit," Charles Raye watches a girl go around on a steam powered carousal and is in part charmed by her beauty, but most strongly and intensely by the swirling of colors and lights, music and mirrors, all "the purely intangible, and irreproducible thrill of the world viewed in motion." (Plotz, 379) Speed and change and movement: being able to see the world in broad strokes, in feeling connected, by rail, by potential, to the rest of the country, means having the world, suddenly, overwhelmingly, always that much closer.

"Annihilation of space and time," Wolfgang Schivelbusch writes in *The Railway Journey*, "was the early nineteenth-century characterization of railroad travel." He goes on to describe the place of the train, its speed, its views, its huge mechanical body, as distinctively modern in the minds of nineteenth century people. (Schivelbusch, 33) With the speed of the railroad, the sense of time it takes to walk from one place to the next is erased; a person on a train can leave his or her home and arrive in an entirely different place within hours by simply sitting in a seat and perhaps even reading a book. Without the markers of weariness, either your own or the horse's, without the dust, the footsoreness, the bodies changed by each step, space is abstracted. John Ruskin, the nineteenth-century critic, describes train riders reaching their destination "as they left, untouched by the space traversed." (Schivelbusch, 39) The traveling that wears the body down, that leaves feet and hands and back scratched and marked no longer exists. The train eases the sense of work expended, "in the form of animal exhaustion, that expenditure had been experienced by means of sensory recognition of that physical exhaustion. As the sensory perception of exhaustion was lost, so was the perception of spatial distance." (Schivelbusch, 12) Distance no longer matches the limits of the body, the breathing of a horse, but can be traversed in great swathes, can be slept through, or ignored. There is little, except the possibility of accidents, to remind the rider of any wearing out of the body, of any mortality.

The world becomes suddenly a bigger place for the inhabitant of the small town; the narrow circumference of the walkable expanding into the wide range of railway travel even as the space of travel seems to get shorter. The space to be traveled shrinks, ““as the distances were thus annihilated, the surface of our country would, as it were, shrivel in size until it became not much bigger than one immense city.”” (Schivelbusch, 34) Rural outposts are suddenly simply hours away from London or Chicago, the railway station sitting as a portal, Schivelbusch argues, to the places advertised – you can hop on a train and arrive within hours and travel as if sitting in a simple room. Hardy’s Charles Raye can base his life around travel, living never in one place but always in transit, just as the railway men in *Black Hawk* come with all the fresh air of movement, bringing into town the promise not only of Lincoln, but also of Chicago, of San Francisco, of New York. For Jim, or for Eustacia, this closeness promises a release from pacing, from the narrow confines of their rural world.

The very form of the rails points to this generalization of time and space. Whereas Jim sees roads on the plains running about “like wild things,” or Clym wanders the curving paths of the heath, the line made by a train track cuts directly across the land. “Pre-industrial traffic is mimetic of natural phenomena,” writes Schivelbusch, “ships drifted with water and wind currents, overland motion followed the natural irregularities of the landscape and was determined by the physical powers of the draft animals.” (9) The travel Jim has experienced on the prairie is slow and in pace with the world around him, it is entirely dependent on the rise and fall of land, on unexpected holes, on puddles and streams. With the train, however, this variation is almost eliminated, with cuttings and embankments, the terrain is leveled, made smooth and uniform, so it feels no different to cross land in Nebraska than in Massachusetts. These dips and changes in the fall of the foot are what keep the residents of the heath from getting lost. In the train, as these

curves are erased and replaced “by the sharp linearity of the railroad, the traveler surely felt that he lost contact with the landscape” (Schivelbusch, 23). Jim’s wild roaming of the prairie is not possible in a train that not only moves too quickly to see from, but also moves in one direction, on one track, unable to wander, or to switch thoughts and desires and orientation. Instead of person and place touching in dust and foot, “the railroad did not appear embedded in the space of the landscape the way coach and highway are but seemed to strike its way through it.”

(Schivelbusch, 37) Travel is no longer connected to the place it is passing through, it is instead solely destination and disembarking.

The almost-touching of the narrow passage view is taken over, as the foot is, by the speed and glide and containment of the rail. Rather than seeing the world closely, it is suddenly seen through the mechanical functions of the train. The window frames the world, and then the electric lines, or the telegraph lines, run alongside the tracks, bisecting the view, side to side so that “the landscape appeared behind the telegraph poles and wires; it was seen through them. ... They interposed themselves, both physically and metaphorically between the traveler and the landscape.” (Schivelbusch, 31) Rather than a tangible world, being touched as well as looked at, Schivelbusch quotes Dolf Sternberger, a twentieth-century philosopher, who writes that the views from train windows ““have entirely lost their dimension of depth and have become mere particles of one and the same panoramic world that stretches all around and is, at each and every point, merely a painted surface.”” (Schivelbusch, 61) In this new moving image, with all the thrill of speed and futurity, Sternberger, and Schivelbusch, see the ability to be a part of the world decreasing. We have returned, in the form of the train, to a combination of the panorama and the moving image, a sense that through the window the whole world can be known. With

speed everything is blurred so what is seen is the outline of space and land, the main shape of it rather than the detail.

Alongside the promise of speed and vision, the promise of travel and change, is the fear of dislocation, of being continuously out of place. The landscape seen behind telegraph poles is ultimately inaccessible, part landscape, part man-made metal. The final destination is the only place you settle down into, trying to realign sight and smell and hearing and touch and taste into one experience of place, or of belonging. Yet even this final destination, Schivelbusch argues, is changed by the new speed and ease of trains. For “the regions, joined to each other and to the metropolis by the railways, and the goods that are torn out of their local relation by modern transportation, shared the fate of losing their inherited place, their traditional spatial-temporal presence or, as Walter Benjamin sums it up, their ‘aura’.” (Schivelbusch, 41) Destinations, in their sudden close porousness are no longer distinctly separate and their own. They exist instead within a giant network of cities and suburbs. ‘Auras’ that extend back into the past and out into language, through stories and traditions and the re-walking of the same paths over and over, are erased in the blending of place to place, in the removal of people from their original homes. In Hardy’s “The Dorsetshire Labourer” he describes the plight farm workers as they move from being long-time leaseholders, settled permanently in one place, to being migrant laborers who change farms almost yearly. While they are not moving with the speed of the train, their constant act of relocation is similar to Jim’s career on the railroad, it takes a person outside of the known and knowable paths and into a space of constant flux and dislocation. This movement, Hardy argues, can be both freeing and damaging. With lack of place comes a broader sense of the rest of the world and a limited personal attachment to a particular history, a more generalized sense of self; “They are losing their individuality, but they are widening the range of their ideas, and

gaining in freedom.” (Labourer, 8) Staying in one place has the danger of limiting, he even likens this permanence of home to being like a rooted tree, with as much chance of change or excitement as the vegetation. The change in place has promise, it widens and broadens place, it connects the rural dweller to a larger world of people, yet it also ends in a “lost sense of home.” Home is not a place, but a wagon that holds not only a dresser full of the marks of human history but also a “hive of bees [which] is slung up to the axle of the wagon, and alongside it the cooking pot or crock, within which are stowed the roots of garden flowers. Barrels are largely used for crockery, and budding gooseberry bushes are suspended by their roots” (Labourer, 7). The land, in this travel, has almost been unplanted – the known world carried in a crock, or the roots of a bush. It is home on wheels, home without place.

This promised freedom is restrictive. In cutting across the landscape the railroad also cuts out possible paths and divergences. The landscape is not marked with the wanderings of inclination, but the grid of a huge industry. The world of the train is essentially a graph, going only forward or backwards, never diverging. The novel based on the logic of trains is organized around a single form of movement, a single possibility of direction. Rather than elaboration, the arabesques of Brooks’ plot, the railway journey can only go forward, can only follow the shortest route from one place to the next. It allows for no return. The only possibility of change comes with possibilities of danger – at crossroads where derailment is all the more present and possible, where the chance of death breaks the smooth calm of the tracks. There is no walking into a place, or circling back. This grid does not allow for repetition and return, it is tied instead to the changing and the ephemeral, the constant, persistent, movement forward. The train is the space of the modern and the distant, the space of the natives having left. It is a plot and world that

solely progresses, that has neither past nor diversion, that does not have space for the discursive and the elliptical. It allows only travel forward, not homecoming.

Railway travel in many ways explains the betwixt and between of Hardy and Cather. For all of the attention, and tangibility and lived-in qualities of the walking worlds of *Native* and *Antonia*, they are, in fact far from the reality of their writers. At the time of their writing, Hardy and Cather were not living in the rural, walking-distance small towns they here imagine. The place in which a train is new, and vibrant and out of the ordinary, or where it promises a bigger world, or where it can be forgotten, closed off, where the norm is to walk and the wild and new is to ride, has long been left behind for both of them. They live not on country paths, but in bustling towns and cities. *Return of the Native* was published in 1878, thirty-eight years after Hardy was born, fifty-three years after the advent of the first train carrying both goods and passengers, and decades since railway travel, and a modern, industrial world, had become a regular and expected way of life. His attention to the small and cut-off areas of his country placed him, in the mind of his contemporaries, not only as a regional writer, but as a nostalgic writer – one interested not in the modern city but in the rural past. The place he pictures, based more or less on the heath spreading out on the far side of his parents' house, is made partially of current reality, partially of imagination, and mostly, strongly, of memory. Hardy, as he was writing this book, was almost deliberately avoiding returning home. Newlywed, he and his bride moved from house to house “keeping,” as Michael Millgate declares, “on the far side of an invisible arc centered upon Higher Brockhampton,” his hometown. (168) It is only years later, after falling ill and out of love with his wife, that he buys a house nearby home, and decides to settle. He is connected more closely to the world of London letters than the world of furze-



cutters. This place, this heath, this form of travel by foot, is one long-left and part invented. He is writing not as someone living not in the world of walkers but in the world of train-riders.

Cather, born only five years before Hardy wrote *Native*, thirty-three years his junior, was living in an even more clearly modern world when she started writing *My Ántonia*. Published in 1918, it was written in the midst of World War One, in an apartment Cather owned in New York City. While Hardy traveled in an arc around his home, Cather simply departed, living on a coast, in a city, in a high building so far from earth, from prairies, it is hard to imagine the two in one. The world of walking has long since been interrupted. There are cars, there are trains, there are subways. She went home to Nebraska only rarely, only for major events and in fact, after the death of her mother in 1931, she never returned again. The place and the time, for her, are long ago left. The world is no longer such that the prairie feels like an edge, an opening, a space in need of exploring and holding still – it is instead, crisscrossed with property lines and straight new roads. Beyond living in the world of trains, she lives in the world of automobiles, and when she returns to Nebraska, as she does in her essay from 1923 “Nebraska: The End of the First Cycle,” it is with a bitterness of a new, broken world, “In Nebraska, as in so many other states, we must face the fact that the splendid stories of the pioneers is ended. ... The generation now in the driver’s seat hates to make anything, wants to live and die in an automobile, scudding past those acres where the old men used to follow the long corn-rows up and down.” (Lee, 8) Even when she visits, not so many years after her dreamy vision of Ántonia and her children, the country she imagines, and remembers, no longer exists. She left that place, the slow moving place where old men followed corn rows, followed land furrows, up and down, right after college, searching desperately for a way out, and when she comes back home instead of walking back into her old life, she finds a world of surfaces, of fast driving and automobiles. She is not

writing down a world she inhabits, but like Hardy, re-creating, part imagining, a place, and way of being, she once belonged to. The close walking is not a possibility, or a regularity, of her current world, it is one she assigns to a past, to this created realm of the novel, of the prairie, of the hometown. She and Hardy are accustomed not to slow walking but to speed, to trains, to a modern world.

These novels, then, work less as an introduction to a place that the title “regionalist” implies – a George Eliot-like reproduction of the current way of life in some specific location – and something closer to a modernist form of revisiting and revising. Like Faulkner, or like Joyce, in their continual return to and reshaping of their hometowns, be it Oxford, MS or Dublin, Ireland, Hardy is taking the bits and pieces of a Higher Brockhampton left decades before and revivifying it, changing it, shaping it into a novel. He and Cather, rather than writing of the solid and the present, are writing something already gone, some world partly remembered partly created. While they are firmly rooted in the sort of narrative, and descriptive clarity we associate with realism, with a known world, they are writing in the after-affects of change and disintegration, about a world already past. David Harvey, in his book *The Condition of Postmodernity*, declares that modernism, and the modern world, has long been associated with “ephemerality and change.” (Harvey, 10) No matter how solid, and how binding, the world of Egdon heath or Black Hawk may seem, both Cather and Hardy are working within an imagined landscape, they are recreating a world that may never have existed. The books both end firmly within the circles of their rural world, yet the writer, in the moment of writing, is so far gone from that reality, and physically inhabits such a separate world, that the circle they end within seems more permeable, less secure, than it may appear on the page. They create a dream of the unlined rural world before the breaking through of trains and the leaving for cities. Yet this is,

ultimately, a fantasy, and therefore the trains in their novels, promising freedom and release to Jim, are also something old, and used, and dull to Cather. The world Jim longs for is not the foreign, but the regular, and the world they are writing is part solid place, part ghost town. Their world, whether it be London in 1878 or New York in 1918, is more clearly defined by this train-world, this speed and change, than by the world of walking and pacing that Jim so desperately longs to leave. Yet, as the very writing of these books attests to, there is as well an ache to return, a homesickness so strong it forces the book to jump out of the forward motion of train travel and back towards the place left behind.

For both Cather and Hardy this return takes the form of walking. Jim walks back out into the prairie, and Clym takes up furze-cutting. Walking promises a complete return; they step off the train and start moving through a space they know deeply and intimately. The repetition of an action from their childhood, a path they walked once, ought to connect living body to dead past. Yet walking, instead of directly connecting past and present, is closer to the vague shadows of haunting. Jim is haunted by the repeating, ghosts of his past. *My Ántonia* is his return to Black Hawk, and it begins and ends with walking across the prairie. The book is in part a representation of the haunting that has followed him ever since he left. Jim, going away to school, is haunted by the girls in soft white dresses from the prairie, by scenes he cannot shake, by faces that come between his eyes and the page in front of him. "I could never lose myself for long in impersonal things," he writes, "Mental excitement was apt to send me with a rush back to my own naked land and the figures scattered upon it. ... I suddenly found myself thinking of the places and people of my infinitesimal past." Their remembered selves are so strong they are cut out of time for him, "they were so much alive in me that I scarcely stopped to wonder whether they were alive anywhere else". (262) Even as he tries to study classics, "impersonal things",

these images of people and places disconnected from their actual present selves, arrive unbidden. They push their way to the surface and cloud his present with their intensity and insistence. They promise, in his return, a setting to rest – a flesh and blood reality. Yet even when he does return however, it is only partial. Only through a book, or through a visit. He never lives in Black Hawk but instead becomes a ghost-like traveler, living partially in New York, but mostly on the nowhere of the train tracks.

Hardy's Clym lives in the place he dreamt of. He is haunted not by memories, but instead by a need to re-walk, to return over the places he knows, back into a world he understands. Yet, as this goes nowhere, he is less haunted than haunting, the ghost of the heath, not truly present more almost a memory of the past. As Thomasin and Diggory Venn marry and move forward, he is stuck in an unending loop, a return that never returns. After the death of first his mother and then his wife, he takes to open air preaching, wandering from town to town and giving sermons out of doors. As he walks around and around the heath he becomes attenuated, thin; Thomasin looks up once and is startled, exclaiming, "I thought you were a ghost!" Rather than finding a place within the world he first left and then wanted and then seems to have disintegrated around him, he moves not with the rootedness of touch-sight, nor the speed of the train, but with a slow, halting repetitiveness that calls to mind ghosts. Ghosts exist as a piece of time broken off from its origins. They have broken out of the continuous line between then and now and have sped across the road to exist, disembodied, in the present. They are out of time and out of line. Similarly, Clym walking, or Jim on the train, also exists out of time, out of line.

These hauntings work as Brooks describes repetition working, doubling back and oscillating between the now and the then. The walking of memories into Jim's present shuttles him in and out of time, circling and doubling back to lengthen the time between coming, leaving and returning, between beginning and death-end. They work in the way that walking works, to make it more full, to widen the story out, to make a space for us to enter. Clym's return, his attempt to heal past and present, to jump from Hardy's modernity back into childhood, is continuously resisted. When he returns, all the patterns of remembrance are faced with the present, changed, reality – a reality that seems to have no space for him as it falls around his ears and leaves him haunting the heath alone. Jim, for all his hope of return, stays on the railways, only visiting the world of the prairie. The leap over the train tracks cannot quite be made.

Neither *Return of the Native* nor *My Ántonia*, in the end, are written as train stories. They are made almost entirely of the return, of the elliptical and discursive. They are written not according to the logic and rhythm of a railway journey, but of a walk. Yet the writers live on the far side of the railroad track: the walking, circling, is a return back in spite of the train and its motion forward. The train, in breaking through the prairie, or touching quickly the world of Tess or Clym, serves as the surrogate for the modern world not shown within the novel itself. In its movement out and away, in its lack of return, its distance from land, from touch, from walking, it is the break between being of and in a place and visiting it later. The novels are written as walks, yet they are underlined by the grid of the train tracks, by a roving homelessness. Hardy and Cather are in a strange place between leaving and returning, between solidity and ghostliness, and it is in the promise of going home that these characters, and these novels, refuse and confuse and complicate the grid. That they walk.

## House Holds: Narratives of Dwelling

*Sylvie and I ... could not leave the house, which was stashed like a brain, a reliquary, like a brain, ... even things lost in a house abide, like forgotten sorrows and incipient dreams, and many household things are of purely sentimental value, like the dim coil of thick hair, saved from my grandmother's girlhood, which was kept in a hatbox on top of the wardrobe, along with my mother's gray purse. – Marilynne Robinson, Housekeeping*

As we have seen in the last chapter, there is no clear home, no stillness. There is no solid space to return to. So these narratives then, if not trapped on the train or in the ghost-like wandering of an itinerant-preacher, become the search for home or the building of home, or the hope and promise of home. In Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping* this combination of transience and stillness forms a central piece of the narrative, culminating in the moment when Ruth and her aunt Sylvie leave their town of Fingerbone and hop on the train. Many years later, as Ruth is narrating the novel, she writes, "we are drifters. And once you have set your foot in that path it is hard to imagine another one." (213) In becoming drifters they have not only stepped out of the space of the home, but also literally destroyed it; they burn their house before leaving and erase the marks of their living stored in it like a "brain, a reliquary". This movement away from the house, and the violence against it, points both to the appeal of drifting, the walking away, and the intensity of the house itself. While a drifter may be born homeless – and in some sense Sylvie is forever unrooted, and the house is forever unlasting – for Ruth to write this book, for them to burn the house, there must once have been a place that held all the promise of staying still, of tying them to land and history. There must be a longing for something once promised. In walking, and leaving, there is the ever-present haunting house, filled with "forgotten sorrows and incipient dreams". In this chapter I will consider both the appeal of the

house's seeming stability as a structure that can contain all of these household things and memories, that can form to your body and your history, its space as the opposite of transience, and the inherent death and lack of permanence that is also promised in its stillness.

Walking can in some ways prove the link between land and human – allowing the walker to come close to the world of tiny, mortal, things close to the earth while still remaining a moving, living, human individual – yet it is a transitory, unsustainable link. To remain present and alive in the space of the heath, or the prairie, to not be swamped by darkness and vastness like the two Mrs. Yeobrights are, you must walk and walk and be rubbed down to nothing, be forever a wanderer like Jim, living on the train, or the ghost-like Clym, preaching across his native hills. There is no resting, there is no space of collection or sustained inhabitation. There is no place to slip out of forward-moving time, or to create, or hope in, any connection to place that may last beyond the end of life. For there to be a home to return to in the first place, for the relationship between human and place to have taken such strong hold of these writers, there must be a way of being in a place, of writing and relating to the world, that is stationary. There must be a space of collection and containment. Where *Return of the Native* and *My Ántonia* track out in railways and well-worn paths stories of departure and return, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, *The Woodlanders*, and *O Pioneers!*, are stories instead of searching for home, of putting down roots and building houses, of dwelling. Gaston Bachelard in his book *The Poetics of Space*, explores the spaces we inhabit and the ways we inhabit them, “how we take root, day after day, in a ‘corner of the world.’” The house, he goes on to say, is “our corner of the world,” it is our “cosmos” and our “first universe”. (4) The house can hold all of our memories, all of our most intimate, sheltered selves. It is part physical part dream, according to Bachelard, and the memories we have of it, or the memories it stores, are ones deeply aligned with our own body. It

forms, in its very structure, a lasting connection to land, to the ground it rises up out of. Topophilia, here, gathers a hard physical form; it is not only loving a place, but also being physically rooted into it. We look to houses to hold both our physical selves, and our imaginative histories, our sense of continuance.

If walking and movement is a fight against a space so large it seems ready to sweep away your edges and swallow you whole, this settling down and homesteading is instead a fight against an equally large sense of time. As much as the heath or the prairie is overwhelming spatially, it is also overwhelming temporally – pointing both to a time that spreads out unendingly before and after you, and to a quickness of death – these are places filled with a quickly changing population of tiny things. Both Hardy and Cather are living in the wake of Darwin and a biological theory of evolution; the individual, in the modern telling of the world, is simply a step on the biological ladder, easily replaced, of little importance. Nature, and its horizontal, never-returning rush of time, can overwhelm the individual in pure generality – in the sense that nothing will last beyond the edges of a single life. Memory, a person, or a life can be swept to the side.

In response to this force of time, Hardy and Cather, in these novels of dwelling, create a vertical structure of time in the face of the horizontal push of travel. I will examine an inherently synchronic sense of time and place in these texts. Synchronic analysis, as it originates in linguistics, is the study of a word within its moment of speech rather than throughout its history. Synchronic logic, as used in this project, is an associative rather than sequential ordering of the world, or of time and memory. Movement and migration lend themselves to the diachronic logic, moving both temporally and spatially on a single plane, but houses, on the other hand, can associate times, and images, outside of the logic of what-follows-what. The shape of rooms



allows different spaces to exist simultaneously, the physical palimpsest of paint, and change, and memory, holds former eras in the current one – so rather than tracing a history back into the past, it already exists side-by-side with the present. Houses are an attempt at holding a layered, accreted, sense of individual history. Houses, so often the end point of the marriage or homesteading plot, are the place where the biological time of desire and replacement (generations constitute and can inhabit the same “house”) is held in the same space as an individual time based on memory and experience. The “house”, the structure that could belong to anyone, becomes a “home”, the shell-like extension of the individual, the loved and lived-in space, as the history of the individual comes to shape the inside of the house – to match self to place, to make a physical tie to the earth and a claim on continuance. Where the logic of metonymy matches the movement from place to place to place in Hardy and Cather’s peripatetic novels, with the home it becomes instead a logic of metaphor – of insisting that the house *is* your family, *is* your history, *is* your self. The house lends the novel a chapter-like form, and a final leap towards metaphor, towards the space of the attic and the depths of the basement. It is both containment and a way into the world.

Novels of dwelling represent not only an attempt to protect the self against time, and the unique against the push of the general, it also proves a tie to the material world of death. Just as Jim’s narration of his travels across the space of the prairie, in Cather’s *My Ántonia*, ties him ever more firmly and bodily to the vastness of that space, even if the tie proves to be more of a haunting than a living, in a narration of home-boundedness, the connection to home is also a connection to the seasons, to plants, to insects, to the work of the land, and therefore a tie, more and more strikingly, to a biological, or geological time out of hand.

Hardy and Cather observe a distinction between writing about time and space. Yet a novel cannot simply exist either as a novel of space or a novel of time, the two are inevitably mingled. How do these two drives coexist then in their fiction? Mikhail Bakhtin, in his essay “Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics”, creates the word “chronotope” – literally “time space” – to describe “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature.” He goes on to write that the literary chronotope blends time and space into one, so that “time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history.” (84) The time of plot is inevitably bound to the material world of space. Most basically this is illustrated in the simple act of meeting; for one person to see the other person, they must both be in the same time and the same place. Similarly, a land without time is a stilled picture. We cannot be given simply a slice of space for there would be nothing to narrate. Narration inherently occupies time, a book cannot exist except with the turning of pages, and a textual representation of land therefore is only “charged and responsive” insofar as it appears in the movements of a book; it can only become a part of the narrative in the company of time. The relation between the two may shift and change, yet they remain bound together.

Bakhtin’s chronotope complicates the possibility of a discussion of Hardy and Cather as divided by their reactions on one hand to space and on the other to time, yet it also allows room for a slightly modified version of this split. Bakhtin is interested in “time-space”, a phrase defined as much by the line between the two separate words (chrono and tope, while not hyphenated are equally distinct) as it is by their connection. Time and space never merge; they are instead glued to one another, whole and separate but stuck. In writing about space, we are

always writing about space in time, and in writing about time we cannot separate out the space that time is working within. Yet they are not always given equal weight, and as we move from a poetics of movement to a poetics of stillness, the emphasis moves from the land passed over to the time accreted in the stilled area of the home. In the known, and organized space of the homestead it is not vastness of land that overwhelms, but a vastness of the time stretching out ahead and behind the single moment of inhabitation. Therefore the chronotope shifts from the issue of where to an issue of when, and the vastness of the heath at night is transformed into the vastness of time slipping past; we move from bounding across land to digging in.

### I. The Marriage Plot and the Homestead Plot

*Matrimonial ambition is such an honorable thing.* – Thomas Hardy, The Woodlanders

The time being addressed, to differing degrees and in differing ways but with a similarity of intensity, by both Hardy and Cather, is one perhaps as harsh and obdurate as the heath or the prairie at night. In her book *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Gillian Beer tracks the response of certain nineteenth century writers to Darwin's *Origin of the Species*, seeing in their novels a reflection of Darwin's new theory of evolution. Hardy read *Origin*, and responded clearly to this new world-ordering, both directly in his diaries and less directly in his novels and poems. Beer cites other critics who have "emphasized the point of connection between Hardy and Darwin in terms of pessimism, a sense that the laws of life are themselves flawed." (238) As she continues, this is "undeniable." Darwin's laws of life are laws that emphasize our lack of control. They are laws that govern biology, that make us desire things unwittingly, that make us search and search endlessly for not

only another person, but through that other person, our biological replacement in the form of children.

They are the laws that lead out of our controlled, and conscious, world and into a space that seems uncontrollable. Desire, in Hardy, is most often destructive. Out of desire, Jude moves from thinking about “the great age of the trackway, and of the drovers who had frequented it,” to following Arabella up the stairs as she laughingly pulls away from him, to eventually, on a false pregnancy, marrying her and tying his fortunes forever and always to the fortunes of a woman he does not love. Desire draws Fitzpiers towards Mrs. Charmond in *The Woodlanders*. And desire, most blatantly played out in a scene from *Far From the Madding Crowd* wherein Troy displays his skill with his sword, cutting the air closer and closer to her “hip” her “ribs”, and surrounding her with a “firmament of light”, urging Bathsheba to marry Troy the soldier, and tie her luck to a wayward man. This desire is a desire based on Darwin’s theory of sexual selection, where a mate is chosen not through intellectual, or moral, or individualistic characteristics, but through their ability to outshine, or outmatch, others in their sex. It is a form of promising the continuance of the species, those who are best adapted to their world will reproduce most – regardless of the human distinctions of worth and companionship. Desire, or this bodily, biological, urge towards another, has the ability to cut off thought, to surround one with the bright shine, the “firmament of light,” of sexual attraction, and in the case of Bathsheba, to in a minute bring “the blood beating to her face, set her stirring as if aflame to the very hollows of her feet, and enlarged emotion to a compass which quite swamped thought.” Sexual selection is the biological continuance of the race made bodily and personal, and it has the ability to overtake will and thought, to surround us with this unthinking haze of want and confusion, so that our actions are not ours, not the intellectual Jude’s, but the race’s, the gene’s, the body’s. The products of desire

are fixed and present; a child, a marriage. Tess is marked by Alec's desire for her, so that even after the death of their child she still holds signs of sexual knowledge – the child may be dead but she is a "Maiden No Longer" and continues to be known, in her town, and by her husband, as a fallen woman. The forward rush of time, and the staying marks made by marriage, and by childbirth, combine to fix the characters in nets outside of their control. "The human race," Hardy declares again and again in both *Tess* and *Jude*, "is too extremely developed for its corporeal conditions" (239). The ways in which our bodies move forward, the ways in which they carry marks of the past into the future, the ways in which they desire what they cannot, or ought not, to have, these are the things that leave us out of time, our bodies unfit for our thinking.

A reading of Hardy's novels solely through this pessimistic view of the primacy of the sexual imperative and the struggle for survival leads to an oversimplification of his work. He has an undeniably grim view of our place in the world, yet, as Beer argues, this is not the sole use of Darwin within his novels. In contrast to the single-minded argument of pessimism, she creates a three-tiered image of Hardy's plots: "the anxiously scheming and predictive plot of the characters' making; the optative plot of the commentary, which often takes the form 'Why did nobody' or 'had somebody...', and the absolute plot of blind interaction and 'Nature's laws.'" (240) This multiplicity of plot scales leads to a multiplicity of time-scales: "In Hardy's novels all scales are absolute, but multiple. So he includes many time-scales, from the geological time of Egdon Heath to the world of ephemerons." (240) Hardy, in Beer's hands, is responding to Darwin not by simply taking on a plot of biological time – an image of the world that erases all individual and human markers in the face of the whole of time and evolution – but by tying it to both the life of an individual – "the world of ephemerons" – and the voice of the narrator – something between the death and life of an insect and the death and life of a race. It is the

biological time of generation that lies, like the space of the heath, the dark obscurity of night, or the harsh land of Cather's prairie, beneath Tess and her worrying, or Giles and his loss of love.

Cather did not necessarily read Darwin. Unlike Hardy she never wrote directly about him. However she lived in a world shaped by his theories of biological replacement, and while she may never have read *The Origin of the Species*, she was, as Bert Bender argues in *Evolution and the "Sex Problem": American Narratives During the Eclipse of Darwinism*, undoubtedly aware of his theories. He quotes from her third novel, *The Song of the Lark*, stating "the world is little, people are little, human life is little. There is only one big thing – desire!" (165) Bender argues, however, that while she acknowledges the force of sexual selection, she is also trying to work around it and create a different vision of evolution. He points to the differences between Alexandra and Marie in *O Pioneers!*, seeing Alexandra's strength and her de-sexualization (she is beautiful but distant, and after a dream holding the traces of desire she scrubs herself clean in anger), a side-stepping of the Darwinian forces which shape Marie's life and death. He writes, "Cather creates a "tremendous push" behind her mythic heroine, Alexandra Bergson, freeing her from the Darwinian sexual entanglement ... that destroys her counterpoint Marie". (170) Alexandra, Bender argues, is Cather's creation of a pattern of evolution based on Henri Bergson's *Creative Evolution* that rests in the push of whole generations forward, the idea that "the living being is above all a thoroughfare, and that the essence of life is in the movement by which life is transmitted" (167). Rather than a desire that takes up residence in a single person's body, Alexandra is exhibiting a force of nature, a non-sexual continuation of the species. Cather, Bender argues, sees this as life-affirming, as avoiding the dangers of sexual selection, and the terrors of Darwinian theory. Yet I would argue that this structure of evolution is equally terrifying to Cather. If humans are simply a "thoroughfare" of life there is little individuality left

to them, and the novel, the novels Cather writes, cannot continue in the mass of the general. There is nothing to write. It may seem to erase the dangers of sexual selection but it only emphasizes the vastness of the prairie itself.

Hardy's biological time-scale, in Cather's work becomes a geological time-scale. In *O Pioneers!*, this concern with a too-large time frame is blurred with the sense of a too-large world. As Alexandra and Carl ride out over the prairie in the opening pages of the novel, Cather describes the town of Hanover, Nebraska as a new pioneer town, barely clinging to the surface of the earth. Carl and Alexandra, young but already carrying the weight of their respective families' continuance on their shoulders, are grim in the face of the land which seems to "overwhelm the little beginnings of human society that struggled in its somber vastness." (10) While in some ways it is the "somber vastness" of the land that seems to be setting them so squarely and grimly against a world bound to overwhelm them, pointing directly to a spatial sense of tininess not unlike being set down in the dark, or coming into contact with a country not marked by known things but seemingly "the material out of which countries are made," in truth the somber vastness encompasses time as well as miles. It is not so much the spatial power of the place that overwhelms them, but the fact that it will not be changed by any of their actions. Carl imagines that the land wanted to be "let alone, to preserve its own fierce strength, its peculiar, savage kind of beauty, its uninterrupted mournfulness." (10) The sorrow in these young faces is found in a sense that the land wants to be let alone; even the houses – those permanent-seeming marks of habitation – are swallowed by the land:

Of all the bewildering things about this new country, the absence of human landmarks is one of the most depressing and disheartening. The houses on the Divide were small and were usually tucked away in low places; you did not see them until you came directly upon them. Most of them were built of the sod itself, and were only the unescapable ground in another form. The roads were but faint tracks in the grass, and the fields were

scarcely noticeable. The record of the plow was insignificant, like feeble scratches on stone left by prehistoric races, so indeterminate that they may, after all, be only the markings of glaciers, not a record of human strivings. (*Pioneers*, 13)

Cather's land will not hold the "record of human strivings." Wagon tracks disappear, the houses are "only the unescapable sod in another form," and the plow leaves almost no mark. Each gesture towards permanence is erased, but perhaps even more strikingly, each gesture towards individuality is also erased. It is not the sense of work that will not produce anything that depresses, or a homestead without a future, it is instead the lack of the record of human strivings. The marking of the earth with the plow might not even be human, as far as you can see in the marks left; they might instead be confused with the marks of a glacier. Geological time swallows human time.

There is nothing to attest to a human individual in the land not solely due to its harshness or its physical vastness, but to its temporal vastness as well. What is a human plow to the age of glaciers? How can a single life, and only a few years of the single life at that, come to make any mark on this place that is only trackless ground and glacial paths? The geological time-scale dominates the human, and it is this lack of time, this sense that the world will not take your movements, that your gestures towards endurance and homemaking are erased in the hugeness of a scale that measures not human lives but the lives of rocks, that is "bewildering," that leads perhaps to Mr. Shimerda's suicide in *My Ántonia*, or John Bergson's young death in *O Pioneers!*. The generational time of Darwin, or simply of a time that has no space for the human, erases the individual. Your marks do not last on the prairie – there is nothing durable left in your wake, so with your physical death comes too your imaginative death. Desire, which points to reproduction, is also an erasure of the self, an end of individual in favor of species being. It is biological time held under the skin. George Bataille, in his essay on Emily Bronte's *Wuthering*



*Heights*, writes, “the basis of sexual effusion is the negation of the isolation of ego which only experiences ecstasy by exceeding itself, by surpassing itself in the embrace in which the being loses its solitude.” (1) The self so carefully preserved in walking, unstuck from the forces of obscurity and space, in one sweep can be consumed by another, can be destroyed through a lack of barriers. Swamping time exists within the human frame. In this view love, or sex, or generation, can exist only at the expense of the individual, and therefore the destruction of the novel written about the individual. Yet both Cather and Hardy rely, in these novels of character, on love stories to move from one point to the next, as a way of inhabiting the space of the novel and the space of the land itself. They take the fear of intimacy, the danger of misplaced love, which is truly the danger of sexual selection and desire overtaking reason and self, and contain it within the form of a novel or the house of fiction that they will then inhabit.

As Beer argues, plots are the playing out of this splintered sense of time. While Hardy’s novels, in her reading, split into three different time-scales – the character’s, the narrator’s, and the plot of fate, or the “absolute plot” of nature – the marriage plot attempts to hold all of these split or splitting times in the space of a single narrative. The marriage plot, or the homestead plot, relies on the romance, and coming together, of two separate people, which is, ultimately, the blending of a biological urge to reproduce (to create your replacement in the world) and an ideal, individual finding of your “soul mate”, your platonic other half, the promise of the fullest articulation of the self. The biological, Darwinian, push towards replacement and generation is thus held within the frame of a personal choice. Similarly, Cather writes a homestead plot, the finding and claiming of land, the planting of it, the fighting of the seasons, and then the promise of passing it along to the next generation, which holds both the creativity of the individual and the expectation of replacement. Theoretically, by making replacement the forward push of the

book –Alexandra is planning her life around handing her farm on to her brother, or her brother's children, or sending her brother to school and keeping the farm going for him – Cather contains the biological push towards a future within the scale of a single human life.

Hardy does not write either a narrative devoid of straight biological desire, or a narrative that unfolds as a Darwinian love story – a straight-ahead progression from one point of attraction to another: to the house, the children, the next generation. He has a non-linear frame for his marriage plot based on hasty marriages, and later remorse, the space between your former and current self. Grace and Fitzpiers, Frafrae and Lucetta, Jude and Arabella, Sue and the Schoolteacher, Bathsheba and Troy, the unmarried intimacy of Alec and Tess couple after couple marries and regrets it later. Falling sway to the pure physical desire for the unknown and the other, Troy and his elaborate dance, Arabella and her hearty earthiness, Fitzpiers and his education, Lucetta and her charm, Alec and his pure economic power, is disastrous. Marriage, the tying of yourself to another, has the potential to destroy you entirely, to break the lines of selfhood and leave you chained to a person, a world you do not know and do not love. In *Tess* Hardy writes,

Nature does not often say 'See!' to her poor creature at a time when seeing can lead to happy doing; or reply 'Here!' to a body's cry of 'Where?' till the hide-and-seek has become an irksome and worn out game. We may wonder whether at the acme and summit of the human progress these anachronisms will become corrected by a finer intuition, a closer interaction of the social machinery than that which now jolts us round and along; but such completeness is not to be prophesied, or even conceived as possible. Enough that in the present case, as in millions, the two halves of an approximately perfect whole did not confront each other at the perfect moment ... Out of which maladroitness sprang anxieties, disappointments, shocks, catastrophes – what was called a strange destiny. (*Tess*, 43-4)

Here Hardy addresses both Nature, or desire, or biology, which does not point in the direction of the "happy ending" but instead wears the person out with looking, sending them to Arabellas and

Troys in the search for Sues and Gabes, and the theoretically individual imagining of Plato's "two halves of an approximately perfect whole". Lovers are promised, and the designation of them as two halves rather than as two separate people allows a logic of ultimate making rather than ultimate dissolution, if they are a part of the original whole, then in joining together they are not losing themselves, but instead simply becoming more completely, truly, individual.

Yet this is not the entire promise of the passage, and nature and the self are not so perfectly aligned (nor does Hardy imagine them ever being so) that desire leads one instantly to their other half. Therefore, his lovers do not find each other as they should, and in this lack of meeting, in the first wrong turn, in the extension of the space between the two, the "anxieties, disappointments, shocks, catastrophes" that spring up instead of happiness, comes our plot and, simultaneously, our promise of resolution. Giles and Grace, Tess and Angel, Jude and Sue, these couples seem to be matching pairs, destined for each other. Tess and Angel at the dairy, Sue and Jude at Christminster, they hold the place of the youngest and the best, the bright and the moral. It is a melding of the pure force of the summertime heat of the dairy love and the ideal of the individual calling out to another individual, the self alone and the self as a part of the blossoming, blooming world. They are the two that might make and end of the book, that might, together, make the start of a generational house, and also, a personal, rooted, house in which to dwell.

Yet we as the readers cannot get our house too readily. The marriage plot, and the homestead plot, or any plot according to Peter Brooks (and to our own good sense) has to have something between the beginning and the end, and in the case of a romance, this something is the time spent trying to find, and therefore "complete" each other. Before we reach the conclusion we expect a love triangulated, a plot expanded on, and in novels such as these, a character

changed. “Desire,” Peter Brooks writes, “is the wish for the end, for fulfillment, but fulfillment must be delayed so that we can understand it in relation to origin and to desire itself.” (*Plot*, 111) The end, Brooks argues, can only be reached through the “arabesque” of the plot – a lengthening out of the space between initiation and satisfaction, an elongation of desire itself. The marriage plot does this quite literally, we long for the ending, the satisfaction of desire – the final death-like marriage, the house, the kids, the sealed whole – while simultaneously loving every turn of the plot that keeps us moving and living in the pages in between. If Cather’s Emil and Marie were simply two unattached young people who met and fell in love, with nothing in the way of it, the book would not be the book it is – it would be far shorter, and far less rich. Brooks writes, “the organism must live in order to die in the proper manner, to die the right death. One must have the arabesque of the plot in order to reach the end. One must have metonymy in order to reach metaphor.” (*Plot*, 107) The death, the chosen death, a coming together of two halves, the death we have couched in terms of family and house, in terms of comfort and reason, can only happen if there is a middle, a way of finding the *right* person and the *right* house, or else the death would occur in the first marriages that occur in these texts: Marie’s, Bathsheba’s, Grace’s, Sue’s. Or else the death would be chosen not by the individual but by pure unthinking desire, by a biological force of replacement and we would not have the story of a person, but the story of a gene or a species not a character.

The homestead plot at the beginning of *O Pioneers!*, founded in John Bergson’s declaration ““I want them to keep the land””, and Alexandra’s reply, ““We will, father. We will never lose the land””, by the second section, “Neighboring Fields”, has changed its focus. (*Pioneers*, 17) Where in the “Wild Land” section that begins the novel Alexandra is simply struggling against the hard face of prairie-time, by the time the second section starts sixteen years

later, the question is no longer one of conquering, but of continuing to live on the land. The plot then becomes based around inheritance, who will inherit the land – either her two older brothers' children, or her much younger, and beloved brother Emil, and if it is Emil who will he be with, and where will he be? The homestead plot combines with a plot and question of generation, merging with the marriage plot, a question of Emil and his beloved Marie, or the even more fatalistic, and less biological, love between Carl and Alexandra. Cather's Emil is both made out of the soil of this harsh new land, and almost entirely separate from it. He is the promise of the future, and for that reason he is almost distinct from the past; in the opening scenes of "Neighboring Fields" he whistles and mows the Shabata's orchard (once Carl's orchard), "he was not thinking about the tired pioneers over whom his blade glittered. The old wild country, the struggle in which his sister was destined to succeed where so many men broke their hearts and died, he can scarcely remember. That is all among the dim things of childhood and has been forgotten in the brighter pattern life weaves to-day, in the ... all-suffusing brightness of being twenty-one." (*Pioneers*, 53) Emil is, in some ways, the epitome of the future: young bright, without the scars of work and wear that mark his sister and his brothers, the heaviness she ascribes to living and toiling continuously in one place. Yet, when she looks at him she sees her father as well;

‘on the outside Emil is just like an American boy – he graduated from the State University in June, you know – but underneath he is more Swedish than any of us. Sometimes he is so like father that he frightens me; he is so violent in his feelings like that.’ (*Pioneers*, 80)

As a character, Emil combines the past and the present, the personal and the biological; he is both the future and an outcropping of the past, he is made as much by what he does not know (for he hardly knew his father) as he is by what he does. He represents the melding of the gene and the individual.

The violence of his feelings, his unknowing inheritance, then, becomes both a source of the story and the danger of it – the biology, or the huge time once found in the rocks and soil, is now inhabiting the body of the boy raised in the same landscape. It is this violence that leads him to loving the impossible girl, it is this violence that promises in the union of Marie, the beautiful laughing one, and Emil, the beautiful serious one, a youthful perfection of the entire generation of pioneers. At the end of the novel Carl declares, “they were both the best you had here”, and it is this distillation of place in its dwellers that is the push and height of the novel, that lets us want to rest in the union of Emil and Marie. The danger of love, the danger of generation, of being replaced, of desire founded on nothing but the body and its descendents, is taken and made safe and reasonable within the frame of a fated and shared bestness, with the assertion that one matches the other and their union, and the house they will make, is therefore one meant to be, not because of pure Darwinian continuance, but because they, as individuals, fit each other to perfection. The battle between the individual and biology shifts and changes, landing, seemingly instead, with the two linked on one side (the two best not only desire one another, but were made for one another) with history, and the marks of an unthinking past on the other. It is not girl and boy versus desire then, but girl and boy versus a mark that refuses to be erased, a marriage that cannot be undone. The union of Emil and Marie for all of its impossibilities, promises a uniting of all three time-scales in Beer’s reading of Darwin, a righting of the balance between Nature and choice.

The entire basis of the pioneer movement is not only the creation of a new life for yourself, but more stirringly a new life for your children. The roughness of pioneer life is such that, at least in Cather’s novels, the older generation rarely lasts long in the new world. Both *Ántonia* and *Alexandra* lose their fathers, for Mr. Shimerda and Mr. Bergson die, leaving their

holdings in the hands of their children. Years after Mr. Bergson dies, Alexandra says to Carl, “‘I’m sure it was to have sons like Emil and to give them a chance, that Father left the old country.’” (*Pioneers*, 80) The land he wants them to keep is both to hold their dwelling and to hold the possibility for their future advancement and education. The homestead is where the time of the individual – the time of Alexandra at home, trying to hold her farm together, or *Ántonia*, raising a baby – intersects with the geological, or biological time in a form that we can know, and hold, and understand. A marriage plot ends with cohabitation; the intense desire of Hardy’s Tess and Angel in the summer on the farm being transformed, hopefully, into the day-to-day living of a farm and a family and a house to protect them from time and weather. This is the dream of the marriage plot – not to be annihilated by the one you desire, but to house the desire, house the wanting, and surround it with the practical, manageable, work of the every-day. The house narrative works along the lines of the marriage plot, pulling disparate time-scales together, so that the individual world of the woman or man alone is mixed with the biological world of the woman or man in love and is held, overarchingly, in the space of the house she or he marries.

## II. The Home Epic

The attempt to hold multiple time-scales in place – forward-moving generational time, the time of personal motion and personal memory, and the time of the narration – ends, for both plots, most strongly in the founding of the house, or the “home epic,” itself. “Marriage,” George Eliot writes at the end of *Middlemarch*, “which has been the bourne of so many narratives, is still a great beginning ... It is still the beginning of the home epic – the gradual conquest or irremediable loss of that complete union which makes the advancing years a climax, and age the harvest of sweet memories in common.” (*Middlemarch*, 832) The complete union of the marriage plot turns into the home epic, a narrative based on the domestic and the private. While

Eliot is more focused on beginning from a domestic drama of the space, Hardy and Cather turn to create “home epics” around the actual structure of a building. Where a life can be mapped in the paths taken through a story of motion, a story of stillness, or of staying home, the life, and the story, is found instead in the building of walls, the setting down of roots, the accumulation of things. A house not only shelters, but it also holds the intangible signs of former shelterings, former livings. In *The Woodlanders*, Mrs. Charmond’s house is described as “a house in whose reverberations queer old personal tales were yet audible if properly listened for; and not, as with those of the castle and cloister, silent beyond the possibility of an echo.” (*Woodlanders*, 22) A house holds old stories and old patterns. “Queer old personal tales,” and tales mixed with the generations past and the present ones now hearing them, combine the impersonal and the personal. In this sense, the house collects the traces of different strains of time, different forms of living in a place, of being at home in the world.

We stay in place through the houses that we build and then inhabit. These structures that we make allow stillness and placedness, a way of containing motion within four walls, and letting motion add to motion add to our sleeping stillness, so that we no longer move away from home but instead move into it. It is through these structures of accumulated time that we make a physical and lasting connection to a certain place, that we mark our roots, and dig down deep. Cather moves with particular intensity towards the idea of houses in her appropriately-titled *The Professor’s House*. In this book, written in 1925, twelve years after *O Pioneers*, she transfers her attention from the prairie to a small mid-western college town on the edge of Lake Michigan. It takes place years after the marriage plot or the homestead plot is realized for the central character Professor Godfrey St. Peter. In fact, it is so long after the marriage, and the children, that the house itself is being abandoned. The Professor and his wife, their children grown, have decided



to move to a fancier house, a house they own rather than rent. But the Professor continues to haunt his former home, the supposedly transitory space of the rental, that managed to house all the decades of his marriage and child-rearing. The novel begins with a section titled “The Family”, and the line, “the moving was over and done”, seemingly the end of a narrative rather than the beginning. Yet the Professor continues to work in an upper study, inhabiting the house even after it “the moving was over and done.” He is unwilling to leave the space of his former work and his former family. Before the family is introduced, we meet the remains of their house; “Professor St. Peter was alone in the dismantled house where he had lived ever since his marriage, where he had worked out his career and brought up his two daughters.” (3) It is an admittedly uncomfortable house, “as ugly as it is possible for a house to be; square, three stories in height, painted the color of ashes – the front porch just too narrow for comfort, with a slanting floor and sagging steps”, but it is an uncomfortable house that has lasted for long enough to become deeply wound up in the life and patterns of this family. In leaving the house, he is not only leaving a building but also leaving the signs of shared living that has marked the space of the house. (*Professor*, 3) When his daughter asks him why he refuses to give up his study, full as it is not only with his old papers but also the papers and mannequins of the family’s dressmaker who uses it as her workspace, he replies “they remind me of the times when you were little girls, and your first party frocks used to hang up on them at night, when I worked.” (48) The house itself holds the time and the deeply personal memories of the family. It is in this space that all of the settling down and raising of children promised by the most famous of marriage plot lines, “Reader, I married him”, is played out and made solid. It is here, too, that the marks of that time remain as the time itself has passed on by.

The house is needed to bind a family and a narrative together and to a specific place. Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, is founded on a desire to re-find lost roots and lost position in the shape of a family house, and Tess herself is driven less by love and than by a desire for home above all else. The novel starts with the revelation of the now "fallen" Durbeyfield's former status as lords of the land, not only connecting them to knighthood and noble blood, but also connecting them to a former seat, a familial manor house. This revelation of former nobility allows the possibility of a new home for the too-full family, and access to strangers that are not, in fact, strangers but instead carry both a blood-bond and a duty-bond to the Durbeyfields. The action of the novel truly rests in the initial desire, and belief in, the ability to reconnect with the wealthy, land-holding members of the house of the D'urbervilles. In this move away from her childhood home, towards this ancestral living-space, Tess is acting out the economic and class-based wishes of her parents. She is sent to be supported, she is sent to "claim kin" and win their affection, she is sent on the thin line of blood that ought to connect girl to land, or girl to home, or at the least girl to the owners of the house that stands in for these things. Her contact, however, with the d'Urbervilles, instead leads to sorrow and disaster. It is a mismatched non-home. When she arrives she is not thrilled with the clean lawn, the "snug property" that was "bright, thriving, and well kept;" instead she is struck dumb and made uncomfortable, wondering why if they were an old family "this is all new!" (38-9) The house that ought to be hers, is instead entirely disassociated from her self – it is a linguistic and economic connection, a relationship in name only with land that has been bought and sold, not one of blood and bone.

Yet, even if this is a failed attempt at finding a bloodline with ties not only to fortune but to land, it points to the ideal running through Cather and Hardy and the Marriage Plot: the house as a whole is a space of generational time. The d'Urberville house is, theoretically, to be passed

from one d'Urberville to the next, and it is only the perversion of this system of inheritance, the collapse of the family and the entrance of the wealthy but unknown Stokes, that disrupts the chain from one generation to the next leading eventually to the destruction of Tess herself. As much as Tess dreams of a home, she dreams, more specifically, of a home with Angel Clare, and the satisfaction of the marriage plot that would come not simply with their marriage, but with a shared life and actual co-habitation. Similarly, the homestead plot rests entirely upon the promise of creating not a home for the self, but John Bergson's vision of a home for those who come after him. The person who builds it is not the person, necessarily, who lives in it longest. The house is the locus of desire and individuality, of permanence and replacement. It is in the house that we expect both to remain forever (our portrait on the wall) and in time to be replaced (our children at the head of the table). It is here, too, that the marriage plot ends and the homestead plot finds its satisfaction: the home full, the characters paired off, the scene settled, and it is within the frame and expectation of this settling, this expectation of future children, that both Cather and Hardy organize their multiple strands of time, their stories of belonging.

The house materializes a sense of rootedness in the physical and temporal world. As Cather's prairie is tamed and the Bergson's farm moves from a bare-bones operation to a thriving, growing, organization, their house, and the houses of their neighbors change from structures that were "built of the sod itself, and were only the unescapable ground in another form" to the solid frame of Alexandra's "big house". The solidity of their tenancy on the prairie is confirmed by this clear planting in the earth – the houses that once could almost have been blown away are now big and stately, surrounded by verdant fields and gardens, firmly and fiercely entrenched in the land, standing against the run of wind and rain and time, just as the Bergson boys, once restless pioneers, once itching to leave for Chicago to work with their uncle

in his bakery, have had children and are settled down. The house is the material form of their settling and of their place within the world of Hanover, Nebraska – Alexandra's large house on the hill a far cry from the smaller, and more tenuous, home of Marie and Frank Shabata. Their space in the world, their connection to place and people, and the pure fact of their lack of money is held not in their face or their clothes, but in the outer shape of their house.

A house can represent both an actual tie to the earth and an illusory one. In Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* houses have an even more intense role as the materialization of economic and social status. As a migrant labourer, Michael Henchard is homeless – wandering the highways of England in search of work, his haying tools carried on his back, his whole family at his side. He proceeds, in a horrifying act of drunkenness and frustration, to sell his wife, thereby blending the most interior, domestic, and private realm of his life – the marriage that ought to form the center of their non-existent but longed-for home – with a gross economic transaction. The house, before it is even present, has been eviscerated; the internal made external, the familial made public, so that the line between person and person is held not in close relationships, but in money and the shape of a building. Yet Henchard, in a desperate and long-lasting attempt to erase his sin, buys a house, gives up drink, and becomes the mayor of Casterbridge, assuming in his new ownership a role of authority and apparent respectability that was first denied, and then ruined by him in his initial role as a transient laborer. His house becomes the site of his newly rebuilt self, and of his atonement. The transience, and the broken marriage that forms the center of his life, is covered over by the house he buys and the title that comes soon after it. His unrootedness is obscured.

Henchard's house in particular maps out the relations the inhabitants have both to each other and to those who pass in front of their windows. It is to this home that the abandoned wife

Susan and their child Elizabeth-Jane return in search of Henchard after the death of Susan's later husband. It is through the house that Henchard tries to provide his former, and now present wife with the "deeper affection than he could give her". (67) By painting the iron railings "that had smiled sadly in dull rust for the last eighty years" a bright green, and by enlivening the windows with new white paint, he attempts to show, "in external action," the affection he cannot give her in his own person. The house makes physical and public the potential internal world of the inhabitants; yet this internal world is actually not present, and the marks of the bright green paint and white windows point to a lack rather than an actual presence. The relationship between the meaning of the house and the look of the house is never entirely transparent. In the transcription of the personal world onto the public world, Henchard believes not so much that the inner world will mold to the outer, but that the important thing, the appearance of owning an affection for his wife, will be made visible and tangible. The house occupies the space that ought to hold a link between two people. Instead of Henchard and his wife having their own, personal set of relations to each other, however, they are mediated by the actual form of the house: the paint, the railings, the rooms occupied.

This transformation of the inter-personal into the architectural is echoed in the shifting web of relations between the characters in the book; as Elizabeth-Jane moves into Henchard's house and later out of it, as Henchard moves from house, to cottage, to hotel, as Frafrea shifts from being a wandering foreigner to the actual mayor of Casterbridge, settling down in Henchard's old house, as marriages are enacted in the move from one home to the next, the entire plot of the novel – the rises and fall of power, the new loves and losses – can be found in the rooms left and the rooms adopted. Just as the wrong matches only extend the time between beginning and end in the marriage plot, here the false fronts of houses, the homes that house, in

fact, nothing, are only part of the arabesques of plot. “Anxieties, disappointments, shocks, catastrophes” of the marriage plot are made material in the uneasily inhabited rooms and houses of *Casterbridge*. Elizabeth-Jane’s relationship to Henchard and, most clearly, her silent love of Donald Frafrea is held, at least at first, most clearly and tellingly in the rooms she inhabits. She lives initially, while Frafrea is working for Henchard, in a room that is “rather high in the house, so that it command[s] a view of the hay-stores and granaries across the garden”. This position “afforded her opportunity of accurate observation of what went on there”, not only providing entertainment, but also a way of watching the man she is falling in love with as he goes about his daily business. (70) Where she is often too shy, or too separate from Frafrea at first to actually interact with him, the view from her window allows a strange connection both to him and her father, acknowledging a distance between her and this active male world that is so interesting, as well as a closeness to it. The house becomes a material map of her loves and losses, mediating between herself and the world. She is not with these people, but through the house she can be related to them – see them or live next to them, or live in the signs of their former habitations and the reverberations of “queer old stories”. This house, and her later dwellings – the one she moves to, even, with Frafrea – hold the traces of these false relationships, these confusing and transitory people. Hardy’s novel itself is the map of her rooms, as the rooms are the map of her romance.

### III. Time as Accretion

The promise of a house is held in a sense vertical time. The chronotope of travel is inherently horizontal, moving forward on a plane through time and space, but the chronotope of staying still is instead based on building layers of time in a single space. Travelers could map out their years spent traveling, but the person who has remained at home turns instead to the things in his or her house – the closets full of mementos, the layers of paint. Within the walls of a

building, you can create a space where memory, either personal or familial, and history, either national or individual, can be stored. Familial time, the accretion of family life within the home, is not restricted simply to a single, insular, bloodline, but instead, being genealogical, and therefore entrenched in a forward-moving, backward-looking time, it is also historical. For Hardy houses, and this accreted time, are a part of a larger historical system. The d'Urbervilles fall is indicative of a general changing of the aristocracy over the past few centuries; they are not the only family to have fallen from lords to laborers. Parson Tringham warns John Durfeyfield not to make too much of himself, for "it is a fact of some interest to the local historian and genealogist, nothing more. There are several families among the cottagers of this country of almost equal lustre." (*Tess*, 9) The abandoned houses of "families in decline" dot the countryside, and are overtaken by the new manufacturing rich. Cather's narratives too are tied to a larger national story of traveling and conquering, of venturing West. She writes in the wake of the Homestead Act, in the time of Manifest Destiny and nation-building.

Cather and Hardy firmly refuse to fall into either of these patterns, instead melding the familial and ongoing with the personal and end-oriented view of the marriage plot. It is this time, this problem of scale, the human and the biological together, that being-at-home-in-the-world by staying home is directly engaging. In this choice to use the smaller time-scale for the form of the book, Hardy and Cather are turning away from the more obvious historical or genealogical narratives that inherently hold both a long view of time and the short view of single lives. *War and Peace* is the Napoleonic wars and the marriage plot, a romance and a political treatise, and a narrative encompassing the vast movements of a generation. The historical novel or the genealogical novel can promise a collection and coordination of a time that has come before us in the shape of a single story. The conclusion of a historical novel not only ends the story but

promises the beginning of our own, linking their time to our time and promising a general upward movement of the world.

The generational, or even at times the historical, novel adheres to an idea of cyclical, and in the broadest sense agricultural time. In Bakhtin's essay on the chronotope, he describes "folkloric time" based in the "pre-class, agricultural stage in the development of human society," an organization centered not on the life of the individual but on the life of a whole human and natural world. (206) The idyllic chronotope comes out of this time, built upon the cycles both of the natural world (spring summer autumn winter) and of the human (birth, age, death, holidays and working-times). The idyllic chronotope is "an organic fastening down, a grafting of life and its events to place". (225) The idyllic chronotope stays in a single space, and according to Bakhtin, it leads to a "blurring of all the temporal boundaries made possible by a unity of place" and "also contributes in an essential way to the creation of the cyclic rhythmicalness of time so characteristic of the idyll." (225) In some ways this is directly reflected in the time that has been accreted in the corners and rooms of houses and streets in Casterbridge. Time, for Hardy, is not arranged on a timeline but in the architectural space of a city, or the layers of the soil. It has an inherently physical form; as Bakhtin writes, "such time is fleshed-out, irreversible (within the limits of the cycle), realistic." (208) The vision of idyllic time that Bakhtin describes out is devoid of the ending that occurs in personal history, or personal time. This is the time that goes on and on. As one person dies they are replaced by the next, as one city falls it is built on top of and becomes the foundation of the one after it. Yet this is not the form Hardy chooses for his novels. He insists stridently upon patterning his novels solely on the life of the individual, necessarily cutting off the possibility of this glorious renewal. For as Bakhtin declares, as soon as the narrative, or the society the narrative is written from, changes from the general whole to the



specific singular, the entire idea of death “undergoes a profound transformation in the temporally sealed-off sequence of an individual life. Here this motif takes on the meaning of an ultimate end.” (216) Therefore the revival expected in the replacement of one life for the next has been made impossible; “individual lives do not overlap with the birth of new lives, they are not swallowed up by the triumphant growth, for these deaths have been taken out of the whole in which such growth occurs.” (216) In writing novels entitled *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, or *Jude the Obscure*, in so forcefully deciding not to write the generational novel but instead to write the novel of a single life, Hardy is not only cutting off the sweeping maps of history and genealogy, but also this potentially unending, untterrifying sense of time. He is re-introducing traumatic ending, death into the novel, insisting as much on the death of the individual as on the individual himself.

In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, the historical time of the city itself is held in archeological layers. The city literally conceals “the dead men of Rome. It was impossible to dig more than a foot or two deep about the town fields and gardens without coming upon some tall soldier or other of the Empire, who had lain there in his silent unobtrusive rest for a space of fifteen hundred years.” (55) These bodies and all of their accessories (a bronze brooch, an urn, a jar, a bottle) are deemed a “familiar spectacle” by passers-by, both a novelty and a part of the structure and daily life of the town. Even as Hardy’s narrator points to the seeming distance, however, between the lives of the present and the deaths of the past, he insists that they are right on top of each other, existing in both the same time and space. Casterbridge, more than anything, seems to be built out of the materials left behind by different generations. The houses hold the old and the new in equal proportion:

through the long, straight, entrance passages thus unclosed could be seen, as through tunnels, the mossy gardens at the back, glowing with nasturtiums, fuchsias, scarlet geraniums, 'bloody warriors,' snap-dragons, and dahlias, this floral blaze being backed by crusted grey stone-work remaining from a yet remoter Casterbridge than the venerable one visible in the street. (48)

Old-fashioned fronts give way to backs that are "older than old-fashioned," and the bright "floral blaze" of present growing things is backed by the grey stonework, already crusted over with the accumulated material of years gone by. Each part of Casterbridge is attached to another part that was built before, and holding the marks of those that came after. The new gardens are built from the bones of the ancient Romans. Casterbridge holds present and past in the very structures of habitation, so the modern man cannot escape the traces of the ancient.

Similarly, the line between land and city is thin, and rather than one being entirely separate from the other, the city is made both of layers both of brick and earth. The stone streets hold the urban population alongside "bees and butterflies" who want to travel from the cornfields on the one side of the town to the meads at the bottom and take "no circuitous course," but fly right down the main street, just as the "airy spheres of thistledown" fly down the same street and lodge "upon the shop fronts, blew into drains". (48) It is a town built out of the materials of the time it has existed in, the traces of things left behind as people die or thistles pass through. Hardy's sense of history is not one that moves inevitably onward along a continuum, but one that remains in place, so that the present is haunted by, and living in, the ruins of the past. This accumulation of time is held in the buildings, the streets, and the soil of the town. Time takes on the shape of the buildings and structures of Casterbridge, collecting in rooms added to rooms,

and the layers of paint on a house front, or the flowers growing from the moss growing out from the stone of a wall built centuries before.<sup>1</sup>

Cather, too, could easily slip into a historical, or nationalistic narrative, expanding the range of her story of pioneers out to touch the great events of the nineteenth century, or to focus the novel on the growth of a city, or a town, or the country as a whole. It is undeniable that *O Pioneers!* and *My Ántonia* were built on the foundation of manifest destiny and the great movement west. Yet they, and the rest of her novels, are determinedly personal rather than general, built not on the model of a family tree or a history book, but on the daily decisions of Alexandra, on the private memories of Jim Burden, or on the quiet study of Professor St. Peter.

The chronotope of Cather's novel is not so clearly defined and material as Hardy's for there exists, in these stories of immigrants, an ocean-wide break between now and then, a history that has been cut off from its whole huge self and has leapt, in the form of a small family, to the center of America. Where Hardy has centuries of inhabited earth beneath each footstep, centuries of unbroken generations, the history she is dealing with, as I discussed in the first chapter, is almost imperceptible to her. Cather, as many pioneers did, seemed to imagine the plains as a space without a human history, existing instead only in a geological time-frame before the coming of the first European pioneers. She hints, barely, at the marks left by Native Americans, but they do not come into her true picturing of a bare earth and a land without inhabitation. Unlike Hardy, excavating the past with every shovel-full of earth, Cather is interested in a time that cut off from all former times, removed from both a personal and a national history as the wagon trains head further and further west. Cather's own family split itself apart from its past

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<sup>1</sup> Combining past and present in the act of excavating the bodies, looking at them, and then moving past

and is therefore almost mourning it across the seas, alone in a world they cannot see the past within. Cather does not base her vision of time along a continuum but instead within the structure of the longing for and the creation of a home. Alexandra's house serves as the foundation from which she can send Emil to college. Jim returns to see Ántonia settled in, surrounded by her children; the house holds the strong promise of a future life in the formerly inhospitable landscape.

Mrs. Bergson, set adrift in the move from one home to the next, takes the materiality of memory and uses it to her advantage. Cut off from all of her former patterns and traditions, the land that held her ancestors and her memories, she tries to recreate, if not her entire country in this new world, at least her old house. She turns to filling her house with the things of her past:

Preserving was almost a mania with Mrs. Bergson. Stout as she was, she roamed the scrubby banks of Norway Creek looking for fox grapes and goose plums, like a wild creature in search of prey. ... She had never quite forgiven John Bergson for bringing her to the end of the earth; but now that she was there, she wanted to be let alone to reconstruct her old life in so far as that was possible. She could still take some comfort in the world if she had bacon in the cave, glass jars on the shelves, and sheets in the press. (*Pioneers*, 20)

She believes that she can “reconstruct her old life” to some extent. She may not be able to turn back time, or even go home, but she can create, in the absence of that home, in the chaos of the new world, an order and a system that is hers, similar in shape to the one she left behind. If she fills her house with the preserves she had in Sweden, if she takes the wild newness that is thrown at her and puts it in jars and makes it useful and stores it away, her life might begin to resemble what it was before. The past is not held in the scope of history but instead in the canned fruits she puts up, and the kitchen she fortifies. It is a structural, tangible, past, one made in the attempt to create layers, to hold onto the *things* of time and of home – the quilts, the clothes, the violins, the cans, the tables. In a life that is made out of seemingly thin air, out of the land that swallows up

houses and resists change, the objects that both receive the mark of owning and imply the owner's stability and character, are all the more precious. The Bergsons carried everything they owned across an ocean, and over land so wide seemed never to end. They held onto the things that imply history, and use, and family. It is in the material, in the houses that hold the material, that these families turn to track their own living, to understand past and present, and to build the potential future.

#### IV. The Nest

*I have been building some shanties of houses (connected with the old one) and likewise some shanties of chapters & essays. I have been ploughing & planting & sowing & printing & praying, and now begin to come out upon a less bristling time, and to enjoy the calm prospect of things from a fair piazza at the north of the old farmhouse here. – Herman Melville, Letter 1852*

Thomas Hardy was trained as an architect, and was deeply aware of power of mediation and collection that the house holds. In 1883 after an illness and a return to his native Dorset, he set about designing and building his own house outside the edges of Dorchester (the city he later turned into Casterbridge in the *Mayor of Casterbridge*). He bought a piece of land that was rough and exposed, high with long views but open to wind and weather. He soon set about planting trees as breakers, and while they took years to grow, eventually they became so large they blocked out the sun and left the house dark and stifling. In the meantime, however, he was designing his house “from the inside outwards,” only later trying to connect it all together in a coherent outer form. (Millgate, 241) It was a house built from rooms rather than from facades, and as his biographer Michael Millgate explains, Hardy was deeply concerned with the windows of the house, more than the look of it, trying to give each “window precisely the size, shape, and location demanded by the function of the room to which it belonged and by the arc of the sun at different periods of the year.” With the windows he not only wants a “house full of light,” but a

house that has as many corners as it has open spaces. (Millgate, 241) For all its newness this house was literally rooted in the ancient ruins of Roman times. During its construction, which was done by his father and brother and heavily overseen by himself, they dug up “Romano-British skeletons” while they were setting up the foundation. The house therefore included both the traces of an ancient history and an entirely new enterprise – neither thatched cottage, nor grand estate, but a strange new building with brick and mortar and many windows, a rough hillside, newly planted trees, the harshness of heath and the softness of a domesticated garden and orchard, and the several, changing, studies of a man at work writing. (238-243) The house became the sign, or space, of an in-betweeness, a form of settling into being in the world that was both private and public, a space of daily use and of creation, far from his roots as the son of a working-man and yet made out of that very past.

The house can become a materialization of our actions. It is in houses that we hold our memories – literal, tangible, mementos and also the small patterns of everyday habits. Hardy’s buildings collect not only signs of major events, but also the small, daily, remembered and reenacted motions of living. As Marty South wakes up in *The Woodlanders*, it is still dark but she begins “moving about the house in those automatic initiatory acts and touches which represent among housewives the installation of another day.” (*Woodlanders*, 19) Each day for Marty begins with a repeated action, a blind remaking of the world she knows in her bones. Yet as with Mrs. Bergson’s canning in *O Pioneers!*, the house is built as much as it is lived in, so that each act of habitation is also an act of change, of creation, and the house is as much a map of the self as it is a map of a former history.

The house, holding the accreted time of our youth, the accreted touch of our blind night-dark hands, the accreted memories held in the objects left behind, acts as a stationary shell. A

shell, like Max Gate, is formed from the inside, it is made of “daydreams of inhabited rock” and the excretions of the soft creature within. In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard describes to the mollusk which “exudes its shell,” it “lets the building material ‘seep through,’ ‘distill its marvelous covering as needed’” (106). The wall of the shell comes from the body of the inhabitant, the mollusk wrapping itself in the hard protection of its own histories. It works as a traveling home, a deeply private solitude. This fits our dream house, wrapping us in traces of our former selves, forming a thick protective layer between self and world. The shell however is unsharable and unrooted. It is a dream space but not a true space. A nest, on the other hand, is made more like our actual physical houses are made, with a separate material shaped to a new form. The nest, Bachelard and Jules Michelet, who he quotes, argue, is made from the inside out by a pressure of the body against the walls, the bird is “‘constantly turning round and round and pressing back the walls on every side’”. (*Poetics*, 101) Unlike the shell, the nest is not an excretion but the accumulated traces of former actions, a continuous contact between body and material, hands and walls. Michelet writes,

‘The nest is the bird’s very person; it is its form and its most immediate effort, I shall even say its suffering. The result is only obtained by constantly repeated pressure of the breast. There is not one of these blades of grass that, in order to make it curve and hold the curve, has not been pressed on countless times by the bird’s breast, its heart, surely with difficulty in breathing, perhaps even with palpitations.’ (101)

As Bachelard points out, this is a deeply human point of view. But perhaps in its very humanness it fits our imagining of our own inhabited spaces even better. The body of the bird, in Michelet’s romantic reading, is almost one with the interior of the nest. This oneness, however, comes only with pain. To come this close to the material world is to be wounded in the act of willful transformation. In space, or time too big, the danger of dissolution is of a lack of walls, instead here the danger of dissolution comes in the *making* of walls. The leaked self, the heart that

almost presses through skin in this longing for home, this painful making of home, instead of dissipating is captured in the walls of the nest, or the walls of the room.

For Bachelard, the nest is built through accretion and collection. Much as the town of Casterbridge is made out of layers of time, the nest holds the different phases of the self in layers of down and straw and mud. The home made out of our blind and “automatic initiatory acts and touches” that start the day, or the stairs fixed and bathtubs painted, or the dressers with “shining handles, and finger-marks, and domestic evidences thick upon” them, is made also out of us and our history. The nest metaphorizes our past and present and future sense of ourselves, with the longer time of inhabitation. *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* is very much organized around Tess’s longing for this solidified relation to, and home within, the world. While in some ways this is a deeply economic longing, such as her parent’s insistence that she live at the house of the ‘d’Urbervilles and work for it’s inhabitants, it is also, more intensely, a story of a personal longing for a home. In the long narrative of Tess’s search the Vale of Blackmoor is the first answer to her call for home; it is both the place of her ancestors (their bones are in the soil here) and the place of her new love, her new private life (she is totally unknown, obscure). Yet Hardy’s sense of time is a time of accumulation, personal and historical and biological, and the time of Tess’s stay in the Vale is such that it cannot encompass the many possible time-scales of a novel, or of a self, but instead only holds the layers of a particular summer, and a particular version of Tess. It is only Tess-in-love that is present in the Vale, and while this Tess is, to Angel, “so far-reaching in her influence as to spread” into the dairy house and “make the bricks, mortar and whole overhanging sky throb with sensibility”, it is a Tess that disregards all other Tesses, that is happy in her pure presentness. (154) Tess, in Hardy’s earliest vision of her, is a defined by the continuation of her past selves into her present self, for “phases of her childhood



lurked in her aspect still”, and it is her inability to erase the mark of the baby that died, of the man that harmed her, that leads, eventually, inevitably, to her own unhappiness. (*Tess*, 15) Just as the bones of Roman soldiers lie in the foundations of Casterbridge, child Tess lies in adult Tess. The home, the home that she could perhaps return to and know, that might, on her return, “open up,” as Bachelard writes, “faithful to our own being”, ought, in theory, to hold these former motions, these former layers of self as well. She is either a girl haunted by childhood, or a woman haunted by the loss of it. The house is needed as both a private space and a space to contain a history of being, to root her to a place so that she cannot be shuffled off and set to roaming.

In her childhood cottage, Tess finds something like the relationship of bird to nest. After her disastrous marriage, and the months spent at Flintcomb-Ash the starve-acre farm, she returns to a house filled with her mother’s illness and her father’s old age. There is a direct line for her between self and slanting building,

As soon as she could discern the outline of the house – newly thatched with her money – it had all its old effect upon Tess’s imagination. Part of her body and life it ever seemed to be; the slope of its dormers, the finish of its gables, the broken courses of brick which topped the chimney, all had something in common with her personal character. (*Tess*, 345)

Former stages of her childhood lurk in her face and the very structure of the family house haunts her person; she is made of the “slope of its dormer, the finish of its gables, the broken courses of brick which topped the chimney”. Hardy’s language suggests a brokenness – all the elements of the house mentioned are deteriorating or already faulty – but it also points to a solid hold on the world. The house represents a larger physical form of her “personal character,” both an example of and a shelter for her whole history. There is, in this world, a space that is made of Tess, a village that holds her roots, a piece of land connected not to the bones of the long-dead but to the

traces and dreams of the living woman. Rilke, as quoted by Bachelard, describes his childhood home, writing,

Indeed, as I see it now, the way it appeared in my child's eye, it is not a building, but is quite dissolved and distributed inside me: here one room, there another, and here a bit of corridor which, however, does not connect the two rooms, but is conserved in me in fragmentary form. Thus the whole thing is scattered about inside me, the rooms, the stairs that descended with such ceremonious slowness, others, narrow cages that mounted in a spiral movement, in the darkness of which we advanced like the blood in our veins. (Rilke, *notebook of Malte Laurids Brigge*, (fr. tr. P. 33))

Rilke imagines a return to a sense of space that is as much interior to the body as exterior. In her searching for a home Tess is also carrying with her “the rooms, the stairs that descended with such ceremonious slowness, others, narrow cages that mounted in a spiral movement, in the darkness of which we advanced like the blood in our veins.” She, like Rilke, both makes up her house and lives within it. “Part of her body and life it ever seemed to be” so when she travels away from it, it still exists in its new form as a building “dissolved and distributed” inside of her. In this rooted housekeeping, the person inhabiting the house not only comes close to it, but also becomes a part of it.

Cather explores the nest-house most deeply in *The Professor's House*, written in 1925. The novel is not as clearly based in the land as either Hardy's *Tess* or her earlier pioneer novels are, but it articulates a grounding in the home, and by extension the material world around it, that is akin to the creation of a homestead in Nebraska, or this cottage in England. Professor Godfrey St. Peter has a nest-like relationship to his home. His house is a rental, and he is in the process of leaving it, but just as Tess is so tied to her cottage, he too feels a physical aching connection between his body and his house. Bachelard in a discussion of the houses we return to, writes;

But over and beyond our memories, the house we were born in is physically inscribed in us. After twenty years, in spite of all the other anonymous stairways; we would recapture the reflexes of the ‘first stairway,’ we could not stumble on that rather high step. The

house's entire being would open up, faithful to our own being. We would push the door that creaks with the same gesture, we would find our way to the dark and distant attic. The feel of the tiniest latch remained in our hands. .... We are the diagram of the functions of inhabiting that particular house, and all the other houses are but variations on a fundamental theme. The word habit is too worn a word to express this passionate liaison of our bodies, which do not forget, with an unforgettable house. (Bachelard, 15)

The first description of habitation, or more tellingly of the moving out, is of St. Peter walking through the house, regarding "thoughtfully the needless inconveniences he had put up with for so long". These inconveniences are Bachelard's inscriptions of the house onto his body and his memory. He catalogues the windows that will not stay open and doors that will not shut and the bathtub that never stops leaking; "certain wobbly stair treads, certain creaky boards in the upstairs hall, had made him wince once a day for twenty-odd years", and the many nights he coated the tub, "clad in his pyjamas" with a new "one of the many paints that were advertised to behave like porcelain and didn't." (3-4) He has a physical and dynamic relationship to the very structure of the house, either fixing it or finding it at fault, simultaneously changing its surface and changing his own. The inscriptions of the house on the self point to the "passionate liaison of our bodies, which do not forget, with an unforgettable house", which is too strong a feeling, Bachelard declares, for the small word habit, and the structure in turn inhabits the Professor: "The feel of the tiniest latch remained in our hands. .... We are the diagram of the functions of inhabiting that particular house, and all the other houses are but variations on a fundamental theme." It is a space known deeply and practically; in the very body of the Professor lies a map of creaking stairs and leaking tubs, and the particular way in which he must prop his study window open, just as in the very body of Tess lies the roof and cracking walls. The life of the Professor and the life of his house are so inextricably bound together that with the loss of his house comes an almost-death.

As we have seen Hardy and Cather imagine the narrative of movement as inherently metonymic, and the house, in contrast, as metaphoric. Metaphor works as a branching out rather than a moving forward. Metaphor is not motionless, instead it has the ability to expand the singular thing out into a different entity while still remaining in place. Much like a system of roots or the process of tracing out bloodlines, metaphor attaches the body to the world and to the time around it. In saying this *is* that, the time of the house is pulled into the time of the body and vice versa. The metaphoric world of the house holds the promise of continuance, in the bloodline, in the accretion of history and material, in the solidity of walls as versus the frailty of flesh, in its pure stationariness. Bachelard even promises a permanence of memory, the latch forever remembered in our fingers, the door always opening to our touch. The marriage plot, the homestead plot, the nest we return to, seem to be the answer to that grey obdurate earth, to the fear of replacement. No one else will be able to replicate our relation to the very form of the space we inhabit, yet we can give a trace of it to our children. In the nest, Bachelard argues, survives the form of our body pressed against its contours. In the cottage Tess can store her phases, her childhood, her new adulthood. It is a living in place that only grows deeper over time, a burrowing down into the earth, an accreting of lived material around the soft body at its center. The time that once seemed too large – the biological desire for another, the historical force of what has happened before you and what will happen after you– is held in the walls of the home. While land, or time, on its own is too huge, too terrifying, too always drawing towards death to be still within, while darkness can feel too close and nature ever seems to be playing cruel jokes upon the tiny, insignificant, lives of individuals, with four walls the individual both protects the self from this oncoming force of time, and incorporate the vastness of it into it's own small space.

Making a nest is a process that includes the weaving of the self with an outside material. These houses are made out of the physical world as well as these layers of personal time. In *Tess*, she spends the days of her pregnancy locked in her old room in the cottage and here the outer plots and time-scales are reduced and woven with the self, made manageable and tangible; “under her few square yards of thatch, she watched winds, and snows, and rains, gorgeous sunsets and successive moons at their full.” (*Tess*, 85) Tess is not involved in the winds and snows and rains, but she watches and collects, and the room becomes a holding space for thought, the opening up of the intangible and private (what she sees, what she thinks) into the space of the material room. The time of seasons is wound into the biological time of her body and her pregnancy which is wound into her own thinking, and the few square yards of thatch.

The Professor’s study acts as a concentration of the gathering and weaving of the nest. The study determines the Professor’s interaction both with time and the rest of the world around him. His private space provides a clear form of what Jonathon Bate, in his discussion of John Clare’s nest-like poems, refers to as “dwelling with the earth.” It is the space where the interior and the exterior meet and meld; holding not only the private musings of a man alone, but the daily domestic world of his family, and the external world of guests, and books, and the scraps of history he collects and rearranges,

During the fifteen years he had been working on his *Spanish Adventurers in North America*, this room has been his centre of operations. There had been delightful excursions and digressions ... But the notes and the records and the ideas always came back to this room. It was here they were digested and sorted, and woven into their proper place in his history. (*Professor*, 16)

Here, in the study, he is somewhat isolated from his family yet not entirely separate, “only a vague sense, generally pleasant, of what went on below came up the narrow stairway”. As the “centre of his operations,” the study is the place wherein he collects the literal papers of his work

but also where he collects the ideas, the memories of excursions, the things he has felt and found outside the slope-roofed box of his room. The study has been occupied by the same thoughts that occupy the Professor, his dreaming has been inscribed in the wallpaper in his study, or those long talks in the garden, or the sounds of his family drifting up from below. The house of the body and the house of the house hold the same stories and the same things, one is simply made tangible, made thick and material, whereas the other always seems to want to slip away. The nest is a place of making. For Tess it is a making out of a new vision of the world to match physical, biological, changing of her body. For the Professor it is a literal making of a book. This is not space simply dreamt in, but space acted in and upon. It is in the space of both solitude and expression that these homes take on the shape of nests or shells, forming themselves out not only of the body, but of the thoughts, the dreams, the making of the inhabitant.

In this space of making the line between character, house and novel becomes blurred. Even as the Professor is making his book, and Tess herself, the author is creating, in the space of another small room, the whole of the novel. Writing and building are intricately linked. Herman Melville describes building “some shanties of houses” and “likewise some shanties of chapters & essays.” The two are, for him, part of the same process, the writing of a book mirrors the building of a house. Like Melville, writing shanties, Cather and Hardy split their narratives into parts (the Wild Land, Neighboring Fields, Winter Memories, the Mulberry Tree, Alexandra, or phase one through seven of *Tess* – The Maiden, Maiden no More and so on), each with its own interior space but leading into the next. And the making of the self in *Tess*, or the history book for the Professor, coincides with the writer’s making of the fictive structures that hold them. The link between the building of a house within a book and the building of the book itself is

emphasized in *O Pioneers!* through the character Ivar, a local eccentric, who lives alone in a sod house on the prairie,

Ivar found contentment in the solitude he had sought for himself. . . . He best expressed his fondness for his wild homestead by saying that his Bible seemed truer to him there. If one stood in the doorway of his cave, and looked off at the rough land, the smiling sky, the curly grass white in the hot sunlight; if one listened to the rapturous song of the lark, the drumming of the quail, the burr of the locust against that vast silence, one understood what Ivar meant. (*Pioneers*, 25)

He is not making anything as thick as a book, instead his making is closer to Tess's making of a world view. In the quietness, and openness of the house he has made, part earth part open to the sky, he has made a space he is at home in. Out of the pieces of his world, the quail, the locusts, the curly grass, he weaves a nest, he pulls together sound and sight and heat and is surrounded by them against "that vast silence". There is a triple act of replacement occurring in this paragraph. The narrator stands in Ivan's doorway and looks at his view, while in turn, the writer looks through the narrator, and the reader looks through a screen of all three. In Ivar's building of a world comes the building of the narrator's world, and in turn, the world of the book. We too are surrounded by the sound of the locusts and the quail against "that vast silence", in the time of reading or of writing we are both creating and then inhabiting this nest woven out of the world and the self.

The book then too, is a nest that holds our time and our selves. In its likeness to Tess's cottage, or the study, or Ivar's small home, the novel is a space we can inhabit. It not only gives us a sense of continuance, it gives us a way of being, of dwelling. Ivar is made a part of the prairie, his dirt home planting him firmly in the earth and his act of weaving drawing him close to the world around him. The truest form of "dwelling" as Jonathon Bate and Martin Heidegger define it, is a "sense of belonging." (*Song*, 260) Bate describes the poet John Clare stooping to

look at a nest, and writes, “to stoop towards it but still let it live, is to be gathered in the fabric of the earth and in being so gathered to secure the identity of the self.” (161) Ivar’s home woven out of the sounds of locusts, or Tess’s window view and cottage bound into herself, or the Professor’s study full of his notes, stoops towards the world while still letting it remain whole. Tess and Ivar and The Professor, through the making of their nests, “secure the identity of the self” against time and against space. The book gathers and is gathered, it holds the marks of memorable house and the wild land out its window, and in the reading of this looking and weaving and gathering, we too learn to dwell in the land. We too are, hopefully, “gathered in the fabric of the earth.”

#### V. The Ache of Modernism

*The river’s tent is broken: the last fingers of leaf  
Clutch and sink into the wet bank. The wind  
Crosses the brown land, unheard. The nymphs are departed.  
Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song. – T.S. Eliot, “The Wasteland”*

The cycles that Hardy recognizes in the piling up of time on time in the town of Casterbridge, hold, in some sense, the regeneration that Bakhtin describes in his idyllic chronotope, for until this moment things have continued onward and the new has lived in the house of the old. Yet, Hardy also represents the fear of oncoming time: it is progress and time that have erased Casterbridge. Progress and time send Grace into the arms of Fitzpiers, or Angel off holding hands with Liza Lou after the death of Tess. One is replaced within the same generation, or the next generation, by another, and while in some sense this only points towards Bakhtin’s dream of renewal, for a novel based on the individual life it is a transfer that is filled with a sense of ending.



This possibility of replacement, of a time that moves forward, is intense and constant in Hardy – underlying the need for a home, or a plot, or a lasting love is the face of eventual death. Tess articulates this fear of the end, a fear of the end that is not only specific to moments of danger but is ever-present and ever-possible, most clearly of Hardy's characters. After listening to Angel Clare play music, Tess describes her melancholy, saying,

The trees have inquisitive eyes, haven't they? – that is, seem as if they had. And the river says, - 'Why do ye trouble me with your looks?' And you seem to see numbers of to-morrows just all in a line, the first of 'em the biggest and clearest, the others getting smaller and smaller as they stand farther away; but they all seem very fierce and cruel and is if they said, 'I'm coming! Beware o' me! Beware o' me!' (*Tess*, 124)

The continuous line of days does not inspire joy, but instead seems to promise sorrow. Tess recognizes that time is drawing us forward, against our will, into a world bigger than our own ability to control. It is a world that refutes all attempts to touch it, or reach out into – the river saying “why do ye trouble me with your looks?”, the trees questioning, and Hardy's fiction is haunted by these to-morrows, lined up and waiting. This is an image of cycles, of a natural, or historical world, that does not expect human touch to last, nor human lives to mark it.

Endings, for Hardy, and for a novel based on the individual, are endings without the promise of rebirth. Angel, while listening to Tess speak of the days that say “I'm coming!”, is surprised “to find this young woman ... shaping such sad imaginings. She was expressing in her own native phrases – assisted a little by her Sixth Standard training – feelings which might almost have been called those of the age – the ache of modernism.” (*Tess*, 124) The age that Hardy is writing and Tess is living in, is one filled with “the ache of modernism.” Britain, an empire of waning greatness, is moving from expansion, to a cold, hard, contracted future. A few decades before T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*, Hardy seems to see in his own landscape the fisher king and his arid plain, where “The land's sharp features seemed to be/The Century's corpse

outleant". Hardy's "beware" cannot fully exist in Bakhtin's idyllic chronotope, nor is it one that fully exists within the realm of the family house, for it denotes an "ultimate end", a horror so great there is no returning from it. Instead of the dream of succession, or the tree that both sends roots down and keeps growing out, we are left with a tree at the edge of ending, or a line that cannot sustain itself. There are days ahead that call out not for more, but ring with the promise of our death, and the promise, therefore, of the death of the world as we see it through our eyes, or through the eyes of a certain character.

Cather, on the other hand, seems to accept Bakhtin's ideal of replacement wholeheartedly. It is, in some ways the pioneer ideal: I will travel across continents, I will wear my body to the bone, I will claim this land all not for me but for my children. In this way the dwelling on the homestead, the dwelling on the farm, is the perfect repository for this generational promise of futurity. When Jim Burden returns to visit *Ántonia* and her children, he finds her physically very changed – teeth missing, wrinkled – she looks far older than her years, but still "whatever else was gone, *Ántonia* had not lost the fire of life." (*Ántonia*, 336) She has poured all of her life and loving and work into this brood of beautiful, healthy children. As they walk up from the dark root cellar into the bright outer air Jim turns and sees them all "running up the steps together, big and little, tow heads and gold heads and brown, and flashing little naked legs; a veritable explosion of life out of the dark cave into the sunlight. It made me dizzy for a moment." (*Ántonia*, 338-9) *Ántonia*'s existence is not only filled by this new dazzle of life, but it is continued and amplified by it. The childless, almost transient Jim is both amazed and perhaps slightly envious of *Ántonia*'s home and family, of the pure force of continuing life that holds her to the earth and holds her to the future. The space of her home filled with the dozens of arms and legs and golden headed dreams of children, and this is enough to form a sort of happiness, and

assurance, out of the former fear and hard work of *Ántonia's* pioneer days. She is undeniably happy in her house.

Similarly, though more sorrowfully, Alexandra rests her sense of assurance in the world, and in the future, on the shoulders of those to come. Standing with Carl, after the death of her beloved golden brother, discussing the question of who will take her land, she declares,

The land belongs to the future, Carl; that's the way it seems to me. How many of the names on the county clerk's plat will be there in fifty years? I might as well try to will the sunset over there to my brother's children. We come and we go, but the land is always here. And the people who love it and understand it are the people who own it for a little while. (*Pioneers*, 209)

The impersonal and geological time of the earth is reassuring to Alexandra. It is a promise of futurity that lets her rest easy, both in the decision to hand her land to people she does not love, or did not hope for, and in the promise of a future goodness, an underlying belief in the land itself. Where Hardy is never reassured by the forward motion of time, or by the underlying surface of the earth, for it always feels on the edge of disappearing, Cather is content – sorrowful but content – in a love between person and place. She seems to see no need of being remembered by the human world, simply a need to “own ... for a little while” this earth. Bakhtin's image of the idyllic, reproductive, cyclical past is one Alexandra points to in her belief in this undying time, this undying place, and her comfort not in a biological replacement of herself, but instead by an almost spiritual reproduction – a copy of herself found years later in another form, other people dwelling on the same land.

While Cather seems able to rest in this image of the house and the land holding a calming home in the world, a sense of the individual extending forward through time through the life of another person, Hardy flatly refuses it. Tess is cut off from the long line of long dead d'Urbervilles, and Jude inherits only the traits of sorrow and disappointment (an inability to be

married, a promise of death). For with Hardy, the death of the individual is the death of the book, is figuring the all-consuming death heralded by modernism. The marriage plot promises a continuation of life. In both Hardy and Cather, however, children are either unborn or dead. Generational replacement leaves us with no clear feeling of happiness or resolution. Only Ántonia has children, and even then they are not Jim's, they are "Cuzak's Boys", admired but distant, not entirely solving the problem of Jim's future death or his complicated love for Ántonia. Hardy is particularly dire on this point. None of the marriages or love affairs in *The Woodlanders* produces children, and *Far From the Madding Crowd* is equally free of progeny, while *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is based around a confused process of fathering (is Elizabeth Jane Henchard's Elizabeth Jane or simply the later replacement?). Even when children are present, their lives never extend beyond the end of the book. Tess's son named "Sorrow" is born out of her pain, and lives for barely a minute. While in some senses the death of Sorrow allows Tess to recreate her life (at least initially) and therefore assures an almost-promise of more children in the absence of "that intrusive creature, that bastard gift of shameless Nature who respects not the civil law", Tess is as fierce at his death as she was in his birth. As Sorrow is dying she tries to "devour the little thing with kisses". After his death, while calm, she returns again and again to his grave. Although her siblings cry and long for her to "have another pretty baby" (95), Tess never replaces the one lost. The biological, chronological expectation of the child replacing the parent is entirely denied in Hardy's vision of the world.

The most horrifying moment of pessimism in Hardy comes with the death of Jude and Sue's children. Soon after Sue and Jude decide to be together he is sent a small boy named after Jude but called Old Man Time, supposedly, but not assuredly, the child of Jude and Arabella. He is a strange not-child, neither old nor young but somewhere in between – far too sorrowful and

independent for his age. As Sue and Jude move from lodging to lodging, pulling their three children and Old Man Time along with them, Sue admits to the boy that the children are the reason it is hard for them to find a room. Deeply distressed by his own trouble-making, the boy cries ‘But we didn’t ask to be born?’ guilty over his own life, and his own weight, ‘I trouble folk here. I wish I hadn’t been born!’ Sue, exhausted, replies ‘You couldn’t help it, my dear.’ In the morning she finds the children and Time dead in the room, he having hanged them and killed himself, “done because we are too menny.” The children that should ensure the promise of a future, the perfect mix of Sue and Jude, the end to this unconventional marriage plot, are dead – not by accident, but through the huge sorrow and guilt and fear of the other child, the one from the mismatched former marriage. The doctor that comes to survey the horror declares, as Jude explains to Sue, that Time is an example of future generations,

‘It was in his nature to do it. The doctor says there are such boys springing up amongst us – boys of a sort unknown the last generation – the outcome of new views of life. they seem to see all its terrors before they are old enough to have the staying power to resist them. He says it is the beginning of a coming universal wish not to live.’

The death of Time, his killing of his siblings, is a sign to Hardy of the times coming. Generations do not extend out beyond the edges of the novel, promising the perfect melding of two souls and the perfect continuation of house and love into the future. Instead the generations are killing themselves off. In contrast to Tess’s thirst for life, there is in *Jude* a “coming universal wish not to live” expressed in the body and soul of a child. The Darwinian sense of supply and survival, of life and death, overtakes the small child’s sense of individuality and love of both himself and others.

While Cather may promote a life-after death ideology of replacement, Alexandra’s sorrow over Emil, the death of the beloved brother and his beautiful love, is almost enough to

topple woman, and farm, and narrative. The active heroine stays bedridden for months, and it “occurred to her for the first time that perhaps she was actually tired of life. ... She longed to be free of her own body, which ached and was so heavy. And longing itself was heavy: she longed to be free of that.” (191) While she seems to recover and marries Carl, walking with him back home she is still, in the death of her brother, defeated entirely by a world too “heavy”. The promised replacement, the apex of her father’s dream for his children, all that was golden that was stored in Emil, that was to be handed from her to him, has been killed and dispersed. So while she speaks glowingly of the future, she is speaking of a future that is not truly her own or the one she would wish for. Her life or story will not continue past the edge of the novel, and neither will her true family. *O Pioneers!* ends with a marriage, but a marriage of older-age, a marriage of “friends”, a marriage with no clear promise of any future beyond the simple edges of the gate, the yard, the house. In the death of the children, or the death of Emil and Marie, locked in each other’s arms, comes an implicit declaration that love leads to death, sex to endings. So too, Hardy never once allows two lovers to meet and marry, they are either doomed to an unconventional life together as with Sue and Jude, or the locked doors and confused gazes of Grace and Giles, or Marty’s silent, but consistent, loving. In love, as well as in reproduction, the first choice rarely works and the lover, after the death of the loved one, moves from the obvious future (the perfect wife, the beautiful child) to the sideways replacement of second choice (the false lover, the general future).

The consolation, the final hope of a sideways, single generational act of replacement, is a hope we do not know how to feel about. These acts of replacement – Fitzpiers for Giles in Grace’s home, Liza Lou for Tess at Clare’s side, the generations of the future for the specific life and hope of Emil in Alexandra’s will – are acts that leave the reader unsure and unsteady. While

the movement from Giles to Fitzpiers is one we can feel surely indignant over, particularly as Marty proves herself the strong lover in the end – sticking with Giles even in his death – the replacement of Tess with her sister Liza Lou is more complicated. It is a replacement that Tess herself promotes, for she has, as Tess tells Angel, “all of the best of me without the bad of me; and if she were to become yours it would almost seem as if death had not divided us ...” (*Tess*, 394) Liza Lou promises to be another version of Tess free of history, free of markings, free of child and sin and sorrow. She is, in a sense, a perfect replacement. Yet she is not Tess. And the marks that make Tess tie her to Angel as well as to the murder she has committed and the child she has lost. Therefore when we see Angel and Liza Lou, walking off hand in hand from the site of Tess’s hanging, we do not follow them but instead stay still and apart, watching as they “joined hands again, and went on.” We, somehow, end however with the line “ ‘Justice’ was done, and the President of the Immortals ... had ended his sport with Tess.” (397) The book continues for a few more sentences, shows the walking away of Liza Lou and Angel, but as readers our attachment ends when our character ends, and the act of replacement seems simultaneously extraneous and unnecessary and almost traitorous. How are we to feel about the death of Tess? How are we to feel about her place in the world, in her future home, being occupied not by her, but by her younger sister? This is a marriage plot we are not prepared for, an ending we can neither like nor hate.

Reproduction, in Bakhtin’s narratological sense, in both of these authors has come decidedly to a halt. The marriage plot has dissolved at the end of the novel. The world, the book, the metaphor, the house, cannot hold both the biological move forward and this individual desire to be a singular person, or for the reader to love, and follow, a single character. While promised to us, this replacement fails, and we are left with the limits of a life, the decline of the

d'Urbervilles, the death of two young people in an orchard in the sun. Neither house, nor novel, can hold the family together, and the bloodlines disappear with the ending of book, or life, or house.

## VI. Disappearing Houses

*There was not a soul but knew how shallow-rooted the whole town was. It flooded yearly, and had burned once. ... There were reports that things were otherwise elsewhere, and anyone, on a melancholy evening, might feel Fingerbone was a meager and difficult place.*

*So a diaspora threatened always. (Housekeeping, 178)*

The stability of the houses that we have imagined as our saving grace, the solid form we can return to, is as shaky as the stability of generations. Hardy is fascinated by the instability of the idea of lifeholds, and they dot his novels. Lifeholds are tenancies that last only as long as the person who lives in the house – specifically the father or husband – is alive. In selling the rights of the future of the house to the local estate, there is both the draw of money and the hope that the lifehold will simply be bought again. With the death of a man, however, his entire family is left homeless. This in part arises with the move from a feudal system, based on commons and long known and owned places, towards the more industrialized world of trade fairs and transients and year-long positions. In “the Dorsetshire Labourer,” Hardy describes the newly homeless agricultural workers,

Many of these families had been life-holders, who built at their own expense the cottages they occupied, and as the lives dropped, and the property fell in they would have been glad to remain as weekly or monthly tenants of the owner. But the policy of all but some few philanthropic landowners is to disapprove of these petty tenants who are not in the estate's employ, and to pull down each cottage as it falls in, leaving standing a sufficient number for the use of the farmer's men and no more. (Dorsetshire)



The emotional connection between person and land or house, a connection based on coexistence and close-knowing, is disrupted by the ends of these tenancies and by the insertion of the economic and impersonal need for money. With the death of a family member comes the loss of the house. So human loss is tied to economic and practical loss. The death of Marty South's father is the end not only of her hold on the house, but also of Giles' hold on that house and his own. The land is returned to the landlord, or in the case of Giles, Mrs. Charmond, and she can do with it what she will. As many do, she decides to tear it down – leaving the town perhaps more picturesque, but Giles homeless and unable build a future life, for as a town-member sings, 'O Giles, you've lost your dwelling place, / And therefore, Giles, you'll lose your Grace.' (*Woodlanders*, 99) Similarly, Tess's family loses their cottage with the death of her father. The rule of the lifehold entails inevitable loss. Dwelling becomes tied to and dependent on the inevitable forward rush of time and oncoming of death. The house, like the book, is "pulled down" with the end of the individual. Yet more often than not, the main character lasts beyond this unhousing – so rather than person and house expiring at once, the person is left houseless, shellless, homeless.

The Professor too is living in a house that has leaving built into it; it is not his own home but a rented one, and the novel traces his reluctant, and slow, departure from the house that was not officially his but held all of his work, his family, his friendship, to the newly built, newly owned house bought with the money he has made writing books in his study. The new house comes out of the study of the old, yet it is a new house that seems too big and unfitting at least for the professor. He is not at home in a house that will never hold his children, that does not need anything fixed and therefore does not need the close melding of person and broken stair that the rented house called for. Cather's novel is built around leaving, or not leaving, and even as the

personality and closeness, the relationship between human and house is built, the house is being emptied out and moved past.

Loss of home is often associated, most blatantly in Hardy and more subtly in Cather, either with death or failure. Lifeholds literally end with death, and for Giles it is a sign of his inevitable loss of Grace (and therefore the future he had planned) and for the pioneers the loss of home is either a giving up (we cannot tough it out) or a death (we are exposed to the inhospitable world of wind and rain). For Jude and Sue it is an abstract path from lack of home to death of love and family, but it is clear nonetheless, as it is their continual refusal at inn after inn, house after house, that leads Old Man Time to the conclusion that there were “too menny” children. Giles Winterbourne gives up his small cottage to Grace in her moment of need and stays outside in a storm although he is ill. “To all this weather Giles must be more or less exposed; how much she did not know. ... Whatever he was suffering it was she who had caused it; he had vacated his single-roomed hut on account of her.” (*Woodlanders*, 277) His death is caused as much by his former illness as by his current unhousing. By the time she recovers him from the woods he is beyond speaking and soon passes on. Michael Henchard dies in an abandoned house on a borrowed bed, and with his last written words cuts off all chance at continuing belonging or being at home by writing:

“That Elizabeth-Jane Frafrae be not told of my death, or made to grieve on account of me. ‘& that I not be bury’d in consecrated ground. ...

‘& that no flowers be planted on my grave.

‘& that no man remember me.

‘To this I put my name.” (*Casterbridge*, 251)

In the unknown crumbling cottage he cuts himself off from every attempt to house him after death. Henchard’s extreme, even aggressive, homelessness erases him, and his mark, from the

world. He is, in his death, trying to cut free from any claim to home. The weight of this desire no longer to live, to cut the self off from everything, aligns with the ache of modernism. In his forceful unhousing Henchard pre-empted the cold grey of coming years, the tomorrow and tomorrow receding into the future, the date of his death secretly hidden amongst the rest. This is a man who knows he has already been replaced, whose house has been filled with the next generation, and who lives, and dies alone.

With loss of house, there is also a loss of “dwelling”, of a way to live in the world. In Henchard’s unhousing there is also un-selfing. He erases all ties to others, to history, to money and position, and most importantly, to the single person who knows the most about him – his adopted daughter. He is as much denying himself rest as he is denying himself a self to continue past his fading life. Tess, unlike Henchard, is forced into homelessness with the death of her father. As her family moves out of the family house and into the wagon that is to take them to a new home Tess finds herself at the church that holds the remains of the d’Urberville knights. Hardy’s protagonist looks at a life turned inside out:

Tess gazed desperately at the pile of furniture. The cold sunlight of this spring evening peered invidiously upon the crocks and kettles, upon bunches of dried herbs shivering in the breeze, upon the brass handles of the dresser, upon the wicker-cradle they had all been rocked in, and upon the well-rubbed clock-case, all of which gave out the reproachful gleam of indoor articles exposed to the vicissitudes of a roofless exposure for which they were never made. (*Tess*, 362)

Her entire history of self and family is exposed to the “vicissitudes of a roofless exposure”. This family’s history, the things that tied them to place and earth, are unprotected both against the weather and the sunlight that “peered invidiously”. There is nothing to protect the family from outsiders looking. In a desperate attempt to hold it all together her mother suggests they huddle right up against the church, in the shadow of the tomb of their ancestors. In their unhousing they

try to reverse time or claim kin – to gain shelter in that which is dead. And, at last, Tess herself is undone. With the arrival of Alec comes the promise of a house, and she gives her hand, her hope, her life, in exchange for something to contain them all. Her seducer promises a reconstitution of home, yet she ends up in a seaside hotel – the ultimate way-station, the nowhere of public and private mixing – and her family is far from her, settled somewhere new, in a new cottage that is not her home.

In tying the person to the house, in dwelling in the world, in assigning the house the role of personality holder, and memory keeper, Hardy is also tying character to the uncertain world of ownership and tenancy, to the material body of houses. As much as this can be an expansive tying, the body bigger in connection with the house, it can also be deeply dangerous. Giles loses his childhood home and with it all of the markers not only of his future aspirations but also of his former self. Giles, mourning the house once it is torn down, returns to its foundation again and again.

Even in the gloom he could trace where the different rooms had stood; could mark the shape of the kitchen chimney-corner, in which he had roasted apples and potatoes in his boyhood, cast his bullets, and burnt his initials on articles that did and did not belong to him. The appletrees still remained to show where the garden had been, the oldest of them even now retaining the crippled slant to the north-east given them by the great November gale of 1824 ... They were at present bent to still great obliquity by the heaviness of their produce. Apples bobbed against his head, and in the grass beneath he crunched scores of them as he walked. There was nobody to gather them now. (*Woodlanders*, 167)

As much as this points to Bachelard's dream of self and house tied into one, it also points to the danger of tying your body to another – be it the body of a person, or a plant, or a structure. In the loss of the house comes the loss of the “roasted apples and potatoes” of his “boyhood,” or the initials burned into things that “did and did not belong to him.” Giles's sorrow is almost palpable, held in the crunch of unpicked apples and the ache of a missing limb. The slant of trees

runs in his blood and bone, in his internal store of stories and facts. In the loss of home comes the loss of a whole system of the world – a collection of signs and stories, of traces of the former phases of yourself. In losing a house either you haunt it, as Giles does, following its outline (“he could trace where the different rooms had stood”) in the absence of its reality, or it can haunt you – living in your bloodstream, your dreams, your images of home. You leave a place behind and while it may no longer exist in the world it travels in your guts, so that when you dream of return, or think momentarily of simply the word “home” you picture the front steps, the swing of the door into that hallway, that kitchen, that drawing room, that study. You ache for the slow curl of smoke. And in the absence of this place, this home, this hold on you, something goes loose and wild, goes sad and long. Tess gives in to her unhousing and Giles takes to travel.

For Cather, this loss of home is never made whole. Ivar simply transfers to Alexandra’s house, and while perhaps it is not as wholly beautiful, there are new charms to his company. The Professor almost kills himself instead of leaving, refusing to travel and remaining wrapped in a blanket in his study, or dreaming in his back garden of the days when it was full. When he is alone in the house the world of before comes back to him most fully. He almost suffocates and still he remains, tied to wallpaper and stairs and the tub that will not be fixed. Greater than fear of death, is fear of loss of home and the dissolution of the self. Death is as much a part of the house as life is. “When he was eight years old, his parents sold the lakeside farm and dragged him and his brothers and sisters out to the wheat lands of central Kansas,” Cather writes, “St. Peter nearly died of it. ... No later anguish, and he had his share, went so deep or seemed so final.” (*Professor*, 21) It is this almost death that he remembers and fears in leaving “home” once again.

Carl Linstrum is perhaps the most blatantly unhoused character in a Cather novel.

Returning home to Alexandra describes modern living in terms far more grim than glorious,

‘Freedom so often means that one isn’t needed anywhere. Here you are an individual, you have a background of your own, you would be missed. But off in the cities there are thousands of rolling stones like me. We are all alike; we have no ties, we know nobody, we own nothing. When one of us dies, they scarcely know where to bury him. Our landlady and the delicatessen man are our mourners, and we leave nothing behind us but a frock-coat and a fiddle, or an easel, or a typewriter, or whatever tool we got our living by. ... We have no house, no place, no people of our own. We live in the streets, in the parks, in the theatres. We sit in restaurants and concert halls and look about at the hundreds of our own kind and shudder.’ (*Pioneers*, 83)

To be free, according to Carl, is also to have no personality – to live only with the landlady and the delicatessen man paying attention, with only small and transitory spaces to inhabit. City folk own nothing to tie them to a material world, and in their movement there is no sustained structure of seeing and being, no quiet study, no parlor to meet people in. Without a place in the world we are in danger of being unmissed, untied, unknown. In freedom, there is another loss of self, without the mediating, thickening, role of the home.

The writing of a book is a further step towards, or acknowledgement of, the loss and impossibility of being-at-home-in-the-world. In moving into the study, but then from the study into a book, the Professor, or Hardy, or Cather, moves out of the world of the known and tangible, the marked and held, and towards a space with no boundaries or persistent time. In *The Theory of the Novel*, Georg Lukacs quotes Novalis saying “Philosophy is really homesickness ... it is the urge to be at home everywhere.” (29) The novel, he continues is “like no other, an expression of this transcendental homelessness.” (41) Unlike the epic, a novel captures a world of longing and confusion. In a discussion of different forms of homelessness identified by Lukacs and Bakhtin, John Nuebour writes,

‘the epic world is stationary and to be overseen at a single glance’ (Lukacs). The novel, whose constitutive principle is temporality, emerges once this timeless Heimat fades. Novelistic action becomes a fight against time, its temporality revealing transcendental homelessness. (Nuebour, 534)

Time, in the novel, points to an always present motion away from our origins. The novel moves us from beginning to end, front to back, here to there, now to then, in a “fight against time”.

Stillness is surrounded by the need for time to move. The novel exists in relation to a time that cannot be easily held, to Beer’s three-tiered plot system for Hardy and the onward draw, both of the west and of the person, for Cather. In the book, a new home is created, a home untethered from the world of the earth, the tangible, the dirt, the rooted. As much as we are uprooted by the collapse of the house, we are uprooted by the novel itself. By reading we move from the bodily merge of world and self, to the interior, solitary, bodiless space of language.

Metaphor, the thing standing in for the house in the world of the novel, the act we are enacting as we read (we are not touching the house, we are not living in it, we are simply saying what we think it might be), is as immaterial as biological time is forceful. In metaphor, the body can be lost. Standing in for the solid walls of home, novels’ readers move out of the immediate present and into the realm of words and associations. Fiction is as intangible as wood and stones are solid. Maurice Blanchot writes in *The Work of Fire*, “A word may give me its meaning, but first it suppresses it. for me to be able to say, ‘This woman,’ I must somehow take her flesh-and-blood reality away from her, cause her to be absent, annihilate her” (322). In the act of writing the house, Hardy and Cather are theoretically annihilating “flesh and blood reality” – pulling farther and farther from the rooms that hold and bind, and towards the intangible, the unholdable, the wandering transient unable to sink roots into the ongoing time of biology and geology, unable to grab hold of the wind-blown surface of the prairie, or to live solidly in stillness. The Professor, as he moves farther and farther into the world of his work and his study is

reprimanded by his wife. ‘Well, the habit of living with ideas grows on one, I suppose’, he responds, and she declares, ‘I think your ideas were best when you were your most human self.’ (*Professor*, 142) There is a danger in the realm of ideas and words not only of losing a place in the world, but of losing your human self.

Even as the house becomes more and more immaterial, however, and we as livers in the book or the house grow distant from reality, the shape, and idea, and dream of the house remains (in the body of the former inhabitant, in the book, in the memory of the place you want to return to). So the death that lives in houses, and the death of the house in the book, leads us towards haunting even as we move away from the body. Jim Burden, after the death of Mr. Shimerda, imagines his soul to be “lingering about in this world” and coming to rest in Jim’s house, as if he “had let the old man in out of the tormenting weather and were sitting there with him.” (101) He sits and thinks on Mr. Shimerda until “such vivid picture came to me that they might have been Mr. Shimerda’s memories, not yet faded out from the air in which they had haunted him.” (102) In the presence of death the house becomes the repository of all the memories now wandering without a body. The abandoned house, or the abandoned body, is prone to haunting – to the queer old reverberations of stories, and the memories of a dead man. As Bachelard writes, “a living creature fills an empty refuge, images inhabit, and all corners are haunted , if not inhabited” so that even in the absence of life, the house remains filled with haunting images. (Bachelard, 140) Giles Winterbourne haunts his orchard, even in its emptiness the mere traces of his formerly inhabited corners are enough to inspire day-dreams and longings. They are enough to remind him of death itself, as it comes to inhabit empty rooms. Bachelard quotes a poet saying,

The room is dying honey and linden



Where drawers opened in mourning

The house blends with death

In a mirror whose lustre is dimming. (Jean Boudeillette, *Le droit d'asile*, seghers. P. 26)

Death merges, through language, through memory, with the space of inhabitation, so as much as a house promises a self, it also promises the death of the self, or the haunting of the self. Giles's own death seems to overtake the world:

The whole wood seemed to be a house of death, pervaded by loss to its uttermost length and breadth. Winterborne was gone and the corpses seemed to show the want of him; those young trees, so many of which he had planted, and of which he had spoken so truly when he said that he should fall before they fell, were at that very moment sending out their roots in the direction that he had given them with his subtle hand. (*Woodlanders*, 293)

The world once touched, and lived in by Giles "seemed to show the want of him". The house as much as protecting from death holds it present and still. In books ordered to join the material world of houses and the immaterial world of language, the forces of time rush on and on. As we move to the end of the novel, we too are further made homeless, we lose the spaces we wish to hold onto.

As much as Hardy's Tess aches for home she also aches to be apart from it, "she might be happy in some nook which had no memories. To escape the past and all that appertained thereto was to annihilate it, and to do that she would have to get away." (99) And she tries to annihilate the past. But it simply cannot be done. Tess returns, again and again, both to her former home and her former self. Marilynne Robinson writes,

The force behind the movement of time is a mourning that will not be comforted. That is why the first event is known to have been an expulsion, and the last is hoped to be a reconciliation and return. So memory pulls us forward, so prophecy is only brilliant memory – there will be a garden where all of us as one child will sleep in our mother Eve, hooped in her ribs and staved by her spine. (*Housekeeping*, 192)

The promise of Tess's future has always been a journey back to the house of her birth, even as she longs to erase it forever. The most lasting spaces of memory are those of death for Hardy. Barrows that last for centuries prefigure the crypts that Tess and her family attempt to crawl their way into. Such structures summon up a past that cannot be reached, as Robinson argues, giving way to "mourning that will not be comforted." Either the house holds this mourning in its very shape, or we mourn into the shape of it – tracing as Giles does, the marks of his past on a corner of the world.

Hardy and Cather's novels are equally drawn finally to the space of the unhoused. In entering them we are not entering a dwelling so much as a longing for dwelling. Bright images of home rest on either side of the in-between space of searching and building, of moving from house to house, or collecting phases of childhood, or touches, or distinguishing the true house from the false. We have our origins, and we dream we will find the same space in our future, as our resting place. We start with houses, thick with time – our cottages, our kitchen corners – and in them there is hope for the future – we had that once, we can have it again. As Robinson writes, the mirror image of the past is projected onto the future – as "brilliant memory" – resting at last in the hooped ribs of our mother. We once were cradled by ribs, held in her womb. Tess was once a girl tied to sloping roof and chimney and a land spreading out around it, and Giles had a history spelled out in stones, in material. We had a shell protective but letting in a window of light. These novels occupy a space of mourning. The house may try to push against time, but it, and the longing for it, only winds us deeper into its layers, its impossible returns and improbable hopes. These novels occupy the space after loss. Only barrows, houses of death, truly last. Houses, or the memory of houses, naturally hold loss, but are too slipping to hold joy in perpetuity.

Time and stillness and the hooped security of our garden of origin on their own do not make good subjects for a novel. They exist outside of time. So then, we cannot rest. Rather than living in a home we are living in the longing for it, the building of it. The aftereffects of its loss. As readers of Hardy and Cather we are not living entirely in nests, nor in grand open spaces, but in the structures of these home-bound yet homeless novels. In the nests we build out of words and loss and mourning, it seems we are left floating, yet perhaps we can make something out of this mess of rooms, and shanties, and chapters. We must tie ourselves to the world not with solid foundations, but instead with the words of our longing and our memory. The words that made the house. Out of our fight with time. Blanchot turns to the materiality of words as his answer to sorrow and fear,

My hope lies in the materiality of language, in the fact that words are things, too, are a kind of nature... A name ceases to be the ephemeral passing of nonexistence and becomes a concrete ball, a solid mass of existence; language, abandoning the sense, the meaning which was all it wanted to be, tries to become senseless. Everything physical takes precedence: rhythm, weight, mass, shape, and then the paper on which one writes, the trail of the ink, the book. Yes, happily language is a thing: it is a written thing, a bit of bark, a sliver of rock, a fragment of clay in which the reality of the earth continues to exist (Blanchot, 327-328)

So perhaps in reading *Tess* or *O Pioneers!* we have a house of words. Cather promises the earth to those who love it, and maybe that is as much as we can take. A deep love of the world of words and the world of trees and broken stairs and ugly wallpaper. An intense articulation of a single study, or farm, or house. Of the link between bone and wood, equating hoops of ribs with the ridges of a high, arched ceiling. Perhaps we can only try to haunt the things, the places, the world we love. We must create, in this haunting, in this book, a new study. This is not a simple form of dwelling. It is instead the dwelling, the imagining, the haunting, made possible only through the act of writing – and reading – a novel.

## Hands in the Dirt: Narratives of Labor and Work

*They went through long swaths, short swaths, with bad grass, with good grass. Levin lost all awareness of time and had no idea whether it was late or early. A change now began to take place in his work which gave him enormous pleasure. In the midst of his work moments came to him when he forgot what he was doing and began to feel light, and in these moments his swath came out as even and good as Titus's. But as soon as he remembered what he was doing and started trying to do better, he at once felt how hard the work was and the swath came out badly.*

– Leo Tolstoy, Anna Karenina

When you travel down main street in Red Cloud, Nebraska, over fifty years after the death of Willa Cather, you see signs of her everywhere. The “Willa Cather State Historic Site” is painted huge and bold on one of the highest buildings in town, and there are Cather tours that take you from one building to the next, led in part by an experienced tour-guide and in part by a series of old signs giving chatty background information on the relationship between Cather and her hometown. Most present of all, however, are the plows that grace everything from these signs, to the now defunct original building for the Willa Cather Foundation (now located in the recently re-opened opera house), to an actual plow grafted onto a rock six miles outside of town. This image comes straight out of Cather’s *My Ántonia*, when Jim, Ántonia, and the hired girls, are returning home from a picnic and see a plow that has been left in a far off field. It is “magnified” by the sun, and contained within the “circle of the disk; the handles, the tongue, the share – black against the molten red. There it was, heroic in size, a picture writing in the sun.” (*My Ántonia*, 245) The heroic plow has become the symbol of Cather, in books, on houses, in her hometown. She is linked, in the minds of visitors, and readers, and in the space of the general American canon, to this iconic image of the farmer, the plow rising up on the horizon, part daily reality, part myth. With this single image she becomes the working-man’s writer – not

concentrating on the city time woes of Dreiser and Sinclair – but on the backbone of America, the sturdy farmer spending his days tilling the earth and taming the wilderness. The story of the pioneer starts with a wagon train and ends with a house, but in between – before and during and sustaining settlement – comes work.

### I. The Ploughboy, The Woodsman

Through the poetics of movement and the poetics of stillness Hardy and Cather are forming relationships, and attachments to the earth, either by moving, ever persistently over and around a small area, or by putting down roots, and building up a house, storing self and family and future in the walls of a building. Through either the promise of flight and return, or the form of a building, Hardy and Cather create in their novels, solid, physical ties between the person living in a place and the place itself. Yet walking comes with a wearing transience, an inability to rest that is entirely unsustainable, and by relying on a house to keep you still and safe in the land, rooted, you are relying on something as perishable as your own self. These ties are faulty, are easily broken, are in danger either of putting up layers between yourself and the world, or of tying you too deeply to the short lived experience of ephemerals. Neither traveling nor still, agricultural work, the daily labour of raising something out of the soil – of building, planting, harvesting, cutting, weeding, milking, butchering – is a combination of the two.

Hardy and Cather both write agricultural heroes. For Hardy, reluctantly or not, the main characters in his novels are often workers: Gabriel Oak and Giles Winterbourne, Clym Yeobright and Diggory Venn, and Tess Durbyfield and Bathsheba Everdene and Marty South and even, however he may hate it, Jude Fawley. Hardy does not write of the man or the woman, who, like himself, left and never returned to work the land – he writes of those who know how to use their

hands, who have spent most of their time out-of-doors, who have a large store of knowledge not necessarily in books but in their own bodies and memories. Cather's Alexandra is defined by her farm, and the work of the farm to this day forms the backdrop of *Red Cloud*. Driving through the town in the summer, you can smell the corn in the sun and see the dust rising from the long sweep of a tractor in a field. Even during a recession and an era in which farm jobs are rapidly being lost even as production increases, the people of the prairie here are unstained and dirtbrowned. Jeans crease and fold. A visitor too is covered in the dust flying in from the fields that wrap around the town, and the Divide, the place where Alexandra's farm is located in Cather's fiction, and where *Antonia* and Jim first explore the prairie, high and lonely as ever, holds waving miles of corn. The pioneer story ends in repeated, unending tasks. In a heavy body. In sunburns and fields that stretch on and on and need to be seen to. In expansion. Physical outdoor labor forms the superstructure for the rest of life on the prairie in Cather, or in the woodlands and fields of Hardy's novels. It is not only what makes life possible, it is also what ties the people who live on it to the land – it is labor, a direct engagement with and decision to change the huge space of the prairie that differentiates living here. Not only does the outer, non-human world, simply consume more space in Cather's imagined towns than in more populous regions or the city, it is constantly, and directly, engaged with in the simple daily tasks of trying to make a living out of the earth. Jim wakes up and does chores, *Antonia* plows, her children know every food stored in their cellar having helped grow and pick and can it. Hardy's *Marty* wakes each morning to the birds shifting in the thatch above her head and plans her hours around planting and cutting trees. There is a physical, and mental, intimacy with the material of the world that arises when you work with it day in and day out that forms the reason, the backbone,

for either wishing to stay or wishing to leave. Land connects you directly to the place that sustains you.

Work and Labor, as I mentioned in my introduction, while sometimes used interchangeably, have two separate meanings. Labor, as Hannah Arendt writes in her book *The Human Condition*, “leaves nothing behind.” (87) Work, however can mean both the product of work and the act of work itself, but labor only designates the act of working itself, it is “a verbal noun to be classed with the gerund.” (80) Work is distinguished by the “durable” objects it creates. “The products of work,” writes Arendt, “guarantee the permanence and durability without which a world would not be possible at all.” (94) Labor is associated with both perishable, things consumed as soon as they are made, and that which is necessary for life. Labor is how we grow things, how we eat, how we keep ourselves alive. According to Arendt, this is why there is a distinction, and a hierarchy, between work and labor: to labor is “to be enslaved by necessity,” (83) tied to the unending need for food, for shelter, for reproduction, whereas to work is to fabricate, to make the durable things that “give rise to the familiarity of the world,” (94) the tables, benches, monuments that make up our solid and memorable places. “Men,” Arendt writes, “their ever-changing nature notwithstanding, can retrieve their sameness, that is, their identity, by being related to the same chair and the same table.” (137) Throughout history, Arendt argues, we have searched for ways to distance ourselves from the act of labor, to create a “world between men and nature”, so that we are not made and unmade in the “eternal movement” of nature. (137) Labor, back-breaking and endless, is the thing to be run from, that is to be avoided in its intensity, in its lack of protection from the material, mortal, world. If identity is aligned with the “sameness” of chairs, than the shifting, changing, un-sameness of objects made and then consumed are the un-identity, in danger of dissolving the self.

Yet labor, too, has its own vibrancy and attachment to life. Labor engages not only the pain of struggle against necessity, against the harshness of land and place, but also the enjoyment of the products of that struggle. Work exists in a separate world, but labor engages the land deeply, both in the actual act of farming – growing, weeding, planting, killing – and in the act of consumption. Arendt writes,

On its most elemental level the "toil and trouble" of obtaining and the pleasures of "incorporating" the necessities of life are so closely bound together in the biological life cycle, whose recurrent rhythm conditions human life in its unique and nonlinear movement, that the perfect elimination of the pain and effort of labor would not only rob natural life of its most natural pleasures but deprive the specifically human life of its very liveliness and vitality. (120)

The act of labor – Arendt paints it as in unending circle of action and consumption – is cyclical. As soon as something is made it is used, as soon as it is used another is made. There is nothing left behind and therefore labor only exists in its happening. Labor ties the laborer to the necessities of life, to “the darkness and pain of necessity.” (119) Yet it also ties the human laborer, unerringly, to life. Labor is a rooting, a deep engagement with the material of the action. In the closeness of labor and consumption comes both the pain and pleasure Arendt elaborates on, and too, a linking of the laborer and the earth. This “liveliness and vitality” comes both from the effort of labor, and the satisfaction of the fleeting product, being a tie to the “the biological life cycle, whose recurrent rhythm conditions human life in its unique and nonlinear movement.” Life comes in this direct tie both to the patterns and the pure material of the world. In laboring with and changing the land around us and then consuming it – most literally in the form of food – we are incorporating not only our labor, but also the land that labor is enacted on. Labor is the closest link between person and land we have, a literal binding and combining of the human body and the earth.



Labor is the action of the merging between human and land, and the farm is the space that collects and then embodies this action. Alexandra's farm is made as much by her own hands as by the land itself, by storms and weather. In *Far From the Madding Crowd*, Bathsheba's farm is shaped both by the wild coming of storms and fires and by the calm organization and control of Gabriel Oak. In the act of plowing you are literally digging yourself into the earth, and in the overarching repetition of this work, day after day, in the creation of a livelihood that relies on wheat, or apples, or the clearing of fields, you have dug your whole life into the vagaries of weather, into the tiny details of the world around you – the language of small things that may help you plant, or cut, or know what is in store – into the limits, and memory of your own body. The land is unending in its demands. There is no conclusion to work like this, to keeping some things alive and growing and killing and consuming others. There is no end to the disasters that can come, or the huge, deep, joy in planting, in plowing, in being part of the land. It is a form of living that relies on watching seasons come around again and again, on patterns, on being willing to perform the same task each day – milking and feeding – or in such small, unending detail it seems to stretch on without limit – as in *Tess*, trying to eliminate garlic from the cows' grazing pasture. Labor has no climax, no endpoint, no built-in desire except to keep going. In this regard, labor echoes the danger of walking for too long, as discussed in Chapter One.

Writing is in some ways the opposite of this repeated labor, this unending engagement with the soil. It directly pulls you out of your body and into a small room, alone. It is a form of work, both creating a durable object to be left behind you – in the shape of a published book – and a world between the writer and the land, or the “eternal movement” of nature. Cather and Hardy seem to have chosen one extreme over the other. They write of laborers, but they dedicate themselves to work. They have consciously split themselves off from the rhythms, and ties, of

the life of the laborer by retreating to a room and putting words between the action of labor, the material body of the land, and themselves. The shape of a novel or a story does not easily align with the patterns of labor; it fits more easily the movement of walking, or the structure of a house. As was discussed in Chapter Two, Bakhtin's image of a story based in place, the idyll, while making time a part of land in a way that fits the rural writing of both Cather and Hardy, has little room for the actual labor or the actual body of the laborer. The Idyllic Chronotope is based instead, around courtship and lightness, around some summery scene. Nature is not present in its necessity, but in its motifs.

The body at work does not easily fit into our usual narratives. Often body and word seem at complete odds. The writer sits alone in a room, and it is merely his head, his mind, his collection of bodiless words that are being worked through and used. Reading and writing are direct acts of distancing the self from the world; you retreat to your room, to a chair in the corner, you cut yourself off both from company and from the physical world around you. Reading, or writing, seems to imply a necessary "cartesian contract which splits apart thinking mind and embodied substance." (Bate, 107) While there is a pen and there is paper, there is little else tying you to the tangible, as most of the action of imagination seems to take place apart from the embodied world. In choosing to be writers Hardy and Cather are directly choosing to leave farming, or work with land behind. Not only are they actively choosing another, more cerebral, occupation, they are working in a medium that does not easily convey this everyday time of labor. The novel, as we have seen, moves more naturally towards courtship and desire, towards drama and the arabesque, rather than the constant repetition of labor.

We have a fascination with courtship, and often the body within the cerebral space of imagination or fiction is evoked only in relation to this desire for someone, or for something. The

body can be seen sensuously, through taste, smell, sight, in brief moments of intense feeling. Even with this recognition of our bodies – of needs and desires – even as the body is put on the page, in words that call forth a physical response from the reader – they still fall into this idea of the split reality: embodied substance on one side, thought on the other. The body becomes a part of the plot, or the line between what is good (mind, thought, religion, duty) and what is bad (body, desire, sex, pleasure). Characters are either engaged in one type of being or the other type of being, but rarely both. Sensuousness is a pattern built on desire and satisfaction, on inevitable ends and a narrative interest based upon newness, or change, or oddity. It is an embodied world that is evoked and then left, or evoked only through a series of new experiences and new desires.

Within this frame of the body in relation to sex, or to taste, or to pleasure, there is little room for the repetitive, non-climactic body engaged in work. Elaine Scarry, in her book *Resisting Representation*, argues that work has both “a natural affinity with the novel,” being referenced often in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British novel, and that is “a subject that in some fundamental ways is very difficult to represent.” (60) Zola, Eliot, Dickens, Gaskell and Disraeli, she argues, all use labor as a central part of their narratives; it is only twentieth century criticism, with its “preoccupation with courtship and desire” that insists on the primacy of the courtship plot. (61) Yet the ways in which they address the central problem of work, namely that it is by nature “perpetual, repetitive, habitual”, all rely either on moments of collapse and repair, or in simply breaking the work down into its component parts. (65) Both representational strategies have their advantages, but both inherently break the stream of labor, they cannot show daily movement, only the moment of explanation or the summary of work that comes with restoring its function. Language, and novels, with their divisions, and their need for

narrative, for climax and resolution, both engage the time of work and yet cannot contain it in the whole.

Hardy and Cather, nonetheless, choose this form of the novel, and then return to labor anew. They move away from soil and morning chores and “moiling in the mud” for their daily bread, in their own lives, returning to labor as the subject of writing with an increased intensity of interest. (*Woodlanders*, 160) Daily, perpetual work, is the backbone of life in Wessex, and life on the prairie, and is, therefore, the backbone of these two writers’ perception of the world. In *Far From the Madding Crowd*, Hardy describing a church-like barn that has stood for centuries on Bathsheba’s farm, writes “the defense and salvation of the body by daily bread is still a study, a religion, and a desire.” (130) While this statement is tongue-in-cheek, borrowing the language of the church for the practical cares of the body, it still points to the necessity of food and work in Hardy’s world. Whatever the modern man may think, work is the foundation of life as much as any religion. It is a thing with skill (a study), a thing with power (a religion) and thing that forms our very selves, our very wants, our very movement forward (another form of desire). Labor provides the pattern that Hardy’s books, and Cather’s too, rely upon. They are as much entranced by the act of work as they are terrified by its slowness, its strength, its closeness to the earth and to a deeply mortal, and violent, world upon which men and women must labor.

Hardy, as was mentioned in Chapter One, is a writer of the body. “Nowhere in Hardy’s writing is there a description of an originating act in which the mind separates itself from everything but itself,” writes J. H. Miller in *Distance and Desire*, “His self awareness and that of his characters are always inextricably involved in their awareness of the world.” (Miller, 1) There is never a moment when the body, and its concurrent desires, as well as its more mundane daily being, is forgotten. If Miller locates Hardy’s fiction within the “world” in general, Elaine

Scarry cites his writing within the body: “human consciousness is always, for Hardy, embodied human consciousness: all states of being – not just overt, physical activity but even what appear to be forms of physical inactivity like reading or perceiving or feeling – inevitably entail jostling with the world.” (51) Even thought includes a physical response, and an inevitable mingling with and touching of the outer world, the spaces where your body ends and the next begins. In *Far From the Madding Crowd*, Hardy writes of a man in love, “a man’s body is as the shell, or the tablet, of his soul, as he is reserved or ingenuous, over-flowing or self-contained.” (*Madding Crowd*, 130) The interior mind of the man is written, almost literally, on his body and is therefore made present not only to the people around him, but also, argues Scarry, to the material world around him. We are never solely in our heads, for there is always an overlap between where we end and where the next thing begins. Hardy, in his love of detail, is always recording this overlap, this jostling of self and place.

The space where human and earth touch, and are both engaged in the work of changing the other, is the space that Hardy is most interested in occupying, or in trying to occupy. He is fascinated by the marks of the world left on the body, by people who not only shape the land into their image but are shaped by it in turn. Melbury, in *The Woodlanders*, can map out his life in the scars on his body,

That stiffness about the arm, hip, and knee-joint which was apparent when he walked was the net product of the divers sprains and over-exertions that had been required of him in handling trees and timber when a young man, for he was the sort called self-made, and had worked hard. He knew the origin of every one of his cramps: that in his left shoulder had come of carrying a pollard, unassisted, from Tutcombe Bottom home; that in one leg was caused by the crash of an elm against it when they were felling; that in the other was from lifting a bole. (*Woodlanders*, 29)

Where with walking one part of the world is constantly being replaced by the next, in work you are simply extending out and into the world around you more firmly. The logic of dwelling in

one place, or rooting, is rendered dynamic through the activity of working the land. For Hardy, the man at work is grafting himself to the material of his labor. He is part tree, part man, part the scarred space in between. Where memory is held in walking ghosts or haunting ghosts – whether through stillness or motion – in the combination of the two that is work memory becomes a living part of the body. The world does not exist outside of your limits so much as in the “stiffness about the arm, hip and knee-joint”. Topophilia, or the love that can arise between person and place, is held most clearly in the body, for Hardy, and in the tiny details surrounding it, the things known only when you are working in the same place the same way for a very long time, or when your life relies on weather and tiny mortal things.

This marking of world and self can take, as we have seen, the passing form of travel – dust, shoes, passing over – yet is intensified, and made more lasting, in the repetitive motion of work. Grace, in *The Woodlanders*, looks out the window of her hotel and sees in the courtyard her former suitor, Giles, making cider. He is hardly distinguishable from the material he is working with for “fragments of apple-rind had alighted upon the brim of his hat – probably from the bursting of a bag – while brown pips of the same fruit were sticking among the down upon his fine round arms, and in his beard.” (*Woodlanders*, 158) The material of this particular labor may not be scarring, but in this moment Giles is united firmly to the fragments of apple-rind. The apple-rind seems to bind itself to his skin (it sticks “among the down” upon his arm, attaching itself to the smallest particles), and covers him literally with marks of his labor. He is more deeply immersed in this cider-making, in the actual substance of the work, than Tess can be in the world she is passing through, and therefore the film that covers him seems also to define him. Grace seeing him so covered is reminded both of her former attachment to him (“the friend of her childhood”) and of her feeling of difference from him and his way of life (she looking out

from a hotel window, he covered in the material of a yeoman's work). Looking at him so covered over in apple she insists that those days of longing for him in childhood are over, "she had felt superior to him then, and she felt superior to him now." (158) She is not a laborer and is uncertain of her relation to this way of life. The combination of the repeated nature of Giles' laboring, (this is a smell, a material she has seen on him before) and the physical intimacy of worker and material, that makes this form of transfer between body and world all the more clear and lasting, establishes a powerful divide between them.

The intensity of this linking of self and work, seems to be increased when the work takes place in the woods, or the fields, rather than in the enclosed space of a hotel courtyard. In the heat of summer, the oat-harvest takes place on Bathsheba's farm:

... all the men were a-field under a monochromatic Lammas sky, amid the trembling air and short shadows of noon. Indoors nothing was to be heard save the droning of blue-bottle flies; out-of-doors the whetting of scythes and the hiss of tressy oat-ears rubbing together as their perpendicular stalks of amber-yellow fell heavily to each swath.  
(*Madding Crowd*, 232)

Everything is full of the sound and smell and heat of harvest. Hardy depicts a summer field that seems to press in towards the men in it. The air is "trembling" with heat, implying a tremor running from the air to the laborer, and there is nothing to hear but the sounds of labor— the whetting of scythes and the "hiss of tressy oat-ears rubbing together". Every breath, in this air thick with heat and oat, and under the sky that is not only monochromatic but also defined by the time of year and the wheat harvest, is filled with the taste of labor. The intensity of this description – the attention to the air, the shadows, the blue-bottle flies and the "tressy" (tress-like) oat-ears, adds to the feeling that all of these men afield, and even the women left behind in the house, are enveloped by both the harvesting that is about to happen (the whetting of scythes) and the place itself.

When labor begins this pressing becomes a breaking of skin. In *Tess*, while she is tying sheaves of corn, she literally has to embrace the bundle. Giles stands at a slight remove from the cider press and the apple-rind simply flies out to land on him. Tess, however, must actively engage with the material, must pull it towards herself as she tries to bind the stalks together. The material of the sheaf is much harsher than the light fly of apple-rind: “a bit of her naked arm is visible between the buff leather of the gauntlet and the sleeve of her gown; and as the day wears on its feminine smoothness becomes scarified by the stubble and bleeds.” (*Tess*, 88) In pulling this wheat towards her own body, in trying to manipulate and change its order, she cuts her skin. Where the leather and the gown do not cover her the wheat actually breaks her skin, so that wheat and blood are mingling as she ties bunch after bunch. Her skin, in the aftermath, is “scarified”, marked with the lines of her labor and by the resistance of the material. Where apple-rinds simply fall, here the world has left a mark. The wheat, and this embrace, leaves its mark on Tess. She bleeds into the field.

Labor is an attempt to alter the world and to mark the earth by force of human will, be it by chopping down a tree, or by planting a row of corn. In farming, or harvesting, the worker is engaged in a process of willed transformation. Scarry argues that by engaging this deeply with the world through work, the person is putting himself in danger of being changed as well, “he alters the world only by consenting to have himself deeply altered.” In the closeness that labor creates, the porousness of the body engaged both in toiling and consuming, there is no space in between body and land to protect it from the forces of nature, on a large or small scale. When Tess is bundling the sheaves there is a dual act of alteration: she bundles them together, removing them from nature, and in return they “scarify” her arm. She displaces the sheaves, and they leave her with bloody marks in return.



In that moment of change, the material and the laborer mingle and merge. In a similar moment of work and immersion, Giles cuts branches from the tree in front of Marty South's house and seems to disappear into treetop:

... he worked on, climbing higher into the sky and cutting himself off more and more from all intercourse with the sublunary world. At last he had worked himself so high up the elm and the mist had so thickened that he could only just be discerned as a dark grey spot on the light grey zenith (*Woodlanders*, 86).

This process of climbing up higher into the tree to cut more branches is also a process of merging. The longer he works, the less we can distinguish man from tree or tree from man. High up he becomes almost branch. As he cuts limbs away from the trunk, he is also bringing himself deeper and deeper into the space of the tree. He changes the tree, pollarding it, ripping branch from body, but as he reaches deep into his action, as he engages in the work of change, the tree comes to envelope him. Similarly Marty South is swallowed by branches on the ground, she is "an adept at peeling the upper parts, and there she stood, encaged amid the mass of twigs and buds like a great bird" (*Woodlanders*, 122). In engaging more and more closely with the tree (or the field, or the cider) the rubbing off of surfaces signals an extended moment of merging, the body of laborer changing the body of the material as the material envelopes, and changes, the body of the laborer.

In this merging of bodies there is an expansion, and a rooting, of the individual into his or her surroundings. Hardy finds a particular "charm" in women working in fields when they have become "part and parcel of the outdoor nature, and not merely an object set down there as at ordinary times." Unlike men, who keep, according to Hardy, an element of personality even when they are cutting or binding hay, "a field-woman is a portion of the field; she has somehow lost her own margin, imbibed the essence of her surroundings, and assimilated herself with it."

(*Tess*, 88) In labor a woman afield loses her “own margin”, she becomes boundary-less, without edges either to define her or define the material she is working with. In the loss of margin, not only is there a loss of definition but also a loss of space – there is nothing between woman and field, her personal boundary has been erased. Although Giles almost disappears, his outline smudgy in the misty upper branches of a tree, these female binders completely blend into the landscape and are no longer discernible as moving, thinking separate humans but only as a “portion of the field.” While in some ways this is a terrifying statement, seeming to imply that through work these women are subsumed by their surroundings, they become no longer human but instead merely moving faces of earth and soil, there is something that holds “charm” for the narrator in this merging.

While the word charm is used so casually in pointing to a certain interest female binders hold for this male narrator, charm is quickly overpowered by the action described – this is not a woman who simply looks picturesque in the field, her hair and her clothes sufficiently rural and corn-colored, but instead a woman who has “lost her own margin, imbibed the essence of her surroundings, and assimilated herself with it”. She is no longer entirely human, but the field then too is not entirely matter. Scarry describes this merging of self and world, writing that we cannot overlook the “largesse” of this exchange:

There is an enhancement – almost a physical enlargement – of the individual that results from his immersion in the materials of his work; for the two do not ... simply leave a residue on one another or transfer parts of themselves back and forth across an intervening space, but are instead grafted together so that there ceases to be a clear boundary separating them; the surfaces of the two are continuous with one another.  
(Scarry, 57)

Tess has taken the vastness of the field into the bounds of her own body. In merging each body takes on the properties of the other; the field has a certain living mobility, the woman has a

rooted hugeness. Through the intense interaction of place and person that occurs in work, the physical intimacy of the holder of the corn and the corn itself, two separate things can be grafted together. So that the solitary woman, with scars on her arm, is then “part and parcel” of the land around her, changing as she is changed, just as the man in the tree, or the man planting trees, or the man carrying a tree to market, becomes as much tree as man. For Giles Winterbourne “there was some sort of sympathy between himself and the fir, oak, or beech that he was operating on; so that the roots took hold of the soil in a few days.” (*Woodlanders*, 58) This sympathy, or the sort of merging that occurs when Giles kneels to plant, or climbs into the trees, allows him to extend down into the soil with the roots, to feel a “delight in the work” even when the woods are not his, just as this sympathy gives the roots a strength to start and take hold, a similar delight in living. No mere transference across space, labor in Hardy incorporates land into self and self into land, so that, at least for the moment of bundling the corn, or the time spent afield, the two are somehow one.

For Cather the interaction between farmer and farmed land is less rooted in the intensity of actual labor and more in a relationship between land and person accumulated over time. Merging of the human and the non-human comes most clearly in the realm of farming. The Bergsons, the Shimerdas, even the Shabatas, are tied to the land without any room for failure, to the productivity and survival of their land, but it is a survival we see depicted differently. As much as she may admire labor, she is farther removed from it than Hardy. Unlike Hardy, the son of a builder, she was the daughter of a fairly successful businessman, and they lived in the town center of Red Cloud. She is undeniably tied to, and surrounded by, fields and working farms, but she is, more so than Hardy, removed from the expectation of labor. Her representation of labor reflects this remove. Where Hardy, always the third person omniscient narrator, takes workers to

be his almost-eyes in his novels, Cather often focuses on the farmer through the eyes of someone who is not tied as deeply either to work or to land. Jim tells us about *Antonia*, we do not see her laboring, and in *The Professor's House*, Tom Outland's familiarity with the work of the land is given to us through the strange prism of a story within a story.

Body and land are linked in Cather either through the sweeping changes made by a single person on the shape of the land, each plough leaving its mark on the field, or through a sort of transmission, or effusion of land that seems almost bodiless. The earth on the divide has "such a strong, clean smell, and such a power of growth and fertility in it", a smell that transmits as much an idea of fertility and growth as the thing itself. In smell the sense of the earth is taken in and understood by the person smelling it. Carl looks out at the prairie and feels "something strong and young and wild come out of it, that laughed at care." (*Pioneers*, 33) The transmission of feeling or idea is almost bodiless, yet the idea and the feeling are bound tightly to a joy in the physical. The smell of the clean earth comes with the plowing of a field wherein the soil "rolls away from the shear, not even dimming the brightness of the metal, with a soft, deep sigh of happiness." (33) Carl's joy is something strong, and young and wild, something that lives in the bones of the country and is given, without mediation to the body of the young man looking at it. There is none of the mess, or the particularity of the movement from one body to the next that we find in Hardy. But between prairie and boy, or prairie and reader, there is still this connection of smell and strength, of a wild joy in each other's presence.

If Scarry insists on the *lack* of margin between worker and land, Cather always remains deeply aware of the preserving a line between the two. The relation between the person who labors and the earth itself, as embodied for Cather in Alexandra the farmer, is a question of proximity rather than of merging: "there were certain days in her life, outwardly uneventful,

which Alexandra remembered as peculiarly happy; days when she was close to the flat, fallow world about her, and felt, as it were, in her own body the joyous germination in the soil.”

(*Pioneers*, 135-136) Where Tess, or the field-woman, loses her margin in the field, Alexandra still remains firmly Alexandra, not a part of the earth but very close to it. While she feels the “joyous germination in the soil” in her own body, there is no room, within this sentence, for her body and the soil to merge. She has picked up the feeling of joy and fertility, just as Carl picks up youth and joy like a scent, but even as she attests to the link between her feeling and the feeling of the earth, it is linked across the bounds of her own body. Not grafting together, this closeness allows an exchange – not of surfaces but of feeling, an almost-planting of Alexandra in her fields.

Alexandra partakes of the joyousness of the divide, and she can bury part of herself in it without ever breaking the film that holds her separate from the rest of the world. As she drives home one day, listening to the insects in the long grass, she feels “as if her heart were hiding down there, somewhere, with the quail and the plover and all the little wild things that crooned or buzzed in the sun.” (*Pioneers*, 47) In her love of place she doesn’t so much become it as she buries herself in it. She sinks her heart in under the grasses, to live with all the little wild things. Her closeness to place, her image of herself buried in the grass, depends not on the actual moment of labor, and more from a deep love of the land. Emil, watching her as they drive back from the low river lands, sees her radiant with this attachment:

For the first time, perhaps since that land had emerged from the waters of geological ages, a human face was set towards it with love and yearning. It seemed beautiful to her, rich and strong and glorious. Her eyes drank in the breadth of it, until her tears blinded her. Then the Genius of the Divide, the great, free spirit which breathes across it, must have bent lower than it had ever bent to a human will before. (*Pioneers*, 44)

Unlike the deeply physical melding of body and material that Hardy imagines, this closeness is spiritual rather than bodily. While it rests in a love of the “breadth” of the prairie, a specific love and yearning for this Divide, this great open space with shaggy sod and wild winters, the closeness comes through the intensity of her “love and yearning”, and Alexandra’s labor comes out of that. Her brothers perform the actual labor of the farm, and by Hardy’s logic of labor leading to love, they ought to be filled with its taste, and smell, and knowledge. Yet they have no love for it, and it is only Alexandra’s passion for the Divide that brings her down into the grass, or into the knowing of place. Giles finds love through labor; Alexandra labors through love. It is her yearning for closeness, for something wild under the grasses, that ties her to the land as much as her economic need or her skill as a farmer.

Her relationship with the land echoes the intensity of a romantic relationship, Cather slyly stealing the attention we give to courtship and placing it within the realm of land and work. Alexandra has a recurring dream of being carried across her fields by a man “much larger and stronger and swifter” than any man she knows. She never looks at him but she can feel that he is “yellow like the sunlight, and there was the smell of ripe cornfields about him.” He is strong enough to carry her “like a sheaf of wheat,” and he takes from her “all her bodily weariness” that comes from the work of her farm. (*Pioneers*, 137) This man is place personified, her longing given a physical form. The language and power of the prairie is used to create this dream-man, this impossible man. Just as the Genius of the Divide “bent lower” towards Alexandra than towards any other human, she can feel the man in her dream “bend over her and lift her.” Her weariness with the land (the aching of limbs), her practical relation to it, and her deep yearning for, and leaning upon, the breadth of it is made human in the shape of the man who lifts her up in her dreams. Where for Hardy love of place remains implicit in the merger of self and land (how

can I love my hand, my heart), for Cather it is a realization of this love (“she had never known before how much the country meant to her”) that leads to a tying of self to place. Through a sense of loving her place that Cather’s Alexandra can feel, however marginally, a part of it, and feel, in turn, it as a part of her. Her yearning for the land, alongside her daily battle with it, comes in the form of a stooping giant, an unseen holder. She both creates him from her yearning, and rests, easily, in the hands of her creation.

When the land envelopes her (in his embrace, in the form of her heart in the grass) it is always an imaginary embrace – the practical land is held in cattle and pigs and harvests, or even simply in smells. But this imaginary embrace is filled with the tangible – the yellow light, the smell of cornfields, the chirping of wild things – that it becomes, in a way, embodied as well. Alexandra, and by extension Cather, does not picture a physical merging of self and material, but instead an imaginative one, where self and land are bound inextricably to each other in the realm of dreams and words and longing: a mixture of smell, taste, touch, with ideas of giants, and dreams of weightlessness. Where Hardy sees the merging of two bodies, Cather sees the touching of two separate entities – woman and land – at the strange dream margin, the overlap of smell, or of heart in the grass, or field in human form, that is created between them. Neither extends fully into the other, but they are woven closely, so that Alexandra, as much as she may admire Carl’s ability to move and travel and dream of moving and traveling for Emil, is tied, heart and body, to the land of her Divide.

The merging of self with material, or the love of land expressed in dreams and melded words always ends. The job is over and Giles comes down from the tree. Alexandra wakes up and has to oversee the branding of cattle and in the process stops thinking about her heart in the grass. Yet such moments exist within a recurring rhythm of merging and ending, of loving and

forgetting, for labor happens again and again. Human striving exists in an unending, nonlinear loop, as Arendt writes, labor, “caught in the cyclical movement of the body’s life processes, has neither beginning nor an end.” (Arendt, 144) Not only is labor unending within the scale of a life, the act of labor itself is often repetitive and cyclical. The swinging of a scythe, the milking of a cow, the ploughing of a field, all of these actions hold circles and patterns within them, Arendt declares that “labor but not work requires for best results a rhythmically ordered performance” (145). The repetition of the act of labor and within the job itself lends and becomes engrained in the laborer. This is a labor that is inscribed on the body, that becomes, in its repetition, the underlying fabric of character – what they know, what they think, what they observe. Aligned with the cycle of breath, the cycle of blood, the cycle of desire, labor in this sense winds its way into our bodies, our patterns of thinking, our internal structures. Marty South, out cutting branches with Giles, watches a row of three pheasants on a bough lit by the sun as it goes down; “‘It will be fine tomorrow,’ said Marty observing them with the vermillion light of the sun in the pupils of her eyes.” (*Woodlanders*, 63) She deciphers the language of the birds, and the sun, and the oncoming night in her bones, allowing her to read in the sheltering movement of pheasants the weather for the next day. In the moment of reading, the light is not simply reflected in her eyes but is “*in* the pupils of her eyes” (emphasis added). The act of reading and understanding, which is seemingly un-physical, here too, in its connection to every other act of work that Marty undertakes, becomes another form of merging with the world, or of pointing to the ongoing links between self and place. She knows these words, and in reading them she is reanimating all of her former moments of work and observation that are the basis of her knowledge. Cather too, points towards this love of the earth as an underlying, repeated, fact of Alexandra’s character. Living off the land burns her hands and her face a darker hue, and it is her love of place that allows her



to be successful, to think what sort of planting and plowing and working will fit the land she loves. From these moments of contact with the land around them, from the repeated action of living and working in a place, place becomes a part of the structure of the character's thinking and living. With the repetitive patterns of work, comes a collection of grafted moments building up to a singular superstructure, a self lined with the place of work, of yearning.

The conscious toil of adulthood, as enacted by Hardy's Giles or Cather's Alexandra, is founded in the experience of childhood labor, that is perhaps less conscious, but equally grounding. While Jim and Grace both leave their hometowns, and the work of their hometowns, early they are still tied to the rhythms of labor and seasons through a former, childhood closeness. Arendt describes the act of labor as engaged both in changing, acting towards, the land and consuming it. Grace and Jim, while not always out in the fields, are still aware of how labor shapes the land. Alexander von Humboldt, in an essay on geography quoted by Bate, argues that "humans are products of their climate, that the imaginative and aesthetic sense of different peoples is shaped by the landscapes, the very rock-formations which surround them." (Bate, 101) For Hardy, the knowing of the specifics of a place comes from both this working, and an interest in the details, an absorption of everything you see and taste and touch, that happens naturally in childhood. This is a structure so deep that even after leaving, it can remain hidden in the bones of the former child. Grace, wandering through a town, observes the signs of the season, once so much a part of her life and now somewhat foreign, in the apples piled everywhere;

The outskirts of the town were just now abounding with apple-gatherings. They stood in the yard in carts, baskets, and loose heaps; and the blue stagnant air of autumn which hung over everything was heavy with a sweet cidery smell. Cakes of pomace lay against the walls in the yellow sun, where they were drying to be used as fuel. Yet it was not the great make of the year as yet; before the standard crop came in there accumulated in abundant times like this a large superfluity of early apples, and windfalls from the trees of the later harvest, which would not keep long. Thus in the baskets, and quivering in the

hopper of the mill, she saw specimens of mixed dates, including the mellow countenances of streaked-jacks, codlins, stubbards, ratherripes, and other well-known friends of her ravenous youth. (*Woodlanders*, 158)

Grace is linked to the turning of seasons by her knowledge of the kinds of apples that grow in certain weather. This knowledge comes not from studying, but from her “ravenous youth,” from the pure number of apples she consumed. She knows the names and dates of the apples physically first, for it was only in this taking in of the material of her world, her ravenous eating, that she comes to this close linking of self and place. She knows this world through her body. It is only after eating that she came to language, the names of the apples that hold such a personal relation to herself (they are the “friends” of her youth). But this language, this thing that ought to be able to communicate her world to someone else, is actually only knowable to those who have eaten those apples and internalized their seasons with their growth. “Streaked-jacks, codlins, stubbards, ratherripes,” names themselves give us little sense of what they actually are. The language and the knowledge of seasons that hides under her skin is a personal and specific one, something that cannot be shared with people who do not know the names of apples, or the joy of eating them.

Cather’s lost natives also hold a sense of underlying structure founded in their prairie towns. The first narrator of *My Ántonia*, talks to Jim Burden on the train and they come to agree on their shared, and singular, youth:

We were talking about what it is like to spend one’s childhood in little towns like these, buried in wheat and corn, under the stimulating extremes of the climate: burning summers when the world lies green and billowy beneath a brilliant sky, when one is fairly stifled in vegetation, in the colour and the smell of strong weeds and heavy harvests; blustery winters with little snow, when the whole country is stripped bare and grey as sheet iron. We agreed that no one who has not grown up in a little prairie town could know anything about it. It was a kind of freemasonry, we said. (MA, Intro)

Jim and his companion agree completely with Humboldt, they are shaped and formed and made and their very language is based upon the geology of their surroundings – a “freemasonry”, or brotherhood of those who can speak and mean what they do – with its summer heat and heavy harvests and small towns. They are as much a product of smell and heat, of being “buried in wheat and corn”, as they are a product of their parents, or their education. This shape you take on under the “stimulating extremes of the climate” the specific “burning summers” when you are “fairly stifled in vegetation” and the winters so grey and terrifying, is not something that can be acquired later in life but comes solely with having “grown up in a little prairie town.” This place lies under our grown selves. The Professor in Cather’s *The Professor’s House*, remembers the lake of his childhood, “it ran through the days like the weather; not a thing thought about, but a part of consciousness itself. ... he didn’t observe the detail or know what it was that made him happy; but now, forty years later, he could recall all its aspects perfectly.” (*Professor*, 20-21) The particularities of place are as much a part of the self, and the texture of the professor’s world, as the weather. They are noticed only in their absence, for the lake is a “part of consciousness itself”, a part of his own structures of thinking and seeing. He may allude to the lake, but “all its aspects” are left unworded. Growing up, for Cather or Hardy, has a specificity of form that cannot be communicated, that is too deeply physical to be spoken or understood by another person.

Hardy’s Marty South and Cather’s Alexandra never let a space grow up between themselves and the land. In labor, or in the love-filled longing of Alexandra’s sight, there is a deliberate attempt, a dangerous attempt, to break through the margin that has grown between person and world – the film of memories, of names, of pure thick skin – to continue to create this self defined by the land. They are continuing the process of collecting and creating language, and

touch, and ways of unthinkingly moving through a place. In their repeated and unthought-of of merging with the world, they are avoiding perhaps even the need to articulate or translate their knowledge of place into another, more accessible language for it is still simply held within them, and they are still using it in the way and place it was meant to be used. Only those who break with the pattern of labor then feel the need to find language for it, or feel the lack of it in others, substituting the work of recreation for the labor of existence.

The merging of self and land seems to fall naturally outside of language, or to live in a series of signs and words so specific to a place that the reader as an outsider cannot access them. Marty reads the birds in a way we can only understand, even minimally, through her awareness. She and Giles speak ““in a tongue that nobody else knew ... the tongue of the trees and fruits and flowers themselves.”” (*Woodlanders*, 298) They cannot share their language of “trees and fruits and flowers” with anyone outside of their linked labor. Just as Jim and the narrator insist that no one else can know their world, or Grace uses a series of unfamiliar words that mean things to her but not necessarily to the reader, Giles and Marty know things that can only be learned through the body and through experience. Topophilia, this land-person link that Hardy and Cather return to so insistently, is something that does not readily conform to language, nor is it naturally transferable. And therefore, in a way, there is a whole part of the character that cannot be understood by anyone else. The intensity of Jim’s conversation with the narrator has to do with this feeling of understanding. This inarticulate, incommunicable experience points to a similarly cut off portion of the self, a space without language. Jim, thinking of *Ántonia*, writes, “whatever we had missed, we possessed together the precious, the incommunicable past.” (*MA*, 371-2) They share an unworded time, an unworded space.

In merging with the material world, in being like the field woman who, “imbibed the essence of her surroundings, and assimilated herself with it” you are suddenly no longer simply yourself. (*Tess*, 88) You are not limited to the edges of your own person. That deep, inarticulate substructure of childhood and of work, of the world known by you, solely yours, unless you share it with another person – as Jim does with the narrator, or as Giles hopes he still does with Grace. Or as Hardy and Cather try to do in writing. As much as we fear the overwhelming surge of space that can leave us swamped and dissolved, as much as we fear a time that will erase us in its grand sweeping path, we fear too, the simple limits of ourselves. And in the promise of merging with a place we have a promise that our self may extend beyond the exact edges of our skin. We have not grown up in prairie towns and woodlands, necessarily, but in the writing and reading of these novels Hardy and Cather are trying to reach for the inarticulate and under the surface. For the unworded.

In trying to make a book hold the unworded space of memory, there is a need to match the underlying structure of narrative to a way of living through toiling on the land. In *Far From the Madding Crowd*, chapters are given both a task name and a “plot” name: a chapter that holds a fight between Bathsheba and Gabriel Oak is named “Perplexity – Grinding the Shears – A Quarrel”, fitting the work of the farm in between the inter-personal drama of the characters. In *O Pioneers!* the sections match the changes and markers of the landscape rather than the changes in characters, going from “The Wild Land” to “Neighboring Fields”. Each chapter in Hardy often begins with the season, and Cather too follows the rise and fall of the year in her books. As much as these books are paced according to walking, they also follow the pattern of seasons and work. They hold as much of this tangible language as they can, trying to give us, in the worded novel, the unworded sense of a pattern of land beneath us.

## II. Death in the Orchard

*Of my conception I know only what you know of yours. ... By some bleak alchemy what had been mere unbeing becomes death when life is mingled with it. So they seal the door against our returning.* – Marilynne Robinson, Housekeeping

In this rootedness, this earth-bound narrative, we have the hope of not being alone, of not being a creature that simply moves in isolation, with the intangible weight (and voice) of a ghost. Labor opens you to the violence of bodies touching, and of bodies leaving – to the marks and scars of embodied life, to the overwhelming force of the world in place. Death signifies cessation, the end of labor and the end of the narrative of labor.

For Cather death and land are most clearly mingled in Alexandra's dream. After Emil's death, Alexandra dreams once again of the man who carries her across fields. For the first time, she actually sees him,

He was standing in the doorway of her room. His white cloak was thrown over his face, and his head was bent forwards. His shoulders seemed as strong as the foundations of the world. His right arm, bared from the elbow, was dark and gleaming, like bronze, and she knew at once that it was the arm of the mightiest of all lovers. She knew at last for whom it was she had waited, and where he would carry her. (*Pioneers*, 192)

The man who until now seemed to be an image of her fields, becomes instead an image of death. She is tired of life, and “longed to be free from her own body, which ached and was so heavy”, therefore this lifting of weight is read as a lifting away of life. (199) He seems to be as strong as the “foundations of the world”, godlike both in his strength and in his beauty (the gleam of his arm like bronze). And he will, someday, with this godlike strength, just as death will, someday, carry her somewhere far away to a place she has been waiting to see. His carrying and lifting

away of weight is analogous to death, to the moment of losing yourself (and your responsibilities, and your body) in the arms of something larger. In this release of her body and her responsibility that occurs when she lets herself be held by this tri-force of man and earth and god, Cather's Alexandra relinquishes all control and relinquishes her hold on life. She longs actually for this life to be taken away. He is in control. In allowing him to be her lover, her land, she is allowing herself to be held by death, to live in death's potential grasp.

Though Alexandra's dream is distanced from waking reality at least by the margin of sleep, it is tied enough to the texture of her days and her own wishing and to the reality of her brother's death, that it becomes an emblem of her world as a whole. In letting go of the weight of her farm, she is letting go of the weight of her body, the things that tie her to life and to her self. In allowing herself to be embraced, she is giving up her own being.

There is a violence to this embodied world that Cather and Hardy are both deeply aware of. In changing a material, Scarry argues, you are opening yourself up to being changed, and this changing is often figured as a breaking. Hardy focuses on this violent, and deathfilled possibility on a small, personal scale. Giles in the tree is snapping off limbs while it swallows him. Walking through the woods in the spring Fitzpiers comes upon Marty and Melbury and Giles and others all working, "the barking season had just commenced, and what he had heard was the tear of the ripping-tool as it ploughed its way along the sticky parting between the trunk and the rind." (*Woodlanders*, 122) Hardy stresses the intensity of breaking that occurs in work. With "tear" and "ripping-tool" and "ploughed" and the "sticky parting" and the delineation of the former closeness of "trunk and the rind" this scene, described so coolly in terms of the yearly nature of the act (the barking season), appears to be made up of the most violent of actions. This is not Giles planting trees, but men ripping them apart. The trees resist change and therefore the

changing is forced and painful. While in fact there is only one act being described – the ripping-tool being used to take the bark off a downed branch – the multiplication of words related to dismembering multiplies the force of the single act. Bodies have the ability to merge, but in this merging there is also a cutting and a breaking of skin, a jostling and rearrangement that results in pain and death.

To change things means the death of things. Labor has a certain brutality to it, and as the structure of a field is torn apart by a cutter – theoretically to sustain more life – the lives and shapes of those inhabiting the field, the tiny ephemerons underneath the grass, are unhoused and killed. In a harsh scene of both work and death, the wheat cutters in *Tess* destroy the animals they find there:

The narrow lane of stubble encompassing the field grew wider with each circuit, and the standing corn was reduced to smaller areas as the morning wore on. Rabbits, hares, snakes, rats, mice, retreated inwards as into a fastness, unaware of the ephemeral nature of their refuge, and the doom that awaited them later in the day when, their covert shrinking to a more and more horrible narrowness, they were huddled together, friends and foes, till the last few yards of upright wheat fell also under the teeth of the unerring reaper, and they were every one put to death by the sticks and stones of the harvesters. (*Tess*, 87)

Hardy anthropomorphizes the creatures, referring to them as “friends and foes”, before they are killed in a brutal rain of sticks and stones thrown by the actual humans. The scene points to the close alignment of labor, the food that comes from it, and death. The ripping of bark from tree is akin to the ripping of skin from bones. Here the non-human stands in for the human, so that even as snakes and rats and mice are destroyed, it seems likely that the human refuge could be just as ephemeral as their own. Work is a process of reaping, here, of killing and letting live. Even as the women are losing their margins in the field through work, the labor they are engaged in entails this killing of small animals left behind by the “teeth of the unerring reaper.” The land



holds both wheat and soil and growth, and death for these small creatures. Hardy's laborers cut their way into a field, into connection with a vast space tying them down to earth and to place, but they are also cutting their way into a vastness that holds, and perpetrates death.

Labor ties the laborer ever more firmly to the mortal world. The field may not actually kill you, but in tying yourself to it, you are tying yourself to the short lifespan of the snakes and rats and mice. While Giles may, with the planting of trees, link himself to a longer sense of living – trees are not immortal, and they too can fall and die – your death is only multiplied in the death of the thing you love or the thing you have placed your life within. This personal attachment to the things of the world is most bizarrely realized for Hardy in the shape of Marty South's father. Old and bedridden, he stares out his window each day at a tree rocking in the wind, and he is convinced that the tree is going to blow down and kill him. He fears it so intensely that it is this, "rather than any organic disease, which was eating away the health of John South." (*Woodlanders*, 83) He has worked with trees all his life, but in his final illness he seems to have filled this one particular tree with all the force and fear of death that is haunting him. Marty explaining his illness to the doctor says, "'the shape of it seems to haunt him like an evil spirit. He says that it is exactly his own age, that it has got human sense, and sprouted up when he was born to rule him, and keep him as its slave. Others have been like it afore in Hintock.'" (*Woodlanders*, 93) Something about the closeness of his life with these trees, about the way others have fallen and the way he is no longer able to work amongst them, gives rise to this haunting. The earth he once was a part of has turned against him and plots his death. Yet, when the tree is cut down to spare him this fear, rather than relieving him, the shock of its absence kills him. From a malevolent tree, it turns to a tree that is linked to his own life – so much so that with its death, he declares, comes his own. This imaginary bond – through the glass

windowpane – is strong enough to link his life to its life. When your life depends on another mortal thing, there is twice as much a chance of death as there was before. Where a house theoretically lasts beyond your own life, in this rooting to living organisms the self is tied to harvest and to decay – to both the cruelty of the world, the smaller and smaller refuge, and the longing hold it has on your imagination.

Cather represents the link between man and earth as both deeply romantic, in the form of Alexandra's heart in the grass, and simultaneously as fiercely pragmatic and economic. Where John South is tied to a tree, John Bergson is tied to the success or failure of a whole farm. His fortune, and the fortunes of his neighbors, homesteaders like himself, rests in his skill as a farmer and the vagaries of weather. In a single paragraph Cather underscores her glowing vision of the prairie, or of a plough left shining as the sun goes down, with the harsh reality of making a living from the soil:

One winter his cattle had perished in a blizzard. The next summer one of his plow horses broke its leg in a prairie-dog hole and had to be shot. Another summer he lost his hogs from cholera, and a valuable stallion died from a rattlesnake bite. Time and again his crops had failed. He had lost two children, boys, that came between Lou and Emil, and there had been the cost of sickness and death. Now, when he had at last struggled out of debt, he was going to die himself. He was only forty-six, and had, of course, counted on more time. (*Pioneers*, 14)

Bergson, a skilled enough farmer to pull his family out of debt, is still plagued with bad luck. These are years filled with death of his cattle, his horses, his hogs, a stallion, his crops, his two sons and even eventually himself. Farming, as summarized here by Cather, seems to be constantly undermined by death. In fact, death is integral to agriculture. John Bergson is successful, but it has stolen his time. Farming wearies, says Cather, labor has the potential to tie you to a dying world, to the tricks of fate that cannot be anticipated or thrown off. In buying and settling down, in working day after day on the same plot of land, John Bergson has united his life

with the fragile life of cattle and horses and hogs and crops. He is open to blizzards and rattlesnakes as much as he is open to the smell and growth of the wild country. So far, we have painted the land merged with as green and glowing, nature as a warm holding of the self, but it is also this countervailing force, a power so big, so beyond our control, that as much as we labor within it we labor against it. Where Jim Burden can pick up and leave, Bergson is forever enmeshed in this cycle of living and dying on the land that is far beyond the reach of his will. He is almost swallowed by the life of ephemerons.

This linking of self and place is as much metaphorical as it is physical. The underlying hold of the prairie on Marie Shabata is intense and drawing. If Bergson is linked economically and physically to his fields and his animals, Marie, while as much a worker and a carer for the land as he is, is more deeply linked by her thoughts and her form than by her fear of losing a livelihood. The winter Emil goes to Mexico Marie remains in Nebraska, in her small house,

... but she was always thinking about the wide fields outside, where the snow was drifting over the fences; and about the orchard, where the snow was falling and packing, crust over crust. When she went into the dark kitchen to fix her plants for the night, she used to stand by the window and look out at the white fields, or watch the currents of snow whirling over the orchard. She seemed to feel the weight of all the snow that lay down there. The branches had become so hard that they wounded your hand if you but tried to break a twig. And yet, down under the frozen crusts, at the roots of the trees, the secret of life was still safe, warm as the blood in one's own heart; and the spring would come again! Oh, it would come again! (*Pioneers*, 134)

Sitting inside she is only able to think about the snow and wind and the orchard, and she seems to feel “the weight of all the snow that lay down there.” She seems to be buried out in the orchard, just as Alexandra’s heart is buried under the grass. As much as she is the wife of Frank Shabata, knitting and crocheting in her warm house, she is the ground under the snow, and the hard cutting branches of the frozen trees. She is unprotected from the weight of the snow, and the way it falls and packs in “crust over crust,” and unable to disengage from this physical, and

biting, outer world even as it seems bent on cutting or smothering her with its weight and its freeze. This is linking and tying that pulls her soft inner world out into the harsher light of snow and wind. While the passage ends hopefully, tying Marie not only to the cold but also to the promise of spring (and, by extension, love), the weight of this paragraph falls not on the secret life and the Marie-like exclamation, but on the more deeply elaborated contrast between the hard world and the soft hand, or the soft body beneath snow. Being tied to the land in her head, and in her body, she is tied to coming and going of seasons – the spring that ended and the spring that comes, but that comes bearing her own death. She may anticipate the glory of the rising world, but she also lives in, and is fascinated by the harshness of winter.

This exterior sense of death and violence in the world, a linking of the self to a system of living and dying out of your control, also occurs within the frame of an individual body. Marie looks out at the snow, but in imagining herself in it, or the orchard as a heart with her blood running through it, she is incorporating this outer passing of seasons into her own small frame. Hardy too, takes the grand play of life and death and recasts it within the individual. Once merged, the person occupies the land but the land also occupies the person and the membrane, or window pane, we like to believe separates our life from the ending of others, is not even worth seeing for the ending of others exists already under our skin. Tess, sleeping at night in the woods as she travels from job to job, practically homeless and husbandless, she comes across a batch of dying pheasants, partially killed by hunters, and “with the impulse of a soul who could feel for kindred sufferers as much as for herself, Tess’s first thought was to put the still-living birds out of their torture, and to this end with her own hands she broke the necks of as many as she could find” (*Tess*, 279). The closeness of her plight with theirs leads her to kill them for sympathy, and to turn this death in her hands back upon herself. She feels for these birds as much as she feels

for herself, and in their death at her hand she makes solid and real her own sorrow, her own closeness to death. Minutes earlier she had “put her hand to her brow, and felt its curve, and the edges of her eye-sockets as perceptible under the soft skin, and thought as she did so that a time would come when that bone would be bare.” (*Tess*, 278) In her closeness to the material world (she sleeps in a nest of leaves, and next to the dying pheasants), in her lack of protection from the weather, and from the hard ground, Tess is also unprotected from an awareness of her own mortality, from the bones that lie under her skin. In being close to the death of the world, the death of herself becomes all the more real and solid, being held not in the idea of heaven, but in the very curve of her forehead. The body holds death in its very shape, physical deterioration is waiting; there is a lack of walls to save you from either your own aging, or the shock of weather, or the hard marks of the outer world. The walker can pretend to escape and the house-dweller can pretend to hold off mortality. But here, without shell or escape the laborer has no way of hiding the death that sits in bones, the sorrow hidden in the curve of a forehead. And this, as much as any exterior world, could open a vastness inside that might swamp you, that might leave you without even a name.

Death and lack of walls, is made most pressing and intense in the form of storms. These books are based around potential disasters – John Bergson’s list of tragedies, the constant repair of Bathsheba’s farm, and the wild darkness of Eustacia’s death – and storms hit hardest those who have lashed themselves to trees and fields and wheat crops. In *Far From the Madding Crowd*, Bathsheba and Gabriel are trying to save her wheat from an oncoming storm when suddenly,

Heaven opened then, indeed. The flash was almost too novel for its inexpressibly dangerous nature to be at once realized, and they could only comprehend the magnificence of its beauty. It sprang from east, west, north south, and was a perfect

dance of death. The forms of skeletons appeared in the air, shaped with blue fire for bones – dancing, leaping, striding, racing around, and mingling altogether in unparalleled confusion. ... Gabriel was almost blinded, and he could feel Bathsheba's warm arm tremble in his hand – a sensation novel and thrilling enough; but love, life, everything human, seemed small and trifling in such close juxtaposition with an infuriated universe. (*Madding Crowd*, 268)

Biblical in its proportions, the storm and lightning is “inexpressibly dangerous”, so threatening there is not even language for it. The two, trapped as they are in the middle of the storm, can only “comprehend the magnificence of its beauty.” The space they were just working in, and the sheaves they were in the process of saving, the very farm they have both poured their lives into, is covered over by this “dance of death. The forms of skeletons appeared in the air, shaped with blue fire for bones – dancing, leaping, striding, racing around, and mingling altogether in unparalleled confusion.” Nothing can be seen but the storm. It has burst out of and into the world they thought they knew. The farm is suddenly covered with a dazzling confusion of activity and power, the shape of former death (skeletons) and the promise of future death (their own). The storm “sprang from east, west, north and south,” and seems to come from everything around them. The land longed for and worked into is capable of this, of this overwhelming beauty and this overwhelming terror. Gabriel and Bathsheba form a unit in the storm, her hand on his arm, but it is a unit that can barely hold up to the strength of the world around it. What once was a three-way bond of person to person to place, now seems a death-wish, a nightmare of closeness. Unlike the rest of the farmers (and Bathsheba's husband) drunk and asleep in the barn, these two are trying to save their labor and save her farm, but their link to place and land brings them close to this dance of death. In the face of it, all personal things are insignificant, even longed-for-Bathsheba's arm in Gabriel's hand, for “love, life, everything human, seemed small and trifling in such close juxtaposition with an infuriated universe.” As much as the world can hold and bind, its power can be terrible. An “infuriated universe”, touches and destroys not the men safely

asleep in the barn, but the two who will not stop laboring, who have decided to root themselves here, in this, in the bright flash of nature's power. These books that Cather and Hardy write, are trying to hold not only the underlying daily dust of the prairie town and the Wessex field, but also, inevitably, the bursting out in storms, or in quieter deaths, the infuriated universe, the world and sky and land so big, so powerful, so beyond our own scope, that we are swallowed and awed and left without reason, without, truly the words to understand the flash of light and the falling of rain. Their writing enacts a closeness of book and person and land punctuated by storms. By crackings, by the death in our own bones.

### III. The Machine

The first reaction a person has in the face of such a storm, beyond being stunned, is to run. The cold, the dead pheasants, the bone beneath your own forehead, all of these things we would love to leave behind. Hardy leaves, and Cather leaves, and Jim Burden, pacing the slow streets of Black Hawk, will leave too. Hardy writes, "to work on till the leaden light diminishes and marks that the sun is down, demands a distinct modicum of stoicism, even of valour." (*Tess*, 286) It takes valor to stand up to storm and wind and rain, to face the cold creep of the world in winter, to tie yourself, consciously, to the world not only of sun and green but also of grey and death, of the pheasants sighing on the ground around you and the wheat scratching and scarring your arm. It takes valor to write this poetics of space – to admit that the world, the land, is both terrifying and beautiful. It takes valor to be committed to being in both. We turn then, to education or the machine. Not only to the running of Jim Burden, or the building of houses, but mediators, ways of insulating ourselves from the world, of creating a thicker margin between self and place, of leaving labor in favor of work.

In *The Woodlanders*, Grace Melbury looks at Giles Winterbourne and declares, “she had felt superior to him then, and she felt superior to him now.” (158) The earth, and the person who has tied themselves to the earth, is deeply attractive, but it also holds the marks of a lower class. There is nothing, in Giles’ life, protecting him from the seasons. His identity as a laborer is inextricable from the cold, the dark, the storms, the oncoming death. For Hardy and Cather this connection to death is a connection to something messy and bodily and dirty. It is mud. As both Gabriel and Alexandra argue, there is something too hard, that points too plainly to the thinness between living and dying, or having food and not, in this “moiling in the mud for my daily bread.” (*Woodlanders*, 160) Alexandra desperately wants Emil to find a new career for she does not want him “to have to grub for every dollar.” (*Pioneers*, 47) The man running a farm is tied to the life and death of his cows, to the danger of oncoming storms, and to the actual mud of his work. Alexandra, describing her life on the farm to Carl, says ““everything is slow here; the people slowest of all. Our lives are like the years, all made up of weather and crops and cows.”” (*Pioneers*, 89) There is too much merging, Cather implies. People become too much like the earth, too without language, too linked to the slow motion of crops and cows and weather.

The reaction then, is to leave. To avoid being so plainly marked as mortal. To work differently. Education is the first, most obvious, most longed for, step away from the farm. Cather went to college, and Hardy traveled every day to a school across the moors, and eventually leaving home to study architecture. School is the great way out, the attempt to wash your hands of mud and work and death. To have a body unscratched by corn, and margins perhaps too thick to be breached, implies a self separate from seasons and crops. Work, writes Arendt, is that which creates objects that “give the human artifice the stability and solidity without which it could not be relied upon to house the unstable and mortal creature which is



man.” (136) Whereas labor ties you ever more firmly to the passing of things, work can, theoretically, tie you instead to solid and stable things, to human artifice rather than the turning, violent, world of nature. It is, for Grace Melbury, or Emil, or Tom Outland, a way out too from a working class life. Stepping away from the thinness between living and dying and towards a study and thick walls and a secure livelihood, “education,” Raymond Williams writes in *The Country and the City*, is tied to social advancement within a class society”. (202) In *The Professor’s House*, Tom Outland, installed at a University, writing about his past experiences as both a cowboy and an archeologist, recalls his friend’s push for education, “He said once if I knew Latin, I wouldn’t have to work on my back all day like a burro. He had great respect for education, but he believed it was some kind of hocus-pocus that enabled a man to live without work.” (*Professor*, 167) Labor associates you with animals and mud, it may ground you but it also slows you down, ties you to a process that seems far from the fast-moving world of power and history-making. Jude longs for nothing but education, in part through an actual interest in intellectual pursuits, but in part too for the access it gives to the walled away world of Christminster, to a certain language, to escape from the grind of hard labor. Through education, a space can be made between man and land, and while it may not be the magical cure that enables “a man to live without work”, it does promise, for both Hardy and Cather in their own lives, and for the characters in their books, another way of living. It is a mediation between man and the world around him, offering distance from storms, dirt, hogs, stone, the merge of body and world that is both empowering and terrifying in its vastness.

Hardy and Cather, in choosing to write, broke themselves off from the world of physical labor. In moving to cities, and searching out education, and finally, most dramatically, locking themselves in rooms to reimagine all of these things, they pulled themselves ever further out of

“moiling in the mud for my daily bread.” Seamus Heaney, an Irish poet, in his poem “Digging”, describes the beauty, and tradition, of the work of his grandfather and father, the “curt cuts of an edge through living roots”, all harsh and strong and beautiful, and then his own place in their line – “I’ve no spade to follow men like them.” Cather and Hardy pull themselves out of place, out of the material world, and the long line of laborers before them, to isolation and stillness. To a certain quiet of rooms. To writing. It is an advancement that leaves you unable to return to your former class, to your people. As Williams writes, “it is difficult except by bizarre personal demonstration, to hold both to education and to social solidarity.” (202) Emil is resented by his brothers for “every change in his speech, his dress, his point of view” that seems to come with his University education, and Carl too, having left and been a part of the larger world, is looked on as potentially hostile and dangerous. (*Pioneers*, 159) Education forms a break not only between yourself and the earth, but yourself and your society. The educated Emil might hold himself above his brothers, or simply move at a different pace, aligned with a different pattern of thinking and acting. In *Return of the Native*, Clym’s mother looks at him “as if she did not understand the meaning of his long stay with her; her face had worn that look for several days.” (*Native*, 137) She has expected his visit for weeks and weeks, but because he is educated and a man of the world, as was discussed in Chapter One, he is expected to remain out in the larger world. Due to his education, Clym is no longer a part of the community he grew up in. He has been broken off from his home, and his people.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Tess is also more educated than the members of her mother’s generation. Her language is part school part farm, “the dialect was on her tongue, to some extent, despite the village school” (*Tess*, 15). Yet while she has had more schooling than her mother, she is no more educated than her peers, this is a shared “village school”, shared with other cottagers. This education does not give her either the pressure or the escape that is gives Clym. It is just a slight change of speech, not a change of social status.

The machine, for Hardy in particular, both in the context of the modern world and in the context of a single life or a single farm, promises a similar distance from the soil. It works literally as a go-between. The farmer no longer walks each furrow behind his horse, but drives over it instead. Labor is rationalized, mechanized, and the farmer's tie to the vegetable and animal world is attenuated. As with education, machinery represents an enhancement of the abilities of a single man. Tom Outland is educated and he discovers something that changes the course of modern science (and makes lots of money). Grace goes to school and comes back more beautiful, more refined, more able to marry a wealthier man. There is a social expansion that occurs with education. Where labor roots you in an unspeaking material world, education expands you into a spoken world, it attaches you newly to past and future. So too the tractor magnifies the power of the hand. It expands the farmer's power and reach into commerce, into the age of the machine, into the newest science and the possibility of larger production. Both forms of modernity – schooling and technology – widen the gap between the person and the material, vegetable, world he used to be a part of.

Hardy does not address the coming of the industrial age until late in his career with *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. Here, however, the machine dominates the landscape. As discussed in the first chapter, railways crisscross towns and roads, promising a certain freedom, but here it is the machine, the threshing machine in particular, that infiltrates and disturbs Tess's former patterns of living. At the dairy, and even in her native fields, there is little to hint at industrialization. The corn is cut by a machine but it is horse drawn, and at the dairy all the milking is still done by hand – the milkers' heads resting against the cows' sides. As Tess moves into an ever-more transient and hostile form of farming, however, going from her own home plot, to the sheltered world of the dairy, and on to the harsh labor of the starve-acre farm, the machine becomes more

prominent. At the turnip farm a threshing machine comes with its engineman, who lives in-between the world of agriculture and modernity, a mechanical man who has left the field behind. He is “in the agricultural world, but not of it. He served fire and smoke; these denizens of the fields served vegetation, weather, frost, and sun. ... his thoughts being turned in on himself, his eye on his iron charge, hardly perceiving the scenes around him, and caring for them not at all” (*Tess*, 325). He is tied neither to the people around him nor to the field itself. He can barely see the others, so concentrated is he on his machine. He exists somewhere slightly above (in the world of smoke and fire) the deeply rooted world of the farm workers (in vegetables and seasons). Subject only to the science of his machine, the thresher is no longer in thrall to “weather, frost and sun”. The machine forms a buffer between man and earth, instead of interacting with something so huge it could swamp him, the engineman only has to contend with the vagaries of the machine - larger perhaps than his own body, but made by man and with a mechanical logic to it. To be able to read the natural world you have to be as tied to it as Marty or Giles are, but to read the machine there is a set of operating instructions to render it useful and comprehensible.

Yet this distance from the place you are in and the work you are trying to get done, be it through years of study or the violence of a machine, creates new problems. Death is not avoided, it is simply not seen as clearly. For the rest of the workers not running the machine but answering to it the labor of threshing is still just as physical as before. The threshing machine, in fact, only amplifies the speed and intensity of their labor for they are no longer moving at a human pace but at the pace of a machine. In *Tess*, the thresher keeps a “despotic demand upon the endurance of their muscles and nerves.” (*Tess*, 325) The relation between the human body and the field, and the human body and the rhythm of its own labor, has been erased and while it

allows the speed and efficacy to increase, it also makes the pace surpass the limits of human endurance. The world is suddenly filled with a great shuddering,

A panting ache ran through the rick. The man who fed was weary and Tess could see that the red nape of his neck was covered with husks. She still stood at her post, her flushed and perspiring face coated with the corn-dust, and her white bonnet embrowned by it. She was the only woman whose place was upon the machine, so as to be shaken bodily by its spinning, and this incessant quivering, in which every fiber of her body participated, had thrown her into a stupefied reverie in which her arms worked independently of her consciousness. She hardly know where she was (*Tess*, 333)

The machine does not get rid of the body. Instead it shatters the body and dehumanizes the labor. Before when she was in the field Tess was covered with the dust of her labour; but where her work once fell and rose with her own strength, here the whole operation is beyond control. The machine shakes her so that “every fiber of her body participated,” each fiber shaken separately from the other, so that rather than being a whole laboring person, she is simply an aggregate of transmitted motion. She has no control over her body’s movement, and in this shaking and noise, her self comes apart. Arms move without her thoughts. She cannot even tell where she is. In this great disorienting and shaking, she becomes a part of the machine. In *O Pioneers*, Emil’s friend buys a tractor, and it ends by killing him, for this disconnect between the body and the earth is also a loss of knowledge. In the shaking of the machine these characters cannot remember their own limits, and a harmful breaching of the body takes place. The pleasure of effort and then incorporation of physical toil has been divided so that neither the activity, nor the consumption of labor is whole.

We are, necessarily, embodied. There is no avoiding that, even in the studying both Hardy’s Jude and Cather’s Jim try to escape into, or the introduction of a machine. There is no way to isolate the mind from the rest of the body in a book written by Cather or Hardy. The Professor is as mortal as Alexandra, and the laborer at a threshing machine is as worn by motion

and by exhaustion as the laborer threshing by hand. There is a promise in this machine, in this new modernity, in this motion, but there is a danger in it as well. As surely as the train breaks the narrative apart, so too does education, or the mechanized substitute for labor. Natives are displaced, isolated but still embodied. The old men threshing with Tess, long for earlier ways of working “when they had been accustomed to thresh with flails on the oaken barn-floor; when everything, even to winnowing, was effected by hand-labour, which, to their thinking, though slow, produced better results.” (*Tess*, 327) They do not revel in this new strength, but mourn the old, the place where their hands used to touch the material of their labor, and where the oaken floor was made smooth and clean with their beating. Such hard labor was slower, but perhaps it was also better.

The break between man and his toil leaves him lost. Tess cannot tell where she is, or what she is doing. Melbury has built his whole sense of worth on his ability to “form a conjecture on the weather, or the time, or the fruit-promise,” and as his plans for his daughter fail more and more spectacularly, he feels that even this, his rocklike knowledge of the world in which he works in is suspect, “so great was his self-mistrust.” (*Woodlanders*, 202) Without the foundational sense of reading weather and time, or the patterns of the season and the day, a whole world collapses. Education and the shaking of the machine separate a person from an ability to know a place in their bones. Grace, returning from school, cannot identify certain apples and Giles is horrified. Jim is no longer a part of the world *Antonia* has created, he exists more as a ghost than as a man, and Emil, coming home to Alexandra, is constantly restless, unable to settle. The machine becomes a physical example of the modern split between person and the material world. We are made by the things we merge with, and out of this disconnect

comes a loss of self. We no longer exist in the embodied, physical, jostling, world but only in the shaking of a machine.

While the machine has a certain allure, with a promise of easing our labor, it is not a life-giver, but a ghost creator. Mortality cannot be avoided. Machines have the power to make a person only words on a page, or to shake the rhythm and pattern out of our labor so that rather than serving person, vegetable, seasons, frost and sun, we are serving only fire and smoke. The most terrifying example of this mechanical death comes obliquely: after Hardy gave up novels and Cather took a break from *Red Cloud*, World War One began in 1914 and tore the world apart. Cather's Professor thinks, "chance, in one great catastrophe, swept away all youth and all plans and almost Time itself." (*Professor*, 236) Just as the speed of the thresher expands beyond human endurance, this great mechanical war expands beyond human understanding and control bringing a new, more terrifying, storm to survive. What once promised removal from the pattern of life and death, here almost erases everything we have ever thought to be life – almost "Time itself." In Hardy's poem, "The Pity of It" he censures those who "flung this flame / kin folk kin tongued even as we are". He moves from the "rail-track and the highway", the space of the powerful war starters, back towards the "loamy Wessex lanes" home to those sent to die on the front. The modern world has "flung this flame" on ancient kin, is killing, unnecessarily, the youth of this age. The mechanical break started in *Tess* here comes to pass most startlingly, on the huge scale, country against country. This is the storm that will not end, that seems to break forever our place in time, our place in the world, to overpower the smell of cider with the smell of blood and permanently scar the land itself. Modernity has a force that does not stop. There is no land to work in a shaken world.

### III. Conclusion: What is Left

*For why do our thoughts turn to some gesture of a hand, the fall of a sleeve, some corner of a room on a particular anonymous afternoon, even when we are asleep, and even when we are so old that our thoughts have abandoned other business? What are all these fragments for, if not to be knit up finally? – Marilynne Robinson, Housekeeping*

We are reading after the fall. After the wars. After the age of the machine has given way to the age of the computer. We are reading and not living this connection to place, just as Hardy and Cather are writing and not living the world they write. Bate writes, “we read *The Woodlanders* to remind ourselves of the world we think we have lost, but the fact that we are reading it at all is a symptom of that very loss.” (20) In writing we see the machine made visible, the hole we are trying to cover over. J. Hillis Miller, in a similar statement, declares, “to be conscious is to be separated.” (3) Work only pulls us further away from the physical world, from the feeling of being part and of. We take it up once the farm is no longer appealing, in fear of storms, or in the aftermath of the train and the thresher. Writing, the thing Cather and Hardy left for, necessarily works in this way.

This separation of consciousness and world, this break between self and place, is violent. The machine shakes, but the act of writing slashes and cuts. “The isolation from others,” writes Arendt, “is the necessary life condition for every mastership which consists of being alone with the ‘idea,’ the mental image of the thing to be.” (161) This “isolation from others” translates into general isolation from the world. To write you have to retreat to your study, or more dramatically, retreat to a city, or another town, or a whole new life. You have to suppress the outer world to view the “mental image of the thing to be.” This is akin to Blanchot’s argument



that by naming we erase the object named, we must make it general and therefore lose the specific woman, day, tree, home. The land so loved, or the labor so intensely noticed, is pushed out, unhomed and unlanded. Arendt writes, “this element of violation and violence is present in all fabrication, and *homo faber*, the creator of human artifice, has always been a destroyer of nature.” (139) Unlike the violence found on the land and in nature, this is a violence against nature – a turn from the embodied to the bodiless, from the bound to the floating. It cuts thinking mind from living body, image from world, and in the fabrication claims a distance from the biological cycling of life itself.

In this breaking of the body and breaking of the world there is a part of the self, the unworded uneducated part of the self that lives in the blue water or in the fields or in the trees, or even in the scars on your own body, that is being shaken out. When we break the world into the thinking and unthinking, there is an inarticulate underground of the self lost. We live broken, somehow, without it, or only shallow lives. The characters that last, for both of these writers, are the characters that still have roots. It is Jim who leaves and lives transient and unhappy, or Alec who has no home, no true family name, no labor, that is a roving villain, a man with no sense of solid self. Roots formed in childhood, or through labor, are the roots that attach us to the world, to our bodies, and to others. We as readers, in our attention to the word rather than the world, our dreaming of the thing lost, are as unrooted as any Jim or Alec. We may have these underlying structures, but the world Cather lives in is one she despises (her tirade against Nebraska) and the one Hardy lives in he sees only heading towards disaster and despair. He ends with Jude, with a man alone in a rented house, dying without either his books or his labor or the woman he loves. Hardy writes of the man caught between laboring and working, his uprooted double.

While work and labor are so separate in Arendt's view of the world, I believe they both hold the possibility of merging with the material of their activity. Scarry, describing Hardy's "man-materials relation" aligns merging with a form of "speaking for" another person or thing. This is most clear, she argues, in literary criticism, where we

assume that the words in novels and poems speak for us ... and in turn literary critics perform the reciprocal act of ventriloquism...so the voice of this chapter emerges not out of the speaker's own body but ... out of *Tess*, *The Mayor* and *The Woodlanders*, materials from which it for a time becomes inseparable. (Scarry, 71)

I would like to extend this image to writing in general, for we not only assume that when we write about *books* we are merging with and speaking through them, but when we write about anything. We dream, in writing the land, that we are merging with the land. Yet what we are merging with is part the word, part a memory or image of the thing itself. The material of *Tess* or *Pioneers*, is partly the fields and farms of home and partly the language itself. Cather says, in an interview after the publishing of *Pioneers*, that she wrote out of a desire to capture her home:

I knew every farm, every tree, every field in the region around my home, and they all called out to me ... my deepest feelings were rooted in this country because one's strongest and most vivid mental pictures are acquired before one is 15. I had searched for books telling about the beauty of the country I loved, its romance, and [the] heroism and strength and courage of its people that had been plowed into the very furrows of its soil, and I did not find them. And so I wrote *O Pioneers!*. (Person, 37)

Yet she always changes the name of the town. She never writes, directly, what she had lived.

Hardy too, again and again, moves away from the place he loves in order to capture it more fully.

They cannot exactly re-write their way into home, for they are working not with pure material but a mix of words and trees, words and earth. It is this feeling of something from before she was fifteen, before she started to write, that in writing Cather wants back again. However, as Arendt writes, in words, there is always the danger of the "‘dead letter’ in which the ‘living spirit’ must survive". (169) In merging with the world you are writing you are in danger of merging not only

with the labor, the deep fields, of your image, but also with the potential “dead letter” of language itself. Writing could be a loop of deadness, of the said but unmeaning, of the person alone in a room. Yet in writing, or in reading, we are, whether we will or no, bound to the process of merging. As we turn the page, or pick up the pen, we are implicated in the being of this new world – this world of material and immaterial, of word and land. Even if it only promises the suppressed meaning, the world as Blanchot imagines it, or as it is separate from the person alone, even if it ties us to the unliving, we are bound and cannot break free.

So Cather tries to push through language and Hardy tries to dwell on and illuminate the world itself. She writes that it is not the word alone we ought to look to, but the “the inexplicable presence of the thing not named, of the overtone divined by the ear but not heard by it” (*On Writing*, 42). In *Tess* Angel Clare, once an educated boy from a good family, is now learning to be a farmer. In the process of learning, he becomes more and more enmeshed in the life of the tiny things around him, “he made close acquaintance with phenomena which he had before known but darkly – the seasons in their moods, morning and evening, night and noon in their temperaments, winds in their several dispositions, trees, waters, and clouds, shades and silences, *ignus-fatui*, constellations, and the voices of inanimate things.” (*Tess*, 118) Hardy, and Cather too in her insistence on the unnamed voice of words, bring into light the “voices of inanimate things.” They build nets out of words, linking life and death, person and place.

Hardy in his insistence on the tiny and the detailed takes a season and packs it into a single paragraph:

Another year’s installment of flowers, leaves, nightingales, thrushes, finches, and such ephemeral creatures, took up their positions where only a year ago others had stood in their place when these were nothing more than germs and inorganic particles. Rays from the sunrise drew forth the buds and stretched them into long stalks, lifted up the sap in

noiseless streams, opened petals, and sucked out scents in invisible jets and breathings.  
(*Tess*, 128)

Each thing, each tiny soon-to-end life, is linked to the rest by these “invisible jets and breathings,” by their pure coexistence, by the way in which he has placed them all together, running “flowers, leaves, nightingales, thrushes, finches, and such ephemeral creatures,” into one another and holding them here on the page. It is net of growing things, rays coming down and drawing forth the buds, smell reaching between one thing and the next. Hardy describes a June as so “transmissive that inanimate objects seemed endowed with two or three senses, if not five.” The words alone have no particular strength: it is in his attention to detail, the particular way he collects things, and then, in this intangible movement between the details, the transmissive air that Hardy dwells upon. It is a world thick with breathings, with inanimate voices. In his diary he wrote once,

so then if Nature’s defects must be looked in the face and transcribed, whence arises the *art* in poetry and novel-writing? which must certainly show art, or it becomes merely mechanical reporting. I think the art lies in making these defects the basis of a hitherto unperceived beauty, by irradiating them with ‘the light that never was’ on their surface, but is to be latent in them by the spiritual eye. (*Life of Hardy*, 114)

He illuminates the world, fills girls’ skirt with butterflies, trapped and lit by the sun and the gauze of their dresses. This is not the mechanical reporting that separates body from thought, but instead an insistence on our senses, on feeling. Hardy’s light shines through surfaces, not erasing the body, but simply making it clearer. We are lit from within in Hardy. Our bones filled with death are also filled with this smell, this voice, this ‘light that never was.’

Cather too, writes this thick world. She is not as insistent on the detail, but Alexandra loves a place full of smell and touch and sound, and Jim mourns more the dust of a long lost summer than any home.

It was a still, deep-breathing summer night, full of the smell of the hay fields. Sounds of laughter and splashing came up from the pasture, and when the moon rose rapidly above the bare rim of the prairie, the pond glittered like polished metal, and she could see the flash of white bodies as the boys ran about the edge, or jumped into the water. Alexandra watched the shimmering pool dreamily... (*Pioneers*, 31)

Alexandra, sitting apart, is filled with the smell of hay and the glow of the moon. She sits contentedly on her porch, watching the summer world. Just as in Hardy, this is a breathing scene. This earth reaches out into the breath of Alexandra and links her to the splashing boys to the earlier hay-making and the moon, shining on the pond. In this paragraph all of the parts of her place are mixing and melding and there is such peace that we can forget the inevitable presence of death.

These full-bodied descriptions extend into the realm of memory, and turn towards a strangely lovely haunting. In the leaving, in the breaking, so much was left behind that it comes back to trail after the leavers. They are haunted as much by the place as by people. Jim remembers a night he and Antonia sat out on a roof in a thunderstorm:

the thunder was loud and metallic, like the rattle of sheet iron, and the lightning broke in great zigzags across the heavens, making everything stand out and come close to us for a moment. ... All about us we could hear the felty beat of the raindrops on the soft dust of the farmyard. (MA, 139)

He lies awake at night, when he returns to his old room, and looks out his window and re-sees “the windmill making its old dark shadow against the blue sky.” (318) This world remembered is sharp and intense and demands all of sight and sense and thought. It is a memory that surrounds the body with the “felty beat of the raindrops,” or the summer breeze from a window. They are strong seasons that come back in smell and touch, that rise when Jim talks to an old friend on the train and they both remember “burning summers”. The underlying structure of memory and self has broken through the surface in these sensorial, clear, snapshots. They seem to come involuntarily, as a ghost would arrive, with a shudder, with something trailing behind it.

We are haunted by fragments of the place we left. Cather and Hardy are haunted by a time, a way of life, a slowness, they cannot locate in their present. They are haunted by fragments and they want them to bind together, to make sense, to bring the ghost out of its intangible state and back into their world, so, perhaps, they are not so lonely, so perhaps, they are not so without a home. They are trying to write a topography of their home-land. In writing the unworried perhaps they can link the summer thunderstorm to the present day-traveler, perhaps they can make lines that not only trace out their knowledge of home, and their belonging to it, but will attach them to the place anew. A map can be held, can be carried, can be used. A book exists in our hands, wherever we are, not far away, extending beyond the limits of our eyes or feet. In trying both to extend the time between beginning and end, and to gather all of the pieces of memory into a single story, Hardy and Cather are trying to map their way back home. "Each one of us should", Gaston Bachelard writes in *The Poetics of Space*, "make a map of his lost fields and meadows. Thoreau said that he had the map of his fields engraved in his soul. And Jean Wahl once wrote: the frothing of the hedges / I keep deep inside me." (11) In gathering up these lost fields and lost meadows, there is a hope that they will become rooted inside you. That it is a map not only into the fields you lost, but into the ones you hold deep inside. That those haunting marks of the roads will become, in the shape of the map, external and visible, and therefore real, therefore consuming. Not only will they be inside, but they will be outside too – they will exist, once again, in both the physical and temporal world. Return will be made in the writing and the reading. In the map of our topophilia.

The novels of Hardy and Cather create a shared space between inanimate objects, between the person observing and the world, unspoken, around him or her, and between the reader, the writer and the land. Scarry says that writing is a form of working too. Reading

hopefully is the same, we can perhaps merge not with the words themselves but with the inarticulate in between. Towards the end of *The Professor's House*, the Professor is alone in his room and feels he is close to death. It is “an instinctive conviction, such as we have when we waken in the dark and know at once it is near morning; or when we are walking across the country and suddenly know that we are near the sea.” (*Professor*, 245) That, perhaps, is how we should read. With the knowing that beneath these words, there is something big and unsayable. For Cather the prairie forms an ongoing background, this death and life can be huge and swallowing, but also forms most of what is good and important in the mind of her characters, in the world of her books. For Hardy this possibility of merging with the material presence of nature – trees and fields and moors and the friends of our ravenous youth – is terrifying but still possible, and still somehow desirable, if not needed. Writing strains to represent and enact such merging.

Their worlds are not fixed. I am not fixed and do not hope to be so. We all long for that place, even if we do not have it, of blue water and known trees, of fields and self. It is a land that scars, a land that leaves its mark, that threatens storms, but it is ours – held in our skin and muscle. Usually it is terrifyingly solitary, this longing. And it remains so. But a small space has been opened by these two writers who insist not on explaining but on trying to hold the unholdable, to reach towards this dark sea, this early morning, this bone-feeling, using words to work their way into it. Perhaps in reading we can live in their books, work our way into these beautiful, transitory worlds. In following the “old pull of the earth,” and then in writing it, we are drawn deep into both the world of language and of land. We are in double danger, the danger of the dead letter pressing against the danger of the consuming land. We are also as close as Hardy and Cather can imagine us coming to the world they long to return to, and would hate to be in.

We are always in the process of merging, never merged, always turning a page for more, the ending coming closer and closer. We are merging with the dead letter, but also with the cycles and rhythms of language and labor. With the violence of fabrication, but too, a self, inarticulate and broken, that runs through the days like the weather. While writing splits mind and body often, here in the pure tangibility of language, in the force of Hardy and Cather's writing, a newly full world has been created – part word part earth, so that the “old pull of the earth”, transports us to the prairie, or the woodlands, not trapping us in Jim's fearful loop, or Giles' death, but holding those possibilities in tandem with the escape of language. Writing is a way of walking and building and laboring all at once. It is a process of inhabitation – of merging with that which is terrifying, which is loved, which is so filled with death, which is so impossibly vast, which is so outside of language, and which glows. This is a weaving together of the ghost-memories, the haunting moments of return made if not whole at least a part of a process of being in place. They are a mapping of our topophilia across time. This is the inarticulate world of land and labor made to speak, but made to speak not in cool language but in the warm beat of its own patterns. This is a home, a being at home, a being in and part in, that is made of our best and our worst, our most terrifying fears of death, and our most beautiful, pressing, vital world of living. We are not home, maybe, but, just as Clym bends towards the heath, or Giles climbs up into the tree, or Jim walks out into the prairie, we are momentarily inwoven. Pulled into Bate's nest and by extension our own land. We have merged with our fear, our love, our broken bits of selves, and we live, briefly, between the beginning and the end, in the inarticulate space of the land that runs through our days like weather, of our beloved lost home, of the place we dream of at night but we never can fully see.



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