

The Hardy Society Journal

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BOOK REVIEWS

Valerie Wainwright, ETHICS AND THE ENGLISH NOVEL FROM AUSTEN TO FORSTER (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007) 222 pp. ISBN-13: 978-0754654322. UK £50.

Valerie Wainwright's new book affords a window onto the complex ethical debates in which Austen, Gaskell, Dickens, Eliot, Hardy and E.M. Forster participated, especially the multifaceted issue of how to find validation through pursuits that are both personally energising and morally laudable. Like Jil Larson's *Ethics and Narrative in the English Novel, 1880-1914* (2003), which offers undogmatic scrutiny of myriad moral philosophers and shows canny restraint in gauging the political and ethical standpoints of novelists, Wainwright is responsive to how moral philosophy and literary scholarship have been conversing with each other since the 1980s, as evidenced by the 'ethical criticism' of Wayne C. Booth and Martha Nussbaum. Wainwright's judicious approach reveals how an ethics of narrative should not only chronicle represented moral action but also the ethics of the fictional utterance – the assurances and falsehoods entailed in a novel, for example, or the responsibility of narrative in shaping readers' subjectivity or ideology.

Wainwright's chapter on Hardy, 'The Magic in *Mentalité*: Hardy's Native Returns', is astute in probing Hardy's preoccupation with typically modern demands and the moral sources which can satisfy them. Although Wainwright traces with care how major theorists such as Kant, F.H. Bradley, John Stuart Mill and Matthew Arnold were appropriated and reappraised, the analysis of Hardy benefits considerably from focusing on unjustly overlooked ethnologists and sociologists, such as Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917), whose 2-volume opus *Primitive Culture* (1871) influenced Hardy's depiction of folklore 'survivals' in *The Return of the Native*. If Hardy asks in this novel what would have to occur if individuals were to attain a robust and expansive mode of life, then the response is typically nebulous and unsettling. In Clym Yeobright Hardy uncovers the causes and outcome of a lack of self-awareness that at crucial junctures impedes the moral sensibility whose function is to promote an even-handed outlook. Wainwright signifies how Clym's own ideal can be comprehended as a quest for fulfilment that paradoxically involves a joyless abstention from worldly pleasure: 'He wished to raise the class at the expense of individuals rather than individuals at the expense of the class. What was more, he was ready at once to be the first unit sacrificed.' (RN 230) This supplies a clue as to what stymies a life driven by altruistic zeal: Clym fails to achieve the moral competence that is manifest in measured action.

Wainwright is also persuasive when focusing on Clym's 'wooing' of Eustacia Vye: the returned native is unwilling, or unable, to voice the new feelings that inevitably subvert ascetic personal codes and philanthropic goals. But whatever the problems associated with the language of romantic love, the most vehement register in Hardy's novel becomes that of bitter recrimination, as Yeobright, about to strike Eustacia Vye, now his wife,

desists and resorts to a verbal assault instead. At this stage, his is a 'barbarous' language, if we adopt the terms so fruitfully employed by Christine Ferguson in her recent monograph *Language, Science and Popular Fiction in the Victorian Fin-de-Siècle: The Brutal Tongue* (2006). Neither at the time he confronts his wife, nor later, does Yeobright ascertain, according to Wainwright, the calamitous implications of his rhetorical strategies. Anticipating the theories of the French sociologist Gaston Bouthol, Hardy's narrative uncovers the links between language employment and cultural 'survivals' or aspects of mentalité. It was the view of Hardy's contemporary, philosopher F.H. Bradley (1846-1924), that a man's 'common heritage', the concepts and impressions imbuing the language of his childhood, stamps his mind indelibly. Published two years prior to *The Return of the Native*, Bradley's *Ethical Studies* (1876) made the incisive claim that 'when [an individual] can separate himself from that world, and know himself apart from it, then by that time his self [...] is penetrated, *infected*, characterised by the existence of others'. Wainwright argues with compelling vigour that it is just this idea of the possible contagion through one's cultural heritage that is woven into the imaginative fabric of Hardy's novel.

Wainwright's key contention in this chapter revises the critical commonplace that Yeobright's exile in Paris, his education, idealistic fervour and private accomplishment have cut him off irrevocably from heath culture – the realm of communal lore to which he returns. Clym's tragedy may actually be his acute susceptibility to the fossilised customs and other vestigial remnants on Egdon, especially the primitive 'black' arts of arcane superstition and scurrilous rumour. In an irony that Hardy exploits with sardonic verve, the Egdonites become the custodians of knowledge and the arbiters of truth once Clym's mind has been unbalanced by suspicions about his erring spouse. As Tylor proposes in *Primitive Culture*, the so-called civilised mind still bears the pernicious traces of an earlier condition. Clym's 'wild words' of condemnation signify a consciousness at some level regulated by more primeval intuitions.

Wainwright also brings Walter Bagehot's *Physics and Politics* (1876) to bear on this discussion. Bagehot uncovers strong verbal affinities within communities as he addresses the ineradicable irrationality of the imitative instinct and ideas of magical transmission. This throws into sharp relief the extent to which Clym is infected and bewitched by Susan Nunsuch's invective. Clym, for all his lofty talk of bringing the light of rational clarity to a benighted rustic hinterland, colludes with provincial prejudice about Eustacia's witch-like ways. In the act of castigating Eustacia, Yeobright embodies a connection with Egdon's chthonic and atavistic residues, and this movement of his thought finds no opposition in the form of a modern moral principle of fair-mindedness. Wainwright could have elaborated further how Clym's concern for 'acting rightly' (158) is displayed in a readiness to adopt an inquisitorial stance – a paranoid and punitive mindset that passes judgement on any example of perceived wrongdoing.

Overall, Wainwright's *Ethics and the English Novel* is admirably attuned to how nineteenth-century fiction confronts the issue of the conditions that distort autonomous thought and the discipline of self-direction. Wainwright's account of *The Return of the Native* furnishes a timely and trenchant reminder that Clym desires to be free, not so much to ennoble and elevate the illiterate masses, but rather to think his own thoughts. It is precisely this desire that is thwarted amid the comfortless grandeur of Egdon Heath. That the terrain can exert such a powerfully malign influence indicates how vulnerable

the human mind is to its cultural imprint; how earnest endeavour becomes tainted by the 'savage' instinctual promptings of an ancient past.

ANDREW

RADFORD

Rosemarie Morgan, STUDENT COMPANION TO THOMAS HARDY (Greenwood Press, 2007). 266 pp. ISBN: 0-313 33396-3. £37.95 hardback.

Rosemarie Morgan's latest book is in the American series, 'Student Companions to Classic Writers', whose object is 'to meet the needs of students and general readers for accessible literary criticism on ... writers most frequently studied and read in the secondary school, community college, and four-year college classrooms'. To this, Morgan adds her own aim: 'To fill the gap between the informative and the specialized text ... for students of every stripe, from high school to college and beyond'. This is, as she says, 'an enormous challenge'.

The major part of the text discusses some aspects of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *The Return of the Native*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*. *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is a surprising omission as it is taught so frequently. Throughout, Morgan demonstrates her particular interest in female sexuality, with serious bias and idiosyncratic opinions presented as facts. We are told that 'part of Hardy's purpose was to restore to middle-class women their pride and delight in their bodies and their enjoyment of sexuality'. Yet Hardy's declared intention, put on record a number of times, was to encourage his readers' sympathetic imagination, leading to greater loving-kindness towards all sentient fellow-creatures, including the non-human. Where evidence is lacking, Morgan sometimes fills the gap by using her creative imagination. In the introductory, biographical section, it is hinted that there is significance in the fact that Hardy shared a bedroom with his sister Mary in childhood, as though this were not standard practice, into the twentieth century, for families in cramped conditions. In 'Logs on the Hearth', 'this sister, "Eve", exercises free will, free desire, and free, shameless pleasure in her young body'. Of Hardy's relationship with Florence Henniker, Morgan claims, 'That there was ... a sexual dimension to the friendship seems probable', but, this time, admits 'the evidence is nowhere to be found'.

Even for the most tendentious Feminist interpretation, the condoning of Tess's murder of Alec is extreme. Listing the occasions of blood-shedding, culminating in the stabbing, Morgan writes, 'Naturally and aptly, the periodic shedding of blood ... attends her growth to womanhood'. A few paragraphs previously, it is stated, 'And if her act of removing the object of oppression from her life ... may be regarded as a crime of passion these days ... historically it is martyrdom', to be paid with her own life.

Men are treated less indulgently. Gabriel Oak's sincere faith is scorned as 'religiosity' and he is called materialistic and said to be given to spying. If to observe when unobserved be spying, then Bathsheba is also a spy – on him and to her own edification. Phillotson, one of the most fundamentally decent of Hardy's minor creations, is given a verbal lashing, as though being married to Sue were not more than enough undeserved suffering. In a complete mis-reading of Sue's perverted pleasure in her own dutiful sacrifice, Morgan writes, 'Taking Sue back is revolting, especially his agreeing to her

penitential offering to him of her body ... Thus he compounds the grossest form of her prostitution – the recompense for Sue being revulsion, shame, horror, self-loathing and martyrdom’.

There are many sweeping generalisations, such as babies being considered ‘pornographic’ in Victorian England. This is difficult to reconcile with the tenderness of the scenes where Susan Henchard and Thomasin Wildeva show devotion to their infant daughters. It might be claimed, rather, by those determined to be negative, that they are closer to a Victorian sentimental concept of motherhood as sacred. Sorrow’s baptism is deemed ‘sacrilegious’ (‘Christian theology and church pastoralism being, in Hardy’s day, wholly patriarchal’); the major churches permit baptism by a layman in an emergency.

The book is so full of errors, it is difficult to decide which to choose for citation. It begins with a mis-quotation from *Tess*, the much stronger original being reduced to a ‘thyme-scented, bird-singing’ morning. Similarly, the striking ‘time-torn’ man is reduced to the cliché: ‘time-worn’. The superstitious belief in healing in ‘The Withered Arm’ held that a cure could be effected by touching the rope, not the body, of a hanged man; this is not ‘a latter-day form of aversion therapy’, but an earlier form of magic. The abortifacient in ‘A Sunday Morning Tragedy’ is for sheep, not horses. There are four, not five, insects in ‘An August Midnight’. There are two references to ‘the donkey Jude saves from beating’. This invention stems, presumably, from a mis-recollection of the abused Christminster horse. Of course, the whole point of this scene is that Jude, who has once shown a Franciscan tenderness towards earthworms, is now so demoralised that he signally *fails* to intervene. Hardy and Emma did not have ‘many cats and dogs’. Throughout his whole lifetime, he had a very few dogs; the couple had a great many cats. One of the present royal family is not Countess of Wessex ‘by ... appointment to the queen’. Queens’, Cambridge, is punctuated as Queen’s while the Queen’s College, Oxford, becomes Queens’. Frederic Harrison’s first name is sometimes spelt correctly, sometimes as Frederick. ‘Domicilium’ does not mean ‘homeland’ nor ‘alma’ ‘bountiful’, nor ‘latterly’ ‘formerly’, nor ‘omniscient’ ‘all-seeing’.

This is a very tiring book to read straight through. Perhaps this was never intended and it was only meant for dipping into for reference, which might account for the vast amount of repetition. The flow of reading is interrupted by its being broken up into very small sub-sections and by the astonishingly excessive use of brackets where commas would be appropriate. Many verbal infelicities jar: ‘may’ used where ‘might’ is required, ‘more unique’, ‘it is not quite that simple’. Hardy’s father is referred to as Thomas Hardy Snr.; having told us the farm-workers in *Far from the Madding Crowd* are ‘dubbed by critics and scholars, the rustic chorus’, Morgan calls them ‘drinking buddies’. Morgan’s prose is not noted for its concision. Here, it is padded out with redundant expressions, especially ‘be that as it may’. She even says, chattily, ‘Yes, to be sure’. A further source of irritation is a fondness for rhetorical questions.

Each chapter on the novels ends with an introduction to a school of literary criticism: recidivist feminist and materialist, psychoanalytic, masculinist and feminist. Also, throughout, terms judged useful to the reader are included and defined. It is unlikely that one needing to be told who John the Baptist was will incorporate ‘intradiegetical discourse’ into a GCSE or undergraduate essay other than naively, trying to impress.

The latter part of the book is mainly a headlong gallop through the poems. Much of this is just a list with minimal comments. All that is offered on ‘The Darkling Thrush’ is

that it is the most anthologised, first published in *The Graphic*, and ‘celebrates the mystery of things unknowable but possible’. The few poems analysed in any depth include those protesting against the abuse of animals. It is clear that, here, Morgan is exactly on Hardy’s wavelength and shares his anguish and passionate outrage over cruelty.

The substantial bibliography provides a generally sound basis for serious further reading. However, even here, there are mistakes, for example, an article on *The Return of the Native* being placed in the list on *Tess*.

ALMA

EVERS

ed. C.J.P. Beatty, THE ARCHITECTURAL NOTEBOOK OF THOMAS HARDY, revised edition (The Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society: Dorchester, 2007)

In our era of narrowing academic specialisations, the breadth of a polymath can have particular appeal. The pessimistic sonnets of Michelangelo or the turbulent paintings of Arnold Schönberg can inspire in their own right, but they also elucidate our understanding of these complex artists’ primary activity. Thomas Hardy’s significance as one of the most probing and poignant poet-authors of the late-nineteenth century is unquestioned, but his career manqué as an architect may not be common knowledge to the general reader. The revision and reissue of *The Architectural Notebook of Thomas Hardy*, edited by the late Claudius Beatty, will therefore surely intrigue those wishing to probe both Hardy’s character and the sources of his verbal imagery. Buildings and architects populate his novels with a frequency – at times laboured perhaps – which clearly speaks of his own passions and experience. From the *Notebook* we recognise that this knowledge of architecture, especially of decayed Gothic and its crisper Victorian revival, was acquired from the inside, through a lifetime of drawing, measuring, problem-solving and building.

In a number of Hardy’s most introspective poems, he evokes the patient and concentrated industry of drawing – a discipline of quiet contemplation which may nurture spiritual and poetic speculation. Although in ‘While Drawing in a Churchyard’ it is the title alone which indicates that context of activity, in ‘Drawing Details in an Old Church’ the process of ‘drawing what some Gothic brain designed’ both absorbs and liberates: the solitary poet-draughtsman, lulled by the accompanying rhythms of the tolling bell, is roused sufficiently to dim consciousness of its funereal meaning. The draughtsman who traces ‘the true twist of the ogee’ in ‘Copying Architecture in an Old Minster’, is alive enough to his suggestive environment to be distracted by the ghosts of the buried, until he remembers his task and picks up the pencil and drawing ‘that slipped from [his] hand’.

The *Notebook* represents a journal of responses to a range of architectural experiences and concerns, and through them we can visualise Hardy engaged in this challenging yet liberating coordination of eye, hand and soul. It reveals him recording those architectural sights which must have aroused his visual and historical curiosity with delightful indiscriminate. But being more than a mere sketchbook, we can also share his exploration of the mundane functions and techniques of buildings. A pencil view of a

picturesquely asymmetrical 'Ch[urch] near the Downs, From the Hill' appears on pages 22-23, juxtaposed with the measured drawings of the triangulated trusses of a 'Roof of a Common Street House' and a design for a font, presumably Hardy's own, standing neatly on its 'officiating step'. While the drawings of Gothic sculpture and ornament are perhaps the most attractive, and typical of the architectural concerns of his age, the several annotated diagrams of drains and sanitation, such as the 'French drains' on p.70ii or the 'Cesspool to school W.C.'s' on p.49, remind us of the less romantic concerns of a jobbing nineteenth-century architect.

We can assume the *Notebook* is the sole survivor of perhaps several that Hardy may have kept: Beatty deems that most of it was produced between 1862 and 1872, but dated drawings extend this to at least 1861 and 1920, nearly the whole of Hardy's adult life. His apprenticeship in architecture began in 1856 at the age of 16 when he joined the Dorchester church-restorer John Hicks. From then until 1872, employed in London by A.W. Blomfield (to whom he dedicated his ultimately sombre poem 'Heiress and Architect') and again in Dorset by Hicks and Crickmay, Hardy trained and worked as an architect – notwithstanding his expulsion from the Architectural Association for non-payment of his subscription.

The *Notebook* is presented in an actual size (but somewhat drearily printed) monochrome facsimile, prefaced by a 41-page Introduction with appendix. Beatty is enthusiastically devoted to his subject: his claim that 'few draughtsmen could be more sensitive or precise' (p.32) is forgivable although in fact Hardy's drawings have a linear hardness which may be appropriate to their private use but is pitched well below the sensitive standards of many Victorian architects. Yet some of his more diagrammatic drawings have a quality of geometrical pattern and sound proportion which gives them an appealing sincerity, especially those of Gothic windows (pp.7, 12, 48) which capture something of that same analytical truth familiar to all architectural historians through the illustrations of Banister Fletcher's *A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method* of 1896.

Amongst the most attractive pages are those which are little more than casual doodles, rapid sketches and embryonic ideas. Observations of toadstools and lichen on pp.64-5 suggest the eclectic vision of the poet and mutate into arabesque ornaments which recall the natural inspiration of gothic design. On p.27 tiny images of angels and saints jostle with a variety of Chi-Rho symbols, and the appearance of the carved oxen of Laon cathedral (copied from Nesfield's *Specimens of Medieval Architecture* which Hardy acquired in 1863 as an architectural prize) bring to mind the comparably eclectic portfolio of the thirteenth-century Villard de Honnecourt. Opposite, a rapidly drawn caricature (marked as 'copied') of the bespectacled gentlemen of a church choir attempting to hold their own against the raucous blowing of a bassoon appealingly suggests the Mellstock quire.

Beatty's commentary usefully places the *Notebook* within the context of Hardy's literature and his age, and his quotations from *A Laodicean*, *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, and *The Hand of Ethelberta*, amongst others, help us to understand the ways in which Hardy's training, experience and attitudes to the built and historic environment helped to shape many aspects of his writing. Unfortunately, however, Beatty's introduction does not always make for fluent reading, as the text is regrettably disrupted by the incorporation of the footnotes from the original 1966 edition, and other anecdotal interruptions, such as

the mention of a dedicatory Choral Evensong at Stinsford Church in 1996, add to a sense of overload of detail. Even with such a short essay an index would be an asset. In reproduction, Hardy's copious handwriting in the *Notebook* is remarkably legible but nevertheless a page-by-page transcription and a catalogue of the drawings would be more useful than the many commentaries interspersed amongst Beatty's text. A few plates from the architectural treatises Hardy copied from, and photographs of the churches and designs he actually worked on, would provide illuminating contexts. A purely typographical irritation is the lack of a space after each full stop. But, as Irwing Howe remarked when reviewing the original 1966 edition for *The New York Review of Books*, Beatty's scholarship is 'modest, precise and without flim-flam', words which could refer to Hardy's drawings themselves. Whilst few may feel the need to study the totality and every detail of the *Notebook*, this publication valuably demonstrates a vital aspect of Hardy's concerns and career.

JEREMY GRAY

GREEN BLADES, poems by Thomas Hardy, images by Mark Cazalet
(The Old Stile Press, 2007) 48pp. (330x350mm)
The Main Edition consists of 200 copies, numbered & signed by the artist.
£275 (+ £5 p&p in UK. Overseas at cost.).
The Special Edition: only 10 copies for sale, numbered I-X. £650.

In these days of the mass-market and 'The Richard and Judy Book Club', when words are cheap, paper flimsy, and language often impoverished, it is sometimes hard to be optimistic about the future of the book. The latest chick-lit 'sensation' nestles between the tomatoes and 'Cornflakes' in many a supermarket basket, while the discerning independent bookseller becomes an increasingly endangered species. Penguin Book's innovative, inexpensive paperback editions of high quality 'Classics', which led the way when introduced in 1946, are now themselves threatened by the emergence of the 'e-book', as paper gives way to computer monitor and blackberry.

So, to open *Green Blades*, published The Old Stile Press, is to step back into another world, one in which beauty, quality, integrity and permanence are valued, where the book is no longer a 'product' but, quite literally, a 'work of art'.

The Old Stile Press, founded and run by husband and wife team, Frances and Nicolas McDowall, designs, prints by hand and publishes books in editions limited to between 100 and 250 copies. These editions often combine texts of literary merit and significance with specially commissioned suites of wood engravings, woodcuts, linocuts and other relief blocks made by artist-printmakers.

The Press's most recent publication, *Green Blades*, interweaves a selection of Thomas Hardy's *Poems of 1912-13* with the wood and linocuts of artist, Mark Cazalet. It is a truly striking book: printed on Fabriano Tiziano paper, each of the images is formed from one woodcut and one linocut and printed directly from the original blocks. Each page opening involves three colours, and there are five colours in total, specially mixed from natural pigment by Cranfield Colours. The edition is case-bound: the binding has an image printed on the cover and the book is enclosed by a folding cloth-covered slipcase

by The Fine Book Bindery, Wellingborough.

Mark Cazalet has not striven to find literal ‘equivalents’ for Hardy’s poems, nor to recreate his topography or historical period. Rather the poetic insights which intimate Hardy’s emotions and experiences after the death of his first wife, Emma, are re-imagined in new forms, and through fresh, often quite personal, images. The artist has re-ordered Hardy’s sequence, selecting and arranging twenty-two of the poems to suggest a gradual progression from guilt and grief to reconciliation and a final quiet acceptance. At times there are some arresting connections and juxtapositions; and occasionally there exists some tension between the poem and the image, a stimulating dialogue between the visual forms and poetic ideas which re-invigorates the reader’s response without destroying the essence of the original verse.

In ‘Castel Boterel’, a buoy lies stranded, redundant at low tide, blazed by the powerful sun, chains coiling at its base: ‘for my sand is sinking,/ And I shall traverse old love’s domain/ Never again.’; yet, the sails of the ship on the far horizon, gliding through smooth waters, perhaps suggest future possibilities and hope. Such images recall the work of Edward Wadsworth (1889-49), whose enigmatic still lifes and maritime scenes possess a similar unease and dream-like quality.

Mark Cazalet has drawn his inspiration from his own experiences and environments, including the Sussex countryside and the landscape of Provence,

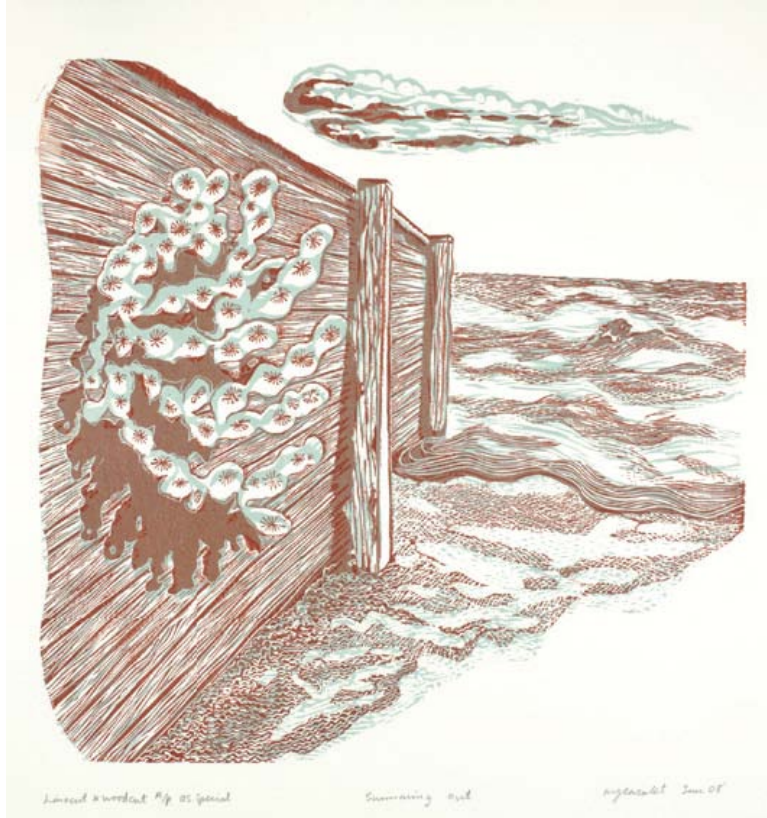


‘Castle Boterel’

Southern France. His images demonstrate an intense sensitivity to place and mood, and capture the mysterious quality of particular objects, conveying paradoxically both temporal, physical specificity and abstract timelessness. Thus, the algae in the image

accompanying 'Beeny Cliff' floats breezily but remains resolutely attached to the wooden breaker, its dense shadow emphasising the rootedness of its holdfast. In 'A Circular', an unused, crumbling mannequin, given shape and warmth by the gentle yellow tint, effortlessly conjures the poet's loss of 'Her who before last year ebbed out/ Was costumed in a shroud'.

Here, and throughout the collection, the handling of contrasting densities is skilful. 'The Spell of the Rose', in particular, exploits such contrasts to establish light and form, and to give life to shadows; the two halves of this image, which straddles the centre of the double page, seem to mirror, complement and oppose each other – both could stand alone, yet there is no doubting their togetherness.



'Beeny Cliff'

Similarly, in 'Places' the eye wanders over many textures, searching for what is just out of sight, as the path narrows, bends, disappears: 'one there is to whom these things,/ ... Have a savour that scenes in being lack,/ And a presence more than the actual brings'.

Unresolved connections and tensions between these often mundane objects – a tree, a pylon, a swing; a bird, a church, a gate – create a sense of restlessness and movement, which is enhanced by the layout of the verse on the page, and by the shapes of the images themselves, which draw the eye along threading paths, towards horizons, and beyond the page. The image which accompanies 'The Voice' sings powerfully to the reader, its swirling forms conveying the restless night breezes which carry the elusive woman's cry, and evoke the powerful pull of the troubled stream whose waters curl beneath the words of the poem and spill beyond the margins, 'faltering forward'. There is an almost Gothic



'The Walk'

quality to some of these images, a dream-like ambience, as in 'I Found Her Out There' with its dramatic sweep to the left of the page, wildly whirling trees, and mysterious forms.

Human figures are rarely present but often implied. In 'The Walk', the kissing-gate which imposes itself on the foreground, its confident pointed wooden planks overshadowing the church residing calmly in the distance, dramatically conveys the poet's sentiments: 'I walked up there to-day,/ Just in the former way; ... What difference, then?/ Only that underlying sense/ Of the look of a room on returning thence.'

However, in 'The Going' the eye is drawn by the narrow perspective to a simple form in the distance, almost lost among the architectural wall of trees which embraces the deep pathway. Light filters through the fingers of the canopy, creating a space crowded with forms and shadows, sounds and movements: 'Why do you make me leave the house/ And think for a breath it is you I see/ At the end of the alley of bending boughs/ Where so often at dusk you used to be'.

One of my favourite images is that accompanying 'Your Last Drive', with its strong vertical and horizontal movements, its integration of past and future, significant and transient. The solidity and permanence of an ancient oak, in the central foreground, is answered by a fragile children's swing, hanging irreverently from its branches. The dense spread of leaves, reaching beyond the confines of



'The Going'

the page, pushes forward and upwards, while the blank sky recedes, telegraph wires etched against its paleness. As the poet reflects on and rejects the voices of memory and the present, these wires carry their messages of modernity into the future.

The strength and simplicity of line, and the wit in Mark Cazalet's images recall the style of the illustrator, book designer and mural painter, Edward Bawden (1903-89). Moreover, recurring motifs, such as the ancient landscape, trees, the Gothic and the nocturnal, suggest an affinity with the English pastoral tradition, beginning with William Blake and Samuel Palmer, and continuing in the postWW1 era, when artists such as Paul Nash sought to affirm this tradition and to tease out worlds of private mystery in the landscape. Above all, Mark Cazalet's images are notable for their poise, confidence and integrity. A beautiful book.

CLAIRE

SEYMOUR

Naxos Audiobooks: *TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES*

Read by Anna Bentinck. Produced by Roy McMillan.

14 CDs (running time: c.17¾ hours). ISBN: 978-962-634-867-3. £50.

For the Spring *Journal* Roy McMillan, the producer of this audiobook, wrote an informative and entertaining article about the planning and preparation involved. He explained the thinking behind the choice of reader: 'The central character has such a powerful presence throughout the work that giving the whole book a female voice

seemed to be the only right way to capture the essence of it.' His decision was a bold and interesting one, which the listener to this series of CDs – certainly the listener already familiar with the novel – instinctively holds under continuous review. Was this the 'right' decision? Is the experience of hearing the novel in this way equivalent to that of reading it to oneself? Does it matter if it isn't?

For what it's worth, my own answer to this last question is that there are both gains and losses. The reader, Anna Bentinck, does an admirable job of finding a voice for Tess herself, coloured by dialect but movingly accommodating strong feeling and instinctive intelligence. She similarly contrives a sympathetic and realistic presentation of Retty, Marian and Izz. At the other extreme she makes a poor fist of Alec d'Urberville; though to be fair it must be conceded that this stage villain is a crude characterisation. The actor – male or female – has not yet been born who could plausibly say, as from a dog-cart hurtling out of control: "'Let me put one little kiss on those holmberry lips, Tess; or even on that warmed cheek, and I'll stop – on my honour, I will!'" That the gender of the performer isn't the crucial factor in the failure here is confirmed by the fact that Bentinck performs very proficiently in a variety of minor male roles, such as Dairyman Crick and Farmer Groby.

There is a corresponding problem, of course, with the dire idiom of Angel Clare. For example: "'My Tess has, no doubt, almost as many experiences as that wild convolvulus out there on the garden hedge, that opened itself this morning for the first time.'" Sentence structure, tone and rhythm are collusively inept. Bentinck makes a decent attempt throughout to soften Clare's voice into well-intentioned unassertiveness, and probably sounds less of a pompous weed than would most male readers; but she is fighting a losing battle.

It may be that the mere fact of hearing Alec's or Angel's dialogue performed aloud – whether by a man or a woman – highlights its shortcomings. In reading to oneself, it seems to me, one automatically modifies the problem by hurrying on and averting one's ear when the dialogue becomes damagingly artificial, thereby reducing it to the status of mere enabling matter.

It's now acknowledged, of course, that in his fiction Hardy was both realist and modernist. In general, reading aloud would seem to have a 'literalising' effect that favours the former mode rather than the latter. For example, in this recording the agricultural descriptions, or the conversations of the milk-maids, work brilliantly at the realistic level. But for that very reason there can be a sense of awkwardness in the transition to a more emblematic episode. More than in any of my own readings of the text I was conscious here of how cavalierly Hardy achieves the memorable baptism scene. He scarcely breaks step as he tosses another small victim onto the huge mound of dead babies in Victorian fiction. Sorrow, inexplicably nameless until his death, is fine all day out on the harvest field but then 'had been suddenly taken ill since the afternoon'. In a few short hours he's dead. Since no doctor has been sent for, his illness is likewise anonymous. The Parson *is* sent for, but is locked out by Tess's drunken father. Her mother, elsewhere portrayed as a kindly soul, does not intervene or so much as speak, and would appear to sleep through the baptism. My point is that this cutting of corners becomes more apparent in the realistic context produced by the reading aloud.

Anna Bentinck has a pleasing voice. She reads with clarity and intelligence and a feeling for the cadences of Hardy's prose. Certain scenes are brought, through

'performance' to strong dramatic life. But to hear the narrative mediated through one voice is to become aware that private reading has editorial functions of its own. Passages may be diversely 'heard', internally, as seeming to provide, for example, basic exposition, psychological commentary or sensuous landscape description. In some cases the apprehended voice is, or might as well be, gender free. But there is sociological description that seems to come from Hardy himself, most obviously where there is direct borrowing from 'The Dorchester Labourer'. And for all the 'powerful presence' of the heroine the sustained external meditation on her plight would appear to be enunciated from a specifically masculine position. In such areas the female narration seems slightly odd or distracting. The essential point that emerges, however, is that to hear the novel read aloud, however well, and whether by a man or a woman, is to be reminded that a private reading, if less lucid and dramatic, can hold a greater number of interpretative possibilities in suspension. That issue is so intriguing as to demand exploration by many an individual admirer of Hardy's work; and there could be no better basis for such exploration than this vivid and meticulous production.

MICHAEL IRWIN