

**Tribhuvan University**

**Quest for Organic Unity in Thomas Hardy's *The Woodlanders***

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### **Abstract**

This research on Hardy's *The Woodlanders* explores the relationship between human and non-human world, which reflects Hardy's quest for organic unity. In this novel, the relationship between nature and characters is subtle, indirectly reflecting Hardy's concern for organic unity. The people who live in woodland have a strong sense of the natural degeneration in the surroundings, and they are quite familiar with every natural phenomenon. In the novel, the characters are led to explore the relationship between human and natural world. This thesis explores Hardy's portrayal of nature as sometimes being cruel so as to teach the human beings the lesson about the significance of the organicism. The characters are made to acknowledge the significance of maintaining harmony with nature. The perception of nature suggests modern civilization exists if only it harmoniously cohabits with nature. Although nature provides human beings with living stuffs, it also forces humans to acknowledge its power through its processes. In the novel, the characters such as John South and Giles Winterbourn's attempt to identify and relate their emotional--sentiments--and physical state to natural phenomena reflect their quest for organic unity.

## Contents

	Page No.
Acknowledgements	
Abstract	
Chapter I: Representation of Nature in Thomas Hardy's Novels	1-10
Chapter II: Quest for Organic Unity in <i>The Woodlanders</i>	11-31
Chapter III: Ecocritical Concern in <i>The Woodlanders</i>	32-33
Works Cited	

## I. Representation of Nature in Thomas Hardy's Novels

This research on Hardy's *The Woodlanders* explores the relationship between human and non-human world. In this novel, the relationship between nature and characters is subtle, indirectly reflecting narrator's view of natural harmony. The people, who live in woodland, have a strong sense of the natural cycle in the surroundings, and they are quite familiar with every natural phenomenon. Giles lives in harmony with the natural cycle, and his occupations involve interaction with the seasons and the land. He understands the trees' language and can interpret the sounds of the trees. He also knows how to make use of and survive in the woods; the woods provide timber and apples that he uses to make a living; the trees also provide him with a refuge and shelter and make him feel at home. Another character John South's identification with the elm can be regarded as a search for organic. They see nature in the form of the community order which becomes the ground scale on which they weigh their lives. Thus, it is hypothesized that the representation of the imagery of nature makes critique of dualist philosophy in order to extend the ethics upto the non-human species. Dualist theory feeds on hierarchal relation, e. g. man and woman, culture and nature, that gives license for the first to exploit the second. Undoing such dualist relation enables to exert the sense of moral responsibility to value equally all the species. By the expansion of ethics the text emphasizes the unhierarchical interrelatedness between human and non-human species. The co-existence between human and non-human species helps maintain bio-diversity. Biodiversity becomes essential in order to protect biotic community and the biosphere.

In *The Woodlanders*, the characters are led to explore the relationship between human and natural world. This thesis includes Hardy's portrayal of nature as sometimes being cruel so as to teach the human beings the lesson about the

significance of the organicism. The characters are made to acknowledge the significance of harmony with nature, and its perception of nature is the only one that can survive in modern civilization. Although nature provides human beings with existential living conditions, it also forces humans to acknowledge its power, and always interferes in men's lives when human beings work towards disintegrating natural unity. So, the characters such as John South and Giles Winterbourn's attempt to identify and relate their emotional and physical state to natural phenomena reflect their quest for organic unity.

Most of Hardy's novels provide a rich source of nature imagery. His each novel set in Wessex has strong naturalistic elements. Some of the most powerful descriptive and poetic passages in Thomas Hardy's novels involve the world of nature. His use of closely observed details in depicting nature and natural processes is perhaps most accurate in English fiction. One of his great strengths as a novelist is the way he portrays the interaction of his characters with the natural world. In many instances he even gives the natural world human quality. Nature can be seen as not merely decorative; rather it can be seen as illustrative, i.e. in harmony with the characters' moods or situation. In essence, a projection of the inner state of the character; it is sometimes determinative of action, i.e. the weather or natural features influence the moods and behavior of the characters.

Nature in all forms becomes an agent in his work. Hardy sees nature as a significant and powerful entity. By allowing his characters to interact with nature in his fictional countryside of Wessex (the counties of Berkshire, Hampshire, Wiltshire, Dorset, Somerset and Devon), Hardy succeeds in adding to his fiction a great sense of drama and a profound vision of man in harmony with the natural world. Irving Howe has noted that "Hardy instinctively unites nature and man, making the external setting

a kind of sharer in the human fate" (23) and that he writes so that "the landscape takes its place as an actor in the drama of human life" (413). Perhaps no other writer, living or dead had such an understanding of nature and at the same time possessed the writing skill and emotional depth to capture and convey this world in print.

Hardy was born in Dorchester, in the southwestern country of Dorset in 1840 into a world that has now long since vanished and was vanishing even as he wrote one that he tried to capture in his fiction and poetry for the rest of his long life. In his boyhood, he was often solitary and "would wander for hours through the countryside, learning to love-it might be more accurate to say, coming to be one with -birds and small animal" (Howe 6). This close involvement with the natural world and certain shyness is the boy seen to have produced unusually sensitive feelings for nature. But there are darker moment. Hardy as a young person also observed the suffering of both animals and men in the Dorset of that time; this seems to have ingrained in him a great deal of empathy for unfortunates-he eventually came to the conclusion that suffering is a democracy uniting all men and animals. But this is only one aspect of Hardy's perspective on Nature. More positively, he celebrates the beauties of the natural world and man's relationship to it. He had deep affinities with "the farmland, animals, rocks hills and the people who live among them" (Howe 6). This honest celebration of the English countryside is one of the great attractions of his writing for many people.

One of the passages about natural environment in Hardy's next novel *Far From the Madding Crowd* is worth quoting here. It is a description of summer thunderstorm to which Hardy gives human quality. In the novel, heaven is compared to human being as it opens and the flash springs from east, north, south, and is a perfect dance of death. The forms of skeletons appear in the air, shaped with blue fire

for bones-dancing, leaping, striding, racing around, and mingling altogether in unparalleled confusion. With these are intertwined undulating snakes of green, and behind these is a broad mass of lesser light. Hardy writes:

Simultaneously came from every part of the tumbling sky what may be called a shout, since, though no shot ever came near it, it was more of the nature of a shout than anything else earthly. In the meantime one of the grisly forms had alighted on the point of Gabriel's rod, to run invisibly down it, down the chain, and into the earth. 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 human, seemed small and trifling in such close juxtaposition with an infuriated universe. (qtd. in Jones 260)

This passage is only a small piece of Hardy's description of this storm. It is instructive to note the additional expressions that characterize the storm. Hardy gives it human qualities: the lightning at one point is seen to be like "mailed armies" (258). A flash leaps out "with the spring of a serpent and shout of a fiend" (259). The verbs used in the quoted passage above all convey motion and even madness: skeletal lightning "dancing, leaping, striding, racing around, and mingling together" (259). These are things that human do and the reference to skeletons is certainly striking. As Malamud Randy argues anthropomorphism "promises to elevate the status of animals in general cultural regard" because it is less easy to tolerate the suffering of nonhuman animals when their emotions, intelligence, behaviour, and feelings seem to resemble our own" (37-38). Hardy's attributing the non-human beings human quality reflects the equal treatment of non-human beings. The climax in above passage comes when the



lightening reaches Gabriel's improvised lightning-rod; Hardy says the 'grisly from' of the lightning came down and 'alighted' upon his rod; and then traveled down into the ground. Gabriel is almost blinded. Howe has pointed out them in this passage, the storm:

seems to be driven by the same energies and torn by the same passions that drive and tear the characters. There is a relationship, extremely hard to fix in language, between the characters and the natural setting, a partial sharing in rhythm and motion, upsurge and rest (Howe 54).

This passage is symbolic of much of Hardy's writing about nature and though it is more violent than most, it still conveys his concern with his characters not as passive victims of nature but as participants in a natural drama. Hardy was an expert observer and was able to render detailed portraits of the environment, and in so doing, he has the environment participating in the moods and feelings of his characters, sometimes reflecting their feelings and condition, sometimes taking on a 'life' of its own ; at other times he has the natural environment influence a characters' emotional state. Thus, he has been able to elevate certain scenes to higher levels of intensity and meaning; in the best novels, this heightened level of meaning reaches the intensity of epic tragedy. A critic from his own time, William Watson, puts it in terms of classical drama by commenting that one of his:

especially poetic traits is hid manner of sometimes using external Nature not simply as a background or setting, but as a sort of superior spectator and chorus, that makes strangely unconcerned comments from the vantage ground of a sublime aloofness upon the ludicrous tragedy of the human lot (201).

This study of Hardy's use of nature as a distinct personality in his novels has sought to show, first of all, that he saw nature and by extension the universe, as neither good nor evil, but that ecocritical interpretations are still necessary. He supplied these throughout his work. If any generalization can be made about the moral force inherent in nature, it might be that Hardy sees the natural world as good and man and his works as less so; perhaps this is because he trusted his intuition more than his reason. Much has been written about his pessimism; but perhaps it might be best to think of his philosophy as a "general temperamental approach to the universe" (Jones 139), rather than a formal system of thought. For Hardy, emotion and not reason is the dominant force in his interpretation of reality. Thomas Hardy has been called a pessimistic pantheist, which might be probably a fair evaluation.

Hardy's *Tess* is the most representative because it is his masterwork and *Far From the Madding Crowd* is, *Return of the Native* and *Egdon Heath* are an outstanding exploration into the natural world. In his writings, Hardy consistently displays his deep feeling for nature, especially green nature. But it seems clear that Hardy saw the whole of the universe as one interrelated organism; that man, as a thinking part of this large organism, is uniquely gifted with the blessing and curse of reason and foresight, and this can be used at times to ameliorate his lot on earth and the suffering that comes with it. Some may be greater and some much smaller than man himself, but all parts interact. Margaret Drabble is of the opinion that he

was perfectly equipped to write of the natural world. By nature, by birth, by training, he was endowed with every gift, and in his best work. By nature, by birth, by training, he was endowed with every gift and in his best work he writes with a sensitivity and power that none can imitate. Whole landscapes or minuscule details of leaf and root and

insect are in his range; he can achieve large effects and small....."

(168).

In his creative imagination he may have formed a hierarchy in the community life and being, but it appears that he felt that "the universal whole was as organism in which we are 'limbs and organs,' on the grounds that organisms are not static but must evolve" while stressing the "similarities of predicament at different levels of the natural world " (Jones 222).

In Hardy's writing, nature provides us with a ground from which we can survey the condition of man; it also provides "grounding in sanity" (125). Hardy saw nature as a personality and a force in his writing because his impulses were towards integration of man with nature. The modern impulse is towards disintegration or separation of man from nature. The movement in his novel is towards unity while still seeing the universe as made up of diverse and unique or individual in nature and in man into a mass of similar attributes, a standardized and stereotypical sense of otherness and alienation. Hardy was perhaps the last English pastoral novelist, though D.H. Lawrence kept to the tradition in his early novels, to see nature as essential to a sane understanding of man and the world. Hardy's novels have maintained a place in the conscious and in the unconscious life of their readers because they continue to be relevant to man's experience of the natural worlds. They continue to help readers interpret not only the natural world that Hardy saw over a century ago, but the contemporary natural world that is fast disappearing -- perhaps they offer us a window into a sensibility towards nature that is no longer in existence.

*The Woodlanders* depicts individuals in thrall to desire and natural law that motivates them. Samuel C. Chew describes it as "the most tender of all Hardy's books" (331). Another critic David Lodge reads the novel in the tradition of pastoral

elegy. He describes the literary tradition of the pastoral elegy and quotes Northrop Frye on its deep roots in religion and myth. He describes aspects of the book in both these terms. He writes:

The characteristic emotional curve of a pastoral elegy is an extravagant expression of grief which, having worked itself out, modulates into a mood of resignation, and indeed hope, based on the promise of renewed life in nature. In this book conventional resolution is spilt into two Grace and Fitzpiers go off to "fresh woods, and pastures new" with their lives at least temporarily revived and renewed, while Marty is left behind in the Hintock woods to nourish the memory of Giles. (qtd. in Williams 905)

Like in his other works, Hardy's character portrayal in *The Woodlanders* is superb. Melbury have really been made to live before us. We become not only acquainted with their physical appearance and their visible movements and actions but also with their invisible working of their minds. David Cecil comments: "Hardy's characters linger in our imagination as grand typical figures silhouetted against the huge horizon of the universe; they resemble characters of epic and tragedy" (36).

Hardy's novels also deal with the passion of love. All his novels are love stories. In *The Woodlanders*, there are love stories which have been interwoven to form a wonderful pattern. Giles Winterbourne is in love with Grace Melbury, Fitzpiers falls in love with Grace feels fascinated and awed by some of his abilities and skills. Grace is compelled by her father to marry with Fitzpiers. Fitzpiers, soon, falls in love with widow, Mrs Charmond, who is happy in company with Fitzpiers. The love affair between Mrs Charmond and Fitzpiers ruin the conjugal life of Grace

and Fitzpiers. Grace begins to appreciate the merits of Giles, and she falls deeply in love with him. In fact, she had never loved Fitzpiers so much as she loves Giles now.

Another trend in the story is the love of humble village girl, Marty south for Giles. Marty's love is stead fast, deep, and trustworthy though it proves to be vain because Giles is hardly aware of Marty's love for him. Paul Harvey states:

Fitzpiers returns from his travels abroad with Mrs. Charmond, and Grace flies for refuge to Giless's cottage in the woods. Owing to delicacy on his part and respect for the properties on hers she is left alone in the cottage and the man she loves, though ill betakes himself to crazy shelter of hurdles, which after a few days of exposure he dies. Mrs. Charmond being now dead Grace and Fitzpiers are ultimately reconciled. Parallel to the devotion of Giles to Grace is the devotion of poor plain Marty South the typical primitive Wessex girl, to Giles. (85)

Fitzpier, once again wants to love Grace but she rejects. Marty South devoted and dedicated herself for the love of Giles. their love seems very ideal represented innocent village girl. The love affair is interwoven in the above mentioned extract.

The rustic characters in *The Woodlander* provide the comic element. The conversation between rustic characters is the source of entertainment. Robert Creedle is the most popular character in the novel. His gestures match with his speech which makes the reader laugh. The rustics has played important role for the development of the plot in the novel. Tim Tangs is a praiseworthy rustic who brings reconciliation between Fitzpiers and Grace.

Despite the fact that the rustics provide amusement for the readers, Hardy makes a humorous remark also in the course of his narration of events. To support the comedy provided by the rustics. R.P Draper opines:

In *The Woodlanders*, there is a memorable picture of the calves roaming in the ruins of Sherton castle cooling their thirsty tongues by licking the quaint Norman carving, which glistened with moisture. It is as though time and all the rest of the natural order, conspired to eat away and erase all the structures and features associated with the human presence. (209)

Although these above mentioned critics have analyzed the novel from various perspectives, this thesis argues that in *The Woodlanders* the characters such as John South and Giles Winterbourn relate their emotional and physical state to natural phenomena. Identifying themselves in relation to nature goes against the dichotomy of nature versus culture. Negating the dualist tradition not only reflects their ethical oneness with nature but also depicts their concern organic unity.

This thesis has been divided into three chapters. The first chapter is the introduction to the thesis. The second chapter analyses the novel from the perspective of ecocriticism with evidences from the text. And the third and the last chapter sums up the arguments developed in the second chapter.

## II: Quest for Organic Unity in *The Woodlanders*

This research examines Thomas Hardy's *The Woodlanders* to explore the critical relationship between man and nature. In this novel, the relationship between nature and characters is amiable. The woodland people who live on nature have a strong sense of the natural topography in the surroundings, and they are quite familiar with every natural phenomenon. Giles lives in harmony with the natural environment; and his occupations involve interaction with the seasons and the land. He understands the trees' language and can interpret the sounds of the trees, and he knows how to make use of and survive in the woods; the woods provide timber and apples that he uses to make a living; the trees also provide him with a refuge and shelter and make him feel at home. Another character John South's identification with the elm can be regarded as a search for organic. In *Reading the Earth*, Michael P. Branch explains the ecocriticism as "not just a means of analyzing nature in literature; it implies a move toward a more biocentric world view, an extension of ethics, a broadening of human conception of global community to include nonhuman life forms and the physical environment" (19). The characters in the novel see nature in the form of the community order which becomes the ground scale on which they weigh their lives. That is to say, they relate their emotional and physical states to natural phenomena.

This thesis explores Hardy's concern for natural harmony, which obviously shows that nature affects human society. The characters acknowledge the significance of harmony with nature, and their perception of nature is the only one that can survive in modern civilization. Nature provides a living to human beings, but it also forces human beings to acknowledge its power, and always intervenes men's life cycles, ensuring that the disunity disturbs the entire ecosystem. Nature forces human beings to look at nature from its agency, which Kevin Hutchings calls "ecotone in which

natural objects and processes have the power to unsettle and thus to revise . . . the discursive understandings of human inevitably bring to bear upon them" (190). Hardy writes at the beginning of the novel:

Here the trees, timber or fruit-bearing, as the case may be, make the wayside hedges ragged by their drip and shade,[ . . .] The physiognomy of a deserted highway expresses solitude to a degree that is not reached by mere dales or downs, and bespeaks a tomb-like stillness more emphatic than that of glades and pools. The contrast of what is with what might be probably accounts for this. To step, for instance, at the place under notice, from the hedge of the plantation into the adjoining pale thoroughfare, and pause amid its emptiness for a moment, was to exchange by the act of a single stride the simple absence of human companionship for an incubus of the forlorn. (5)

On the first page of the novel, the depiction of lonely and deserted paths, hedges, plantation and trees, timber and the deserted highways stress on the need for human companionship, this reflects the writer's concern for organic unity-- non-human and human relationship.

John South and Giles Winterbourn's attempt to identify and relate their emotional and physical state to natural phenomena reflects their quest for organic unity. To them, nature is both an evil spirit that will bring destruction and a good angel that will bring prosperity. South has a strong psychic bond with nature. He feels strong empathy with the elm that has grown old along with him, and he is convinced that the elm embodies his life span. He says that it is exactly his own age that it has grown up to be his enemy. He says:



As the tree waved, South waved his head, making it his flugel-man with abject obedience. "Ah, when it was quite a small tree," he said, "and I was a little boy, I thought one day of chopping it off with my hook to make a clothes-line prop with. But I put off doing it, and then I again thought that I would; but I forgot it, and didn't. And at last it got too big, and now 'tis my enemy, and will be the death o' me. Little did I think, when I let that sapling stay, that a time would come when it would torment me, and dash me into my grave. (108).

Hardy brings a powerful analogy between the state of nature and man. He believes that the purpose of nature is to 'torment' him, and 'dash' him in his grave". When the tree is dead, so is he; this is the law of nature. Hardy, here, implies that the human life is interrelated with natural world.

Similarly, Giles lives in harmony with the natural cycle, and his occupations involve interaction with the seasons and the land. He is skilled in hurdle-making and cider-making, and all his products are of good quality. Apparently, Giles has a high level of intelligent intercourse with nature and an intuitive understanding of his environment, and he belongs to the world of the woods. Grace and the other Hintock people believe that it is the loss of his property that kills Giles in melancholy and illness. According to Mattisson, this is only part of the truth. When "the rules of social conventions oblige him to abandon his hut to Grace", "for the first time Giles is not only confronted with the alienation of society, he must also withstand the hostile forces of nature" (320). In Giles' mind, nature is a refuge and shelter that provides comfort and warmth. But his perception is explored into characters' emotional states in such a way in the novel that he always "withdraws from human company in general and surrounds himself with the creatures of the woods" (319). Whenever he feels at

odd with the human community and modern civilization, he just goes back to the trees to seek solace. He always expresses his deep feelings in actions rather than words; hence, when he is hurt, he retreats further and further into the woods, cutting away all his links to other people and the outside world.

Thomas Hardy's *The Woodlanders* depicts the gloom and decay, which exists in the natural world, and which is mirrored in the lives of the woodland characters. This overwhelming feeling of pain and decay shows Hardy's insistence on the human struggle for survival within the woods--the natural world--built up through numerous references throughout the novel. At times, this gloomy view gives way to a real celebration of the beauties in nature, particularly in the progression of the seasons and their influence on the productivity of the natural world. But this celebration is not to last: just as Grace's joy and discovery of her love for Giles will not come to logical conclusion, so the environmental concern in the novel remains dominant. Another way in which Hardy's depiction of nature is most relevant, and most inspiring in *The Woodlanders*, is in his creation of a close relationship between the woodland characters and the natural world. There are many examples of quest for harmonious unity between character and landscape, as well as times when a character's feelings are imitated by nature. David Lodge rightly comments that "it is his [Hardy's] ability to make concrete the relationship between the characters and the environment" (97). By examining Hardy's natural world in this novel, this research attempts to show the quest for organic unity as it focuses on the interdependence of character and natural world, which the theory of ecocriticism advocates. Hardy describes the miserable state of felled trees and twigs:

They had planted together, and together they had felled; together they had, with the run of the years, mentally collected those remoter signs

and symbols which, seen in few, were of runic obscurity, but all together made an alphabet. From the light lashing of the twigs upon their faces, when brushing through them in the dark, they could pronounce upon the species of the tree whence they stretched; from the quality of the wind's murmur through a bough they could in like manner name its sort afar off. They knew by a glance at a trunk if its heart were sound, or tainted with incipient decay, and by the state of its upper twigs, the stratum that had been reached by its roots. (274)

By mentioning the felled twigs of the trees, Hardy draws attention to the ecological crisis, the human beings are facing.

Generally, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the natural environment. As Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm note that “all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world affecting it and affected by it” (xi). Hence, the most obvious reason why the environmental concern of Thomas Hardy dominates the novel *The Woodlanders*, is that the characters, with the exception of Fitzpiers, are led from happiness to unhappiness, and Hardy translates their unhappiness into pain in the natural environment. From the outset, the writer supplies the novel with images of decay and destruction in the woods, and this unconsciously prepares the characters for the struggle in the natural world. Literature has always conditioned our philosophical understanding of nature. We have lots of literary text where landscape and other non human animals play dominant role as characters. Many literary works make use of concrete physical images present in the echo-sphere like mountain-springs, lofty cliffs, quiet sky, rocks, woods as well as many animals such as birds, and other animals. These ecological elements in literary works can give birth to the sense of

kindness and love to the objects other than human. These portrayals of human beings living in close proximity with other non-human natural world, the communion between man and the physical ecosphere helps in understanding the harmonious relationship and co-existence of human as well as non-human natural world. Concerns about maintaining or restoring a right relationship to nature are both thematically and symbolically present in the literature of every culture. Hardy's use of "ivy," (35) the plant generally known for its poisonous and parasitic qualities and its habit of winding itself around other plants, quickly comes to symbolize the brutal struggle for survival among plants themselves in the woodlands, which the narrator describes for the other characters to understand: "In the hollow shades of the roof could be seen dangling and etiolated arms of ivy which had crept through the joints of the tiles and were groping in vain for some support, their leaves being dwarfed and sickly for want of sunlight" (22). This quote shows the plant's quest for existence in the natural world. In another passage Hardy writes that, "The ivy slowly strangled to death the promising sapling" (44), a succinct and poignant evocation of the struggle between the plants for survival. And further on, the points of the ivy leaves "scratch [their] underlying neighbour restlessly" (72). These references capture exactly the nature of the ivy plant, fighting for survival in the natural world. This representation of natural world in literary work is the major concern of ecocriticism.

*The Woodlanders* shows the reciprocal relationship between human being and land in which the land does not become mere stage upon which human story is acted out but as an actor in the drama. The home ground of ecocriticism is the human's inseparable attachment with the soil in its existence. In the 1996 collection *The Eco Criticism Reader* Glotfelty and Harold Forms posit:

Ecocriticism is the study of relationship between literatures and physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of text, eco-criticism takes an earth centered approach to literacy studies. (xviii)

This passage on ecocriticism shows that as the other theories such as Marxism and feminism advocate for the rights of poor working class people and women, ecocriticism shows its concern for equal treatment of non-human beings. Just as the Marxist and feminist literature deals with the proletariat and women, ecocritical literature deals with the conservation of biosphere.

Ecocritics and theorists are concerned with the questions like how nature is represented in literature and what role the physical setting plays in the plot of this novel. As the phrases, "deserted highways," "decayed trees" and "tomb-like stillness of the place" (5) have been used as a setting in *The Woodlanders*; and on the second page the exploited "old horse, whose leg-joints, shoulders, and hoofs were distorted by harness" reflects the extent to which human beings have exploited non-human beings. These are the things which ecocritics see in the texts. They examine the metaphors of the land used in the text. As the environmental crisis is deepening by the day, it is seeping into contemporary literature and popular culture.

In the novel *The Woodlanders*, the degeneration of natural environment and human struggle in the woods is often explained by the sounds of the struggle between two trees, and their pain is shown by the wounds resulting from this battle. For example, Marty's 3 a.m. journey to deliver her spars is made fearful by "the creaking sound of two over-crowded branches . . . rubbing each other into wounds" (14). This

symbolizes their attempt for their recognition. Similarly, towards the end of the novel, Grace views the woods as being in a battle: There were "trees close together, wrestling for existence, their branches disfigured with wounds resulting from their mutual rubbings and blows" (258). Here, the conflict or struggle between non-human beings (trees, branches etc.) symbolizes equal and significant role of the natural beings in the natural world. Their fight for struggle represents their recognition and existence. Hardy pays attention to the decay and disfigurement in the woods. The grotesque description of the walking sticks is a striking image:

The chief [pattern] being corkscrew shapes in black and white thorn, brought to that pattern by the slow torture of an encircling woodbine during their growth, as the Chinese have been said to mould human beings into grotesque toys by continued compression in infancy. (44)

The image of the objects being described in miserable state reflects the pathetic condition of natural beings, which is the major concern of ecocriticism.

Ecocriticism is a response to the need for biocentric understanding for our relationship with the natural world in an age of environmental destruction caused by materialistic interest of human beings. In large part, environmental crisis is a result of humanities' disconnectedness from the natural world, brought about by increasing technology that fails to understand the interconnectedness among human beings, living and even non-living things. That is why, Hardy in the novel frequently brings together the nature and the human beings. There is interaction between nature and the characters. The agenda posed by the ecocriticism has located it beyond the traditional boundaries of literary studies and they are hopeful that such study can help to result a harmonious balance between nature and human. Levin further explains:

Experience is always situated, in ways that no amount of theoretical reflection can transcend, and no matter how valuable that reflection may be. We should recognize the advantage (evolutionarily and cultural) of living as experientially situated being. Our bodies, our language, our socio-cultural environment all shape our distinctive style of. Without them, we would not recognize the natural environment, let alone express concern for it. The choice is not between culture and nature, as if to locate redemption either in a fuller recovery of nature from culture or in a more complete and rational application of culture to nature, but rather among different styles of dwelling in the world. We need to pay careful attention to how we experience the natural world as well as our literary representation of it. (1098)

This long quotation makes us pay attention to how nature is represented in literary works, which obviously gives spaces to nature. This makes people aware of the importance of nature in maintaining ecological unity. Hardy writes how human beings have destroyed nature for their advantage and exploited animals. He says:

A load of oak timber was to be sent away that morning to a builder whose works in a town many miles off. The trunks were chained down to a heavy timber carriage with enormous red wheels and four of the most powerful of Melbury's horses were harnessed in front to draw them. (80-81)

This representation of the exploitation of woods and horses by human beings for their advantage in the novel makes people aware of the condition of non-human beings.

Ecocritics believe that a considerable appreciation of nature can help restore a harmonious organic unity. They try to transform human environmental and ecological

consciousness. So, they value the integrity and interconnectedness between all things. As a newly emerging field of study, there may be varied interpretation although it can touch virtually any discipline, when it is translated in to action, it generally comes back to its home ground; the human relationship with the earth and its other members who equally share it. It adds place to the category of race, class and gender used to analyze literature; it means looking at how text represent the physical world and how literature raises moral questions about human interaction with nature. Hardy raises moral question on "setting fire to the dead leaves" which would destroy the young plants in the woods (81). A number of ecocritics say that ecocriticism represent a reaction to the heady theorizing of the 1980-90s.

Ecocriticism shows an environmental awareness of the overwhelming effect of human activity on all aspects of the environment. As Bill McKibben argues in *The End of Nature*, for the first time in history,

human beings [have] become so large that they [have] altered everything around us. That we [have] ended nature as an independent force, that our appetites and habits and desires [can] now be read in every cubic meter of air, in every increment on the thermometer (sic).

(xix)

The human population has grown so overwhelmingly in size that it has caused much devastation to the ecosystem. That is the reason why Hardy has mentioned about nature in almost every page of *The Woodlanders*.

Cheryll Glotfelty recognizes this profoundly different new relationship that humans have developed with the rest of the natural world, stating, "We have reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet's basic life support systems" (137). So, towards the end of the



novel, Hardy gives us a magnificent image of the destroyed woods: "Dead boughs were scattered about like ichthyosauri in a museum, and beyond them were perishing woodbine stems resembling old ropes" (258). This horrific representation of nature in literature is the concern of ecocritical study. Also present in this grotesque description are "rotting stumps . . . rising from their mossy setting like black teeth from green gums" (258). All this shows the human activities which have led to the degeneration of the earth.

Hardy also makes use of personification in the novel because personification elevates non-human beings to the state of humans. This allows equal status to non-human beings. Personification is taken even further, perhaps, as William Matchett suggests, "as a means of extending throughout the universe the same sufferings [Hardy] sees in man" (Matchett 257). So, the suffering of non-human beings is recognized when the writers personify objects. In the novel, Marty feels akin to the fir trees she plants because, "It seems to me . . . they sigh because they are very sorry to begin life in earnest - just as we be" (50). The sighing of plants evokes sympathy in human beings. Lost in the woods, Grace and Felice hold each other, "while the funereal trees rocked and chanted dirges unceasingly" (183). The old and dying trees constantly make aware the humans about the natural beings. And most disturbing of all is Hardy's description of the victims of the barking process: "Each tree doomed to the flaying process was first attacked by Upjohn ... an operation comparable to the 'little toilette' of the executioner's victim." The trees "stood naked-legged ... as if ashamed" (xix 103). This shows the sight of chopped trees. By describing the trees as preparing for execution Hardy evokes powerful images of human sacrifice, making the fate of the trees human and universal. Kramer sums up well this connection between the natural and the human world, explaining that "The sufferings that the

trees of the title inflict upon each other in their natural setting parallel those inflicted by one well-meaning human on others in the story" (20). So, human beings should understand the existence and interrelatedness between natural beings; they have to develop ethical attitude towards nature.

The best image to show the chain of being in the animal kingdom comes in the fourth chapter. One of the chapters begins with an ominous and distinctly gloomy description of morning: "the bleared white visage of a sunless winter day emerged like a dead-born child" (18). The simile used here shows the adverse phenomenon of natural world for which humans is directly or indirectly responsible. With the coming of morning, "Owls that had been catching mice in the outhouses, and stoats that had been sucking the blood of the rabbits" (19) cease their activities. The animals and plants also interact in struggle and this is demonstrated by the rabbits "nibbling bare the bases of some of the small woodland trees" (41). Barney Nelson's *The Wild and the Domestic*, which explicitly aligns itself with an ecocritical line, focuses precisely on the close relationship between natural beings: "the more one really knows domestic animals, the less domestic they seem" (24), Nelson stakes her ground not to argue against using animals but to argue against a dichotomy that results in restrictions on ranges of foraging for animals being exploited for human uses. Nelson's *The Wild and the Domestic* needs to be taken to task for tacitly endorsing an ethics of exploitation. And more broadly speaking, ecocritics on the whole need to be taken to task for not looking at how the continued use of animals for food, entertainment, forced labour, and so on, figure into environmental discussions. And in the human world, the strong and arrogant Fitzpiers dominates and destroys the weaker--both in terms of will and physical endurance--Giles, who abandons his suit for Grace with the coming of a rival.

The intense struggle in the natural world seems to draw energy from the earth, and Hardy portrays this exhaustion several times in the novel. One example is Grace's observation of a sunrise:

It was even now day out-of-doors, though the tones of morning were feeble and wan. . . . The tree-trunks, the road, the out-buildings, the garden, every object, wore that aspect of mesmeric passivity. . . . Helpless immobility seemed to be combined with intense consciousness; a meditative inertness possessed all things. (126)

This passage calls for human consciousness to maintain a healthy relationship with the natural world, which would inspire human beings to act in an active and creative way.

By showing the helplessness and dullness of the landscape, and by describing so vividly the violent struggle endured by plants in the woodlands, and animals in the Melbury homestead, Hardy focuses upon the unpleasantness in nature. This point is reinforced by Hardy's juxtaposition of elements of beauty--descriptions which at times come close to a Romantic view of nature--which temporarily bring hope, but are often destroyed by brutal reality. Sometimes, in *The Woodlanders*, Hardy presents the ecocritical elements of his vision simultaneously. For example, when Melbury and Grace drive away from the woods, "their wheels silently crush . . . delicate-patterned mosses, hyacinths, primroses, lord-and-ladies, and other strange and common plants" (106). The description of the plants is fine and detailed; the writer also shows how the gig destroys them. And so here, as is usual in *The Woodlanders*, the ecocritical concern in the woods dominates as it exposes how the surface beauty of the landscape is destroyed, which ecocriticism accounts for.

Another example of the ecological concern occurs when Grace and her father walk through the woods to the auction. Hardy gives a beautiful description of nature's gift in some of the sheltered hollows, their sheltered nature giving the idea of a "mixture of the seasons . . . in some of the dells they passed by holly-berries in full red growing beside oak and hazel . . . and brambles whose verdure was rich and deep as in the month of August" (40). The landscape then changes "from the handsome to the curious," and then leads into deformation:

On older trees . . . huge lobes of fungi grew like lungs. Here, as everywhere, the Unfulfilled Intention, which makes life what it is, was as obvious as it could be among the depraved crowds of a city slum. The leaf was deformed, the curve was crippled, the taper was interrupted, the lichen ate the vigour of the stalk, and the ivy slowly strangled to death the promising sapling. (41)

Here, the power of the description contradicts the beauty previously described, leaving us with the image of destruction in mind. It is also interesting to note in this passage that the decay and deformity is purposely linked to the human world--the city-slum, pre-empting the ruin that would befall the characters such as Giles. The destruction of trees and leaves indirectly affects human beings, so Hardy raises his voice for the conservation of nature.

In *The Woodlanders*, most of his descriptions of nature are miserable and environmental concern and human struggle in the natural world. Hardy is so unable to abandon the ecocritical view that his attempts to describe beauty are overshadowed by his new admission that all things would pass. Only when Grace's love for Giles awakens does Hardy see, unadulterated, the beauty of the season. Having said this,

however, there are other instances of Hardy's ecocritical view of nature to be found in *The Woodlanders*.

An ecocritical view of nature is, in fact, presented in the opening pages of the novel, from Barber Percomb's perspective as he is travelling to Little Hintock, "though there might be a somber beauty in the scenery, music in the breeze, and a wan procession of coaching ghosts in the sentiment of this old turnpike road, he was mainly puzzled about the way" (5). These ideas are unmistakably ecocritical as the natural objects quoted above compel human beings to explore the dark aspect of natural world. *The Woodlanders*, then, from the opening pages, seeks to explore this puzzle. That the book ends with a sad note, however, suggests that Hardy has accepted that nature must struggle for survival and unity that we must look beyond the surface to find only beauty in nature. In the end, Grace says, "Whenever I plant young larches, I will think that noone can plant, as you planted" (305). The ironical statement here focuses on protecting nature for ecological balance.

The lives on earth are connected with each other and all wholly dependent upon such basic natural elements for their survival sunlight, water and air. This ecological approach claims that even study is meaningless unless it highlights the relationship between biotic and abiotic constituents of earth. On the other hand, this new criticism is a call for cultural change. Ecocriticism is not just a means of analyzing nature in literature. It implies a move towards a more biocentric worldview, an extension of ethics, a broadening of human's conceptions of global community to include non-human life form and the physical environment. Jonathan Levin in "Forum on Literature of Environment" says:

Ecocriticism is marked by a tremendously ambitious intellectual ethical, political, and even spiritual agenda. It aims at the

transformation of human environmental and ecological consciousness. Western imagination – man a little lower than the angels but well above the rest of earthly creation, imposing rational design to improve his earthly habitat – toward a newly emerging ecocentric paradigm, with its deeper respect for the integrity of many other forms of life with which humankind shares the earth. Unsurprisingly, this agenda has located ecocriticism beyond the traditional boundaries of literary studies. (1098)

In *The Woodlanders*, with the change in the seasons, from summer to autumn, comes Hardy's most natural description of the glory of nature. Melbury's excursion to Highstoy Hill lends him to the cider district showing "the miles of appletrees in bloom. All was now deep green" (121). At the beginning of the cider season Hardy unsparingly describes the orchards of Little Hintock: "beyond the yard were to be seen gardens and orchards now bossed, nay encrusted, with scarlet and gold fruit, stretching to infinite distance under a luminous lavender mist" (132). Hardy then quotes the marvellous Autumn description from Chatterton's "Song to Aella,":

When the fair apples, red as evening sky,  
Do bend the tree unto the fruitful ground,  
When juicy pears, and berries of black dye  
Do dance in air, and call the eyes around. (145)

Everything in these pages reverts back to the beauty of the season. There are lengthy descriptions of Giles and the process of his cider-making, and Grace's thoughts of Giles and his cider press. The power of Autumn is captured in the description of "the blue stagnant air of autumn which hung over everything [and] was heavy with a sweet cidery smell.

The air of different season quoted above in the novel is meant for human beings without whom sweet air holds no meaning. So, every object in nature is meant for each other. This lays emphasis on biotic co-existence.

Even the villainous Fitzpiers, on his way to see Felice, is immersed in the beautiful Autumn landscape, travelling "through the gorgeous autumn landscape of White-Hart Vale, surrounded by orchards lustrous with the reds of apple-crops, berries, and foliage" (155). The beauty of nature inspires human beings leading them towards creativity and prosperity. The beauty of nature is significant for human beings. All in the natural world is growing, and nature is at its most bountiful. The narrator explains that, "The earth this year had been prodigally bountiful, and now was the supreme moment of her bounty" (155). Nature offers human beings stuffs required for living. Grace also thinks along these lines, but embellishes the meaning of nature to include Giles, her fertility God, within it.

With Grace's realization of her love for Giles comes Hardy's most exquisite and the description of nature in the novel. Giles, coming along the road, is seen by Grace in the following way:

He looked and smelt like Autumn's very brother, his face being sunburnt to wheat-colour, his eyes blue as corn-flowers, his sleeves and leggings dyed with fruit stains, his hands clammy with the sweet juice of apples, his hat sprinkled with pips, and everywhere about him that atmosphere of cider which at its first return each season has such an indescribable fascination for those who have been born and bred among the orchards. (156)

Hardy's description of the Autumn includes the nature's gift of Autumn (apples, pips, kernels, juices, cider) in their descriptions; it imagines the sweet juices from the

Autumn fruit and so use adjectives such as clammy, sticky, sweet, juicy, swell, plump; and both figure Autumn as a person. Hardy describes Giles himself as the season. The tone and atmosphere evokes a feeling of drowsy calm with his long vowel sounds.

In his description of Autumn, Hardy writes focusing on the tactile and octal quality of the products of nature -- the smell of the ripened apples, the sweet taste of cider, the sticky, clammy residue left on the hands, the feeling of the warm sun ripening the Autumn fruit -- as well as the glorious spectacle of Giles as a fruit God. As ecocriticism lays stress on man-nature relationship, through the interrelationship of nature and human, the entire human world thrives and grows. The union between Grace and Giles is confirmed in the language: Giles and Grace "could see far into the recesses of heaven as they mused and walked, the eye journeying on under a species of golden arcades" (156). And as if to affirm the legitimacy of the union, Grace's senses are finally awoken, and she abandons herself "to the seductive hour and scene," "her senses revelled in the sudden lapse back to nature unadorned," and she experiences "revolt for the nonce against social law" and a "passionate desire for primitive life" (156). The power and the beauty of the nature can win; but this is not so, as Grace cannot undo her marriage to Fitzpiers, and their struggle in nature, though Hardy showed it as being temporarily outweighed by harmony, must return.

Ecological reading helps to establish a culture to respect the non-human world. It also helps to relate emotional and physical state to natural phenomena. If the interconnectedness between human and non-human members is understood, it in many ways can heal the environmental wound human have inflicted upon it. American historian David Worster contends that:



We are facing a global crisis today, not because of how our ecosystem-function our ethical systems function. Getting through the crisis requires understanding our impact on nature as precisely as possible, but even more, it requires understanding those ethical system and using that understanding to reform them. (qtd. in Glotfelty and Fromm xxi)

As human beings have not developed ethical and moral attitude to nature, they have deviated from the path of natural unity. Hardy reminds of this moral and ethical path through Fitzpiers who "was still advancing, having now nearly reached the summit of the wood-clothed ridge, the path being the actual one which further on passed between the two young oaks" (294). The actual path here leads to metaphorically natural beings, that is, oak trees. There is a moral obligation on the words "actual path".

The emotional and physical state of the other woodland characters, too, is mirrored by the woods. When Melbury goes to take Giles' advice on Fitzpiers' infidelities, Hardy's description of the evening is symbolic of the illness Giles has been plagued by, and which will eventually kill him: Melbury "set out to look for Giles on a rimy evening when the woods seemed to be in a cold sweat; beads of perspiration hung from every base twig; the sky had no colour, and the trees rose before him as haggard, grey phantoms whose days of substantiality were passed" (170). This reflects the analogy between human and non-human world. A similar parallel is made on one of Fitzpiers' visits to Felice. Felice has shut herself up in her boudoir, with the curtains closed and candles burning, ostensibly to shut out the gloom of the outside world: "'the world is so dreary outside!'" Felice's exclamation arguably echoes the early Tennyson poem "Mariana," with its refrain of, "'My life is dreary,'" for "Mariana" is a meditation on Romantic loss. And Felice goes on to speak

of "Sorrow and bitterness in the sky, and floods of agonized tears beating against the panes" (149). But we learn that these emotions, attributed to the weather, are in fact the feelings of Felice herself, since Hardy's subsequent description makes clear that she is mingling the weather and her emotions: "her constitutional cloud of misery, the sorrowful drops that still hung upon her eyelashes" (152). Fitzpiers presently draws the curtains to let in "the flood of late autumn sunlight," confirming that Felice's picture of the storm outside is really a portrait of her emotions.

Recent theories have argued that language accurately reflects the reality. Lawrence Buell says: "But now there is recoil: Ecocriticism assumes that there is an extra textual reality that impacts human beings and their artifacts and vice-versa" (1135). So, ecocriticism analyzes the ways in which literature represents the human relation to nature at particular moment of history; and what values we assign to nature shape literary tropes and genres. The "noise of owls and flocks of wood-pigeons" (181) returning homewards hold certain cultural beliefs and values in human society. Human beings interpret their situation in accordance with certain things of natural phenomenon. This is a kind of man-nature relation which determines human life.

Though Hardy's depiction of the natural world in *The Woodlanders*, seems to be in Romantic tradition, he is resolute on seeing the intention behind nature. And yet this propensity for seeking intention reveals a struggle for organic unity. After all, the celebration of nature by the Romantic writes contributes to maintaining natural organicism and biodiversity. Humanity co-evolved with rest of the life on this earth. So, humanity is part of nature, a species that evolved among other species. The more closely we identify ourselves with the rest of life, the more quickly we will be able to, according to Edward Wilson, discover "the sensibility and acquire the knowledge on

which an enduring ethic, a sense of preferred direction, can be built” (157). Wilson emphasizes on the fact that the ethical imperative must be discretion. He says:

We should judge every scrap of biodiversity as priceless while we learn to use it and come to understand what it means to humanity. And let us go beyond mere salvage to begin the restoration of natural environments, in order to enlarge wild populations and staunch hemorrhaging of biological wealth. There can be no purpose more inspiring than to begin the age of restoration, reweaving the wondrous diversity of life that still surrounds us. (159)

Biodiversity is invaluable for human beings. So, many writers have written about ecology and degeneration of natural world. Hardy, thus, by showing the representation of natural world in the novel, and by relating the lives of the characters to the physical world, this study on *The Woodlanders* makes a contribution to the field of ecocriticism.

### III. Ecocritical Concern in *The Woodlanders*

This study on Thomas Hardy's *The Woodlanders* examines the novel from ecocritical perspective. The landscape itself is a dominant character and non-human beings are attributed human qualities. Significant interaction occurs between author and place in the novel, character(s) and place. Landscape, by definition, includes the non-human elements of place—rocks, soil, trees, plants, rivers, air—as well as human perceptions and modifications. By examining the language and metaphors used to describe nature, ecocriticism investigates the terms by which we relate to nature. Adopting Barry Commoner's first law of ecosystem ecology that "everything is connected to everything else" (37) ecocritics presupposes that human culture, specifically its literature, is connected to the physical world, affecting nature as nature affects human culture. So, in the novel the characters' attempt to relate their physical and emotional states to the natural world and to live their lives as per the dictates of natural laws reflects their search for organic unity and harmony. The harmonious and unhierarchal relationship between people and the plants, animals, etc. undermine the dualist philosophy.

In this thesis, the characters get delight and learn bitter lesson as they witness natural degeneration. Giles Winterborne and Marty South represent the purest and the most heroic form of Nature, being in a state of harmony with nature, and her perception of nature is the only one that can help conserve natural world in modern times. Though nature provides a living condition to human beings, it also forces humans to acknowledge her power, and always teaches lesson through disasters. To Giles Winterborne and Marty South, nature is both a bad that will bring destruction and a good angel that brings prosperity. South has a strong psychic connection with

nature. He feels strong compassion with the elm trees that have grown old along with him. All this shows Hardy's quest for organicism.

The woodland characters in the novel are reflected by the objects of the woods. Hardy describes the evening as symbolic of the illness Giles has suffered. Rainy evening in the woods in a cold sweat; beads of perspiration hung from every base twig, the colourless sky and the haggard trees as grey phantoms reflects the serious analogy between human and non-human world. The close connection between the natural world and human nature is seen in this great Autumn scene. As the natural world grows and blossoms, so too do Grace's feelings and senses grow, and Hardy makes this link obvious in the simile that Grace applies to her own situation of unhappiness in marriage.

Hardy shows the struggle between the natural object so as to teach the human beings about the struggle for survival in the natural world. The reference of crowded branches "rubbing each other into wounds" symbolizes the struggle of living things for survival. Similarly, towards the end of the novel, Grace views the woods as being in a competition. The trees are described as wrestling for existence. Hardy pays attention to the decay and disfigurement in the woods. Ecocriticism is a response to the need for biocentric understanding for our relationship with the natural world in an age of environmental destruction caused by materialistic interest of human beings.

In this way, the writer emphasizes the unhierarchical interrelatedness between human and non-human beings. The co-existence between human and non-human species helps maintain bio-diversity. In the present time when men are becoming more and more materialistic and exploiting nature for their benefit, biodiversity becomes essential in order to protect biotic community and the biosphere.

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