Anti-Anthropocentrism: Ecological and Artistic Implications of Birds in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*

Eric Ngea Ntam, PhD

Department of Bilingual Letters, Faculty of Arts, Letters and Social Sciences, University of Maroua

Abstract: **When Hardy declared insects, dogs, and birds as God's humble creatures and his guests in his poem, "An August Midnight", his aim was certainly to dissuade human beings from indiscriminately destroying the creatures; for they are ecological beings just as humans and equally serve as an imaginative influence. From Thomas J. Lyon's ecocritical discourse explicated in "A Taxonomy of Nature Writing," this paper views birds in the two novels not as mere symbols, as many critics have considered them, but as beings through which the feelings and conditions of characters, events, as well as the setting are juxtaposed to portray an interwoven connection between the entire ecosystem. The paper asserts that apart from belonging to the Great Chain of Being as humans, birds are endowed with perceptive skills from which Thomas Hardy draws inspiration for his narrative. In other words, birds are viewed in both novels to reveal the beauty of arts; such beauty which is embellished with and identifiable in the physical environment as well as Hardy's creative and linguistic expression.**

***Key Words*: anthropocentrism, artistic implication, ecology, imaginative influence**

I. INTRODUCTION

Thomas Hardy's interest in nature, animals and birds has attracted a lot of attention. As one whose altruism was geared towards safeguarding humanity and natural beings alike (Pinion, 8, Schweik, 62-3, and Tomalin, 376), Hardy's love for birds influenced him to capture many of them in his novels. In her MA Dissertation entitled "Bird Imagery in Hardy's Novels," Sharon C. Gerson looks bird in the novels from three perspectives, showing how they portray human character; reveal the relationship between humankind and nature, and how a human being can be trapped because he has no free will (12). Gerson underlines that her study is concerned "with Hardy as an artist and with an analysis of an artistic technique which elucidates his philosophy" (1). Considering the contemporaneity of ecocriticism, this paper adopts Thomas J. Lyon's ecocriticism discourse, modelled in the scheme of American nature literature (Lyon, 276), to extend Gerson's perspective of technique and philosophy by arguing that Hardy was particularly conscious about the danger of species extinction and the protection of natural beings.

The Mayor of Casterbridge and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* are among the works Hardy classified in 1912 as "novels of Character and Environment" (Widdowson, 11). Novels under this category show Hardy's altruism towards and familiarity with living beings through the juxtaposition of human actions and feelings with the natutural environment. In this light, this paper employs Thomas J. Lyon's ecocriticism discourse which "describes the genre in quasi-taxonomic terms, based on the relative prominence of three important dimensions. Among these are: natural history information, personal responses to nature, and philosophical interpretation of nature" (Glotfelty xxxi) to support the arguments raised in this paper.

According to Lyon, the three mutable scheme involving the interplay between natural history information, personal responses to nature, and philosophical interpretation of nature can be elaborated into seven levels of a frequently integrated spectrum. This spectrum comprises "field guides and professional papers, natural history essays, rambles, solitude and back-country living, travel and adventure, farm life and man's role in nature" (276). These premises are pertinent in discussing and analysing the relationship between literature and the natural environment.

An explanation of each dimension will elucidate the ecocriticism position used in this paper. Firstly, "field guides and professional papers or handbook", from Lyon's view deals with the passing across information about nature and literature. According to the critic, once information conveyance becomes the objective of the analyst, field guides and professional papers would be adopted for transmission and interpretation of the text. In this case, "the writing in question is likely to be a professional paper or field guide handbook, most of which are only intermittently personal or philosophical and so, perhaps, literary only on the spot" (ibid). Lyon however cautions that some field guides are not literary.

'Natural history essay' is another level of Lyon's taxonomy. Explaining this category, Lyon asserts that a piece of writing is considered natural history "when expository descriptions of nature […] are fitted into a literary design, so that the facts then give rise to some sort of meaning or interpretation" as well as theme delineation (277). The eco-critic further underlines, "The themes that make natural history information into a coherent, literary whole may be stated by the author in the first person […] or they may emerge from the facts as

related in a third-person, more or less objective fashion" (ibid). An ecological view of birds as integral natural beings would thus entail a focus on the narrative point of view adopted by Thomas Hardy.

The author's ability to convey his or her 'instruction in the facts of nature is the main concern of the category of the spectrum Lyon calls 'ramble'. With regard to this category, Lyon notes, "the feel of being outdoors, the pleasure of looking closely, and the sense of revelation in small things closely attended to – take an equal or almost equal place with facts themselves" (277). Lyon adds that the classic American form, 'ramble', is the category where "natural history and the author's presence are more or less balanced" (ibid). The ecocritic further points out that in this category of nature writing, "The author goes forth into nature, usually on a short excursion near home, and records the walk as observer-participant […] The writer of rambles usually does not travel far, and seldom to wilderness; he or she is primarily interested in a loving study of the near, and often the pastoral" (177-9). Lyon explains that the fact that "the ramble is local […] or that it takes place on worked-over ground" does not in any way render it 'superficial,' since "deep familiarity with most ordinary landscapes can blossom into immense themes" (279). Thomas Hardy's writing is characterised by such outdoor experiences, which the author himself recorded. As Michael Millgate affirms, Hardy, in his notebooks, gathered information relating to "notes on natural phenomena, vignettes of human situations that struck him as especially poignant or ironic" (385). Thus, the ramble is a perspective employable in the examination of birds in the novels.

The third dimension of Lyon's taxonomy is 'Essays on Experience in Nature,' under which the author identifies three subtypes – 'solitude and back country living,' 'travel and adventure,' and 'farm life.' Lyon says 'Essays on Experience in Nature' are different from natural history facts the emphasise "the writer's experience." The author undertakes personal experiences with nature through such activities as putting up a cabin in the wilderness, canoeing down a clear, wild river, walking the beach at night, rebuilding the soil of a rundown farm, and contemplating a desert sunset. According to Lyon, "first-hand contact with nature is the frame for writing. […] We are placed behind the writer's eye here, looking out on this interesting and vital world and moving through it with the protagonist" (279).

With regard to the distinctive avenue of philosophical reflection termed 'solitude and back country living,' Lyon establishes that this subtype, which is more critical and radical, constitutes the escape from the city and "works much with the contrast between conventional existence and the more intense, more wakeful life in contact with nature" (279).

'Travel and adventure' on its part has an element of solitude and "present the same sort of contrast between the too-safe, habituated existence left behind and vivid life of discovery" (279). Lyon explains that 'travel and adventure' writing is an extreme form of 'the ramble' because the writer here seems to go wild in his or her movement and solitude in wilderness. The author states, "the account is framed on the great mythic pattern of departure, initiation, and return, and always the account gains meaning from the basic American circumstance that wilderness, where the traveler and adventurer usually go, has always […] been considered a realm apart" (279-80). The hallmarks of travel and adventure writing include, "the exhilaration of release from civilization, the sense of self-contained and self-reliant movement, and above all, the thrill of the new" (280).

Writers of 'Farm life', on their part, pay close attention to "the wildlife on and around their places" and convey "the deep, poetic pull of nature on the spirit" (280). Lyon observes that describing the observation of birds on fam land, for instance, is useful in the "development of a placed point of view" (ibid). He further states that farm life involves stewardship, with the ecological ramification involving the "fitting into natural patterns" and stressing "a farmer's proper role." Lyon concludes that in this "ethical commitment, nature writers with an agrarian point of view join with the mainstream philosophy of American nature writing" (ibid).

The third and final dimension that Lyon puts forth is 'man's role in nature.' While interpretation is prioritised in this form, "natural history facts or personal experience are decidedly secondary" (280). Lyon asserts that philosophy is the overriding concern in this form of nature writing and "the mode of presentation tends to be more abstract and scholarly" (ibid).

Concluding his discourse on "A Taxonomy on Nature writing, Thomas J. Lyon states that "natural history essays" or "nature essays" is an interchangeable lump-term for the different forms – field guides and professional papers, natural history essays, rambles, solitude and back-country living, travel and adventure, farm life and man's role in nature – he prescribes for the study, description and analysis of nature writing. Lyon concludes his discourse by reiterating, "Whatever the artistic means chosen, and whatever the type of essay we may choose to call a certain piece of nature writing, the fundamental goal of the genre is to turn our attention outwards to the activity of nature" (281). It is in line with these prescriptions that this paper adopts Thomas J. Lyon's ecocriticism stance to discuss the relevance of birds in the two selected novels. In doing this, the paper argues that the birds in the novel are not representations of human activities and feeling (anthropocentricism), rather they are ecological beings in their own rights and their actions and feelings are either similar or run parallel to those of humans.

It is necessary to state from the outset that Hardy's concern for birds and nature beings clearly aligns with the forms of nature writing developed and advanced by Thomas J. Lyon. When the speaker in Hardy's "Afterwards" poses the question "[…] will the neighbours say, / He was a man who used to notice such things" (lines 3-4) the point is possibly to

implicate humanity, the speaker's "neighbours" and readers, to notice, as Hardy did, that the vastest things of the universe are imaged in objects so mean, in the words of the narrator of *Tess of the D'Urvervilles* (Ch. XXXV, 301). This is in keeping with ramble writing that the "experience in nature – the feel of being outdoors, the pleasure of looking closely, and the sense of revelation in small things closely attended to – take an equal or almost equal place with facts themselves" (277). While accepting with Gerson that Hardy "often used bird images as vehicles for his portrayal of man's plight" (10), it is also true that the birds in the novels go further than portraying human beings' plight. In this paper, they are viewed as beings that delineate the beauty of the rural environment as against the ugliness of the city, foretell future occurrences, clarify human perception and essence, trigger psycho-social introspection as well as inspire literary creative. Hardy's 'bird writing' could thus be viewed as an advocacy for the preservation and protection of the beings' because their extinction would mean the limitation of literary creativity.

The numerous birds that appear or sing in the novels bring forth both the author's keenness to his environment and the importance he attaches to the old rural values of his society, which he often studied when he opted for the ramble, solitude, travel and adventure (Lyon, 277-9). The birds' sorrowful or happy songs are intelligible only to those re-position them from a subordinated position to a valuable status and see them as capable of transmitting messages and prefiguring actions that are comprehensible to humans (Manes, 15). By bringing birds to prominence, Hardy breaks with anthropocentrism, which considers humans of primary importance on earth (Cuddon, 601). By vividly picturing and describing the fowls, finches, cuckoos, crows and their activities in his narratives, Hardy emphasises their influential value to human beings.

II. CONTEXT: 'SOLITUDE AND BACK COUNTRY LIVING'

'Solitude and back country living' is a subtype of Thomas J. Lyon's 'Essays on Experience in Nature.' Here, the author, through his or her protagonist, undertakes personal experiences with nature in various activities and by so doing, gets "first-hand contact with nature," (279). Hardy presents the spacio-temporal settings of his novels via the image of birds. In their search for Henchard from Weydon Priors into the borough of Casterbridge, Hardy vividly depicts the rural setting of Casterbridge to Susan and Elizabeth-Jane, as they reach the summit of the hill, by drawing a distinction between the extending eye of a bird and the limited view of humankind:

> *To birds of the more soaring kind Casterbridge must have appeared on this fine evening as a mosaic-work of subdued reds, browns, greys, and crystals, held together by a rectangular frame of deep green. To the level eye of humanity it stood as an indistinct mass behind a dense stockade of limes and chestnuts, set in the midst of miles of rotund down and concave field. (Ch. IV, 31)*

Elizabeth-Jane's aerial view and description of Casterbridge, just before the above citation, as "what an old-fashioned place its seems to be!" metaphorically likens her to a "soaring bird" that has not only gone through different localities, but also that can, at a cursory glance, perceive through an imaginative eye the overall lay-out and constitution of the Casterbridge topography. The contrast drawn between the bird's eye view and the level eye of humanity portrays the bird more as an artistic decipherer imbued with intelligence that surpasses that of humanity, which simply views Casterbridge "as an indistinct mass." Little wonder therefore that the narrator asserts, "the features of the town had a keen interest for Elizabeth's mother, now than the human side came to the fore" (ibid, 32).

The archetypal function of birds as time indicator to those rooted in rural country life is evoked in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Susan's illness before her death teaches Elizabeth-Jane lessons of the significance of the forces, including birds, within her environment. She understands the reality of her mother's illness when "Between the hours at which the last toss pot went by and the first sparrow shook himself" (Ch. XVIII, 141-2). Elizabeth's ability to notice and experience phenomena at such hours when "the first sparrow shook himself" is an indication of her growth, maturity and consciousness about other living beings such as birds.

In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, the cuckoo's voice on the day Tess and her family quit their Marlott residence is described as a familiar signal at such a period of the month: "During the small hours of the next morning, while it was still dark, dwellers near the highways were conscious of a disturbance of their night's rest by rumbling noises […] as certain to recur in this particular week of the month as the voice of the cuckoo in the third week of the same (Ch. LII, 443). The familiarity of the cuckoo's voice reveals that the commotion realized owing to the packing in and out by farm labourers in this neighbourhood is habitual.

When Henchard and Jopp resolve to under-sell and over-buy Farfrae and snuff him out of business by far competition, they resort to superstition. The rural custom of Wessex, the geographical setting, is reflected in the characters' belief in birds' actions, "After midsummer they watched the weather cocks as men waiting in antechambers watch the lackey" (221). Their reliance on the 'weather cocks' and Wide'oh's allusion to such cosmic elements and beings of nature as the sun, moon, and stars, the clouds, swallows, the smell of the herbs, cats' eyes, the ravens, the leeches, the spiders, and the dung-mixen, in his divination to convince Henchard that "the last fortnight in August will be – rain and tempest" (224), further portray Casterbridge as a rural setting in its inhabitants, beliefs and practices. Good and bad weather is announced by means of birds. While the swallow mentioned above affirms bad weather in Wide'oh's forecast, "all the

weathercocks of Casterbridge" on the other hand announce the contrary a few days later by creaking and sending "their faces in another direction, as if tired of the south-west. The weather changed; the sunlight, which had been like tin for weeks, assumed the hues of topaz." (Ch. XXVI, 225).

Birds equally portray the paralinguistic potential and worldview of the Wessex society. When the butter would not come despite the churning of the milk, Mr and Mrs Crick rightly suspect and attribute this unfortunate occurrence to a possible love relationship (that of Tess and Clare) in the dairy farm. Mr Crick recalls that a similar experience had been recorded in his farm when "Jack Dollop, a 'hore's-bird of a fellow we had here as a milker at one time, [...], courted a young woman over at Mellstock, and deceived her as he had deceived many afore" (Ch. XXI, 190). The story of Jack Dollop's exploitation of the young girl, painted using the image of "'hore's-bird of a fellow", serves both as a depiction of Wessex superstition and a reminder to Tess of her ordeal with Alec. This reminder, which depresses Tess, is further highlighted by the sound of "a solitary cracked-voiced reed-sparrow" that greets her "from the bushes by the river, in a sad, machine-made tone, resembling that of a past friend whose friendship she had outworn" (ibid, 191-2). Solitary and back country livings as well as farm life are exhibited here.

Such solitary, which triggers Alec's violation of Tess is vivid depicted in the natural setting of The Chase on the night Alec rescues her from the taunting of the Queens of Spade and of Diamonds. All of this is accomplished through bird imagery. Alec's footsteps, as he traces their whereabouts in the shrubby woods, are executed in the manner of birds, "She could hear the rustling of the branches as he ascended the adjoining slope, till his movements were no louder than the hopping of a bird, and finally died away" (Ch. XI, 118). This is the last sound Tess perceives as a virgin, for shortly after the bird-like hopping of Alec's footsteps, she falls "into reverie upon the leaves where he had left her", assuming also the posture of "the gentle roosting birds in their last nap;" (ibid, 119) above her in the yews and oaks under which she lies in The Chase.

The hopping rabbits and hares, which mingle among the birds, does not only show the employment of Lyon's ramble form, but also suggests the erotic action that culminate in the rhetorical reverberation, "where was Tess's guardian angel? Where was the providence of her simple faith? [...] There lay the pity of it. An immeasurable social chasm was to divide our heroine's personality thereafter from that previous self who stepped from her mother's door to try her fortune at Trantridge poultry-farm" (ibid). In indeed, Tess's vision, as she retreats from Trantridge to Marlott some few weeks after The Chase incident, records a remarkable transformation. The familiar green world of Marlott now presents not the usual beauty she had known but "a terrible beauty to Tess to-day, for since her eyes last fell upon it she had learnt that the serpent hisses where the sweet birds sing, and her views of life had been totally changed for her by the lesson" (Ch. XII, 123). The narrator here displays knowledge of natural change vis-à-vis human evolution.

Change, with regard to seasonal alternation in Hardy's novels, is often announced by the activities of birds. Tess's departure from Marlott to Talbothays, where Mr Crick requires her services as a dairy maid, is undertaken "ON a thyme-scented, bird-hatching morning in May." The use of "bird-hatching" prefigures both a favourable moment for her journey and the new experiences that the trip to the dairy farm hatches for her. Hardy's narrator, in the perspective of Lyon's 'travel and adventure,' (279), observes that unlike the Vale of the Little Dairies in Blackmoor Vale, Tess encounters the Great Dairies where the world presents itself in larger patterns. Besides the vastness of the Great Dairies, made up of fifty acres of enclosure, extended farmsteads, groups of cattle forming tribes stretching under her eyes from the far east to the far west outnumbering any Tess has ever seen at a glance, like Susan's and Elizabeth-Jane's aerial view of Casterbridge, "The bird's-eye perspective before her," though not so luxuriantly beautiful as that in Blackmoor, presents a more cheering, clear air, bracing and ethereal view of the farm (Ch. XVI, 157). Tess's spirit is sent up wonderfully both by this change in the quality of air from heavy to light and the new scene. To supplement her enlivened spirit, she hears "a pleasant voice in every breeze and in every bird's note seemed to lurk a joy" (ibid).

Birds equally create an atmosphere of love and joviality. The beginning of the relationship between Tess and Clare as they walk through the mead early in the morning is cynically observed and possibly questioned by the birds, which constitute the natural setting. As the lovers advance towards the waterfowls during what the narrator describes as 'non-human hours', they encounter herons which come "with a great bold noise as of opening doors and shutters, out of the boughs of a plantation […] watching them by moving their heads round in a slow, horizontal, passionless wheel, like the turn of puppets by clockwork" (Ch. XX, 187). Apart from the herons, there are other birds which soar through the summer fog "into the upper radiance, and hang on the wing sunning themselves, or alight on the rails subdividing the mead, which now shone like glass" (ibid). It is only when the lovers take a walk away from the city into nature (Lyon, 279) that the herons and the birds can provide the radiance for the growing love relationship.

Rambling and Bird-watching: Hardy's Songsters as Agents of Prefiguration

In order to understand the message of birds, Hardy's narrator adopts Lyon's ramble form by going "forth into nature, usually on a short excursion near home" and recording the experiences as observer-participant. According to Lyon, "The writer of rambles usually does not travel far, and seldom to wilderness; he or she is primarily interested in a loving study of the near, and often the pastoral" (177-9). Perceived as prophetic beings that possess foreknowledge of future

occurrences, most of the birds in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* prefigure the fate of the characters either in their appearance, mood or, in cases where they are only heard, in songs that signal impending happiness or doom. Hardy often ingenuously creates occasions for birds to be seen or heard in order to pass across his message.

It is the silence Henchard and Susan maintain as they walk the dusty road into Weydon-Priors, that allows "every extraneous sound" such as the voices of birds to be audible (Ch. I, 3). The breaking of the silence by "the voice of a weak bird singing a trite old evening song that might doubtless have been heard on the hill at the same hour, and with the self-same trills, quavers, and breves, at any sunset of that season for centuries untold" (ibid) not only complement the vastness of the natural setting "bordered by hedges, trees, other vegetation, which had entered the blackened green stage" (ibid), but also prefigures an atmosphere of impending doom, which commences with the absence of employment for Henchard in Weydon-Priors up to the selling of Susan, his wife, furmity tent. Similarly, the bird which sings in the morning on the day Tess departs to Trantridge to assume the function of manager of Mrs D'Urberville's poultry in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* foreshadow societal occurrences. It is described both as a prophet and time indicator, "at the marginal minute of the dark when the grove is still mute, save for one prophetic bird who sings with a clear-voiced conviction that he at least knows the correct time of day, the rest preserving silence as if equally convinced that he is mistaken" (Ch. VII, 89). Though no one pays attention to the bird's prophecy, it is evident from what befalls Tess in Trantridge that Tess's being raped by Alec proves the bird's prophetic message.

Henchard's decision to auction Susan in his drunken stupor is motivated by the desire for freedom and liberation: "I married at eighteen, like the fool that I was; and this is the consequence o't" (ibid, 7). Susan's caution about lateness to secure accommodation for the night is simply described as "those bird-like chirpings" (ibid). By metaphorically comparing Susan's words to bird-like chirpings, the narrator shows the little valueless place human beings accord to birds. Henchard's desire is to regain his freedom by auctioning Susan, "and if I were a free man again, I'd be worth a thousand pound before I'd done o't" (ibid, 8) is imaged in the swallow that instantly soars in the tent, "At the moment a swallow […] flew to and fro in quick curves above their heads, causing all eyes to follow it absently. In watching the bird till it made its escape the assembled company neglected to respond to the workman's offer, and the subject dropped (ibid, 9). The appearance of the swallow suggests a test of will-power. Its sudden fluttering in the tent at the crucial moment of Henchard's determination to sell Susan serves as a distracting agent against a heinous crime about to be committed. Little wonder then that the company neglects "to respond to the workman's offer." However, a quarter of an hour later the strong-minded Henchard "recurred to the old strain, [...]. 'Here – I am waiting to know about this offer of mine. The woman is no good to me. Who will take her?'" (ibid). Henchard's determined and unbending nature is obvious and his move towards accomplishing the weak bird's prophecy is rife.

The freedom of the soaring swallow is equally indicative of the liberty Henchard wishes for both himself and Susan, "She shall take the girl if she wants to, and go her ways. I'll take my tools, and go my ways. 'Tis simple as Scripture history" (ibid, 10). In this sense, each of them would gain freedom from one another. Whether Henchard is conscious of double freedom or not, it is clear that Susan's departure from him is liberation from his mockery, harassment, and penury as the furmity woman considers it, "Behave yerself moral, good man, for Heaven's love! Ah, what a cruelty is the poor soul married to! [...]." (ibid, 10). Moreover, Susan's remark as she departs with Newson supports the foregoing claim: "'Mike', she said, 'I've lived with thee a couple of years, and had nothing but temper! Now I'm no more to 'ee; I'll try my luck elsewhere. 'Twill be better for me and Elizabeth-Jane, both. So good-bye!'" (ibid, 13). Susan's freedom from Henchard is reiterated by an occupant of the tent, "Well, the woman will be better off, [...]. For seafaring natures be very good shelter for shorn lambs, and the man do seem to have plenty of money, which is what she's not been used to lately, by showings.'" (ibid, 14). Hence, wife's ready acceptance of payment made to Henchard by Newson as constituting a binding force in the transaction grants her the freedom possessed by the birds.

Moreover, the disappearance of the swallow into the oblivion recalls Newson's arrival and departure with Susan to an unknown destination. Hardy creates and achieves suspense when one of the marvelled spectators rhetorically asks, "Where do the sailor live?" after the company vainly gazes around (ibid). Asking where Newson lives is synonymous to enquiring where the swallow finally perches after it leaves the tent. Little doubt then that the man 'who had seen high life' states, "God knows' who Newson is, 'He's without doubt a stranger here" (ibid). The staylace vendor' utterance, "Serves the husband well be-right" is a tragic utterance that follows Henchard to the end of the novel. The inability of the occupants of the tent to figure out who Newson is, his destination, and Henchard's futile effort to trace Newson and Susan the next day can be likened to the resultant worthless effort of attempting to trace the departed swallow, whose quick exit is interpretably a disapproval of Henchard's mean act. In fact, Henchard's inhuman act is juxtaposed and put in direct contrasted to the activity of the last horses "crossing their necks and rubbing each other lovingly as they waited in patience to be harnessed for the homeward journey" (ibid, 13-14). Both the bird's escape from the scene of inhumanity and the loving as well as harmonious relationship maintained by the horses serve as satire of human folly.

Human superiority is questioned by what the narrator ironically calls "inferior nature". The bird's departure also prefigures Susan's going away to leave Henchard in the

solitude which begins with the thinning away of the customers, leaving him in his loneliness to snore on the table. In fact, his solitude is enhanced when the next morning he does not get any human voice, not even Susan's low dry voice of agony, but the buzzing of a single blue fly that serves as his companion (ibid, 16).

Moreover, Hardy skilfully works out the biblical cock-crow that exposes Peter's weak faith to Christ, in the manner of a typical natural history essay as well as 'man's role in nature' (Lyon, 279-81), to lay bare the fragility of Clare's love for Tess. Having been joined in matrimony and set to take off for a deserved honey moon, a cock offers three-goodbye crows to Tess and Angel. Hardy artistically, as in the scene when Henchard and Susan walk in Weydon Priors, creates silence in order to render the bird's voice audible. At a crucial moment when Mr and Mrs Crick and the inhabitants of Talbothays inadvertently maintain silence as they bid goodbye to two of their lovely companions, the silence is suddenly broken, "It was interrupted by the crowing of a cock. The white one with the rose comb had come and settled on the palings in front of the house, within a few yards of them, and his notes thrilled their ears through, dwindling away like echoes down a valley of rocks" (Ch. XXXIII, 282). The effect of the cock-crow, which is literally and spontaneously interpreted by Mrs Crick, foreshadows occurrences that affect both the couple and the entire life in the dairy farm. The following reactions to the cock's crow are revealing:

> *'Oh?' said Mrs Crick. 'An afternoon crow!'*
>
> *Two men were standing by the yard gate, holding it open.*
>
> *'That's bad,' one murmured to the other, not thinking that the words could be heard by the group at the door-wicket.*
>
> *The cock crew again – straight towards Clare.*
>
> *'Well!' said the dairyman.*
>
> *'I don't like to hear him!' said Tess to her husband. Tell the man to drive on. Good-bye, good-bye!'*
>
> *The cock crew again.*
>
> *'Hoosh! Just you be off, sir, or I'll twist your neck' said the dairyman with some irritation, turning to the bird and driving him away. And to his wife as they went indoors: 'Now, to think o' that just to-day! I've not heard his crow of an afternoon all the year afore.'*
>
> *'It only mean a change in the weather,' said she; 'not what you think: 'tis impossible!' (ibid)*

The interpretation of the crow as a signal of imminent change of weather as held by Mrs Crick and later Clare, "That cock knew the weather was going to change" (Ch. XXXIV, 285) reveals more than just Hardy's adherence to the folk beliefs of his Wessex society. By alluding to the biblical cock crow Hardy matches Peter's rejection of Christ to the refusal and rejection of Tess by Clare, despite the professed love in church. What Clare says after Tess's revelation of her past is, "I repeat, the woman I have been loving is not you" (Ch. XXXV, 299). Besides signalling Clare's rejection of Tess after Tess's confession of her past, the cock crow also serves as a prophetic hint of the total disintegration and dispersal of the rally in Talbothays owing to Clare's *departure with Tess. As Jonathan Kail later reports to Clare and Tess:*

> *'We've all been gallied at the dairy at what might ha'been a most terrible affliction since you and your mis'ess – so to name her now – left us this a'ternoon. Perhaps you ha'nt forgot the cock's afternoon crow?'*
>
> *'Dear me; - what–'*
>
> *'Well, some says it do mane one thing, and some another; but what's happened is that poor little Retty Priddle hev tried to drown herself. [...] And more than this, there's Marian; she's been found dead drunk by the withy-bed – a girl who hev never been known to touch anything before except shilling ale [...]. It seems as if the maids had all gone out o' their minds!' (Ch. XXXIV, 289)*

Kail's narration echoes the myriads of meanings that the cock-crow engenders, as earlier mentioned. Its significance in enhancing the development of the plot through character revelation is equally important.

The prefiguring of events by birds is equally evinced during the winter Tess spends in Flintcomb-Ash. The harshness of the season is forewarned by the arrival of "strange birds from behind the North Pole […]; gaunt spectral creatures with tragical eyes – eyes which had witnessed scenes of cataclysmal horror in inaccessible polar regions of a magnitude such as no human being had ever conceived, in curdling temperatures that no man could endure" (Ch. XLIII, 363). Though the birds do not speak, from Manes's ecocritical argument, their "tragical eyes" speak to the narrator and not to Tess and Marian to whom the "nameless birds came quite near" (ibid). The unbearable snow that falls after the birds helps Marian understand the language of the gaunt birds: "'Ha-ha! The cunning northern birds knew this was coming,' said Marian. 'Depend upon't, they keep just in front o't all the way from the North Star […]" (ibid, 365). Marian's ability to read meaning from the posture of the birds highlights the linguistic expression birds are endowed with. Suffice it to state that it takes only observant and reflective characters as Marian to understand the communication in the appearance and melody of birds.

III. FARM LIFE: EVOCATION OF HUMAN ESSENCE

Explaining his Taxonomy, Lyon underlines that 'Farm life,' is a significant discourse in the analysis of literature related to the environment. The concern for wildlife and stewardship

over natural beings such as birds constitute the hallmarks of 'farm life. In this light, when Hardy uses birds to show the extent to which human beings depend on the beings for livelihood and sustenance, he keeps in line with the 'farm life' dimension of Lyon's taxonomy. The socio-economic potentials the beings are projected to enhance the plot of the novels.

Birds picture the socio-economic status of Hardy's characters. Nance Mockridge satirical employs a crow image to Henchard's rise from hay trusser to mayor, "was a poor parish 'prentice, that began life wi' no more belonging to 'en than a carrion crow" (Ch. XIII, 100), when Christopher Coney tells her that she too would soon get married like the worn out Susan whom Mayor Henchard chooses for a wife. Henchard's crow-like wretchedness is further used to picture Jopp's physical state as he seeks employment into Henchard's corn factory. After Jopp's interview as Henchard's sales manager, the narrator vividly describes him as he stands ready to start his work, "standing hands-pocketed at the street corner till the sun had faded the shoulders of his coat to scarecrow green, [...]" (Ch. XXVI, 219). Henchard's and Jopp's poverty is metaphorically likened to human assumed wretchedness of the crow.

Mr Jack Durbefield's empty egg basket at the opening of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* tells of his poverty and wretched social condition. This precarious socio-economic state is later highlighted when Clare abandons Tess and father carries a hen and his empty basket about as an indication that he is employed. The hen which, "had lain, with its legs tied, under the table at Rolliver's for more than an hour" (Ch. XXXVIII, 329) becomes an indicator of not only Durbeyfield's profession and identity but also of his misery. This misery and despair resonates in the dramatic scene which leads to the death of Prince (the family horse) when Tess and Abraham, on the horse, collide with the mail cart man and the horse dies. The reaction of the elements of nature elements, including birds, within the vicinity evokes gloom and sympathy, "He [the mail cart man] mounted and sped on his way; while Tess stood and waited. The atmosphere turned pale, the birds shook themselves in the hedges, arose and twittered; the lane showed all its features, and Tess showed hers, still whiter" (Ch. IV, 71-2). Tess's helplessness is projected in the shaking, arising and twittering of the birds; signalling their sympathy for the death of Prince and invoking the adjustments "shaking" that Tess and her entire family must henceforth make to survive, following the death of the horse – their main source of income.

Mrs Stoke-d'Urbervilles's little fowl-farm, which Tess is employed to tend, is not only a source income for both Mrs d'Urbervilles and Tess, but equally means of exposure to life and its experiences to Tess; Her ignorance of her society is reflected both in her reply to her mother, Joan Derbeyfield, when the prospect of employment is announced, "'But I don't know that I am apt at tending fowls,' said the dubious Tess" (Ch. VI, 85), and also in the narrator's description of her departure from Marlott, "Tess Durbeyfield's route on this memorable morning lay amid the north-east undulations of the Vale in which she had been born, […] but what lay beyond her judgment was depended on the teaching of the village school, where she had held a place at the time of her leaving, a year or two before this date. (Ch. V, 75). Mrs d'Urbervilles's poultry farm, as evident in the manipulative letter announcing Tess's employment as manager, is used by Alec to move Tess from innocence to experience, taking advantage of her family poverty. Alec advances the poultry farm as a reason why Tess should accept accommodation in Trantridge, "Come to this cottage of mine. We'll get up a regular colony of fowls, and your mother can attend to them excellently; and the children can go to school" (Ch. LI, 438). Through fowls, Tess sees the propects of a better life for herself and her entire family.

IV. 'MAN'S ROLE IN NATURE': EMOTIONAL REFLECTIONS

"What should the present be?" is the rhetorical question Henchard asks himself as he contemplates on the present to buy for Elizabeth-Jane. His decision to buy a caged goldfinch from a humble shop at Shottsford, at an affordable price is revealing of Henchard's physical, emotional and social state. In the narrator's words, "The cage was a plain and small one, the shop was humble, and on inquiry he concluded he could afford the modest sum asked. A sheer of newspaper was tied round the little creature's prison and with the wrapped-up cage in his hand Henchard sought a lodging for the night" (Ch. XLIV, 391). The caged goldfinch can be interpreted from many angles. The cage is an image of Henchard himself and the bird his humble, remorseful and loving heart that he wishes to offer to Elizabeth both as a sign of repentance for his sin against the girl and her mother. The cage shows Henchard's awareness of his self-imprisonment owing to his impulsive actions of selling Susan, attempting to kill Farafrae and telling lies to Newson when he comes in search of Elizabeth-Jane.

Hardy's delineation of the theme of stoic acceptance of one's situation is developed in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* in relation to caring for birds, when Tess confesses her transformation from a meek to hard-hearted lady. Hoping that Clare would never despise her because of her murder of Alec, based on Clare's promise, "I cannot ever despise you", she points out, "I also hope that. But considering what my life has been I cannot see why any man should, sooner or later, be able to help despising me ... How wickedly mad I was! Yet formerly I never could bear to hurt a fly or a worm, and the sight of a bird in a cage used often to make me cry" (Ch. LVIII, 481). Tess can no longer cry on the sight of a bird in a cage since she now considers herself already caged by her experience.

Unlike Henchard's and Tess' imprisoned birds, Mrs d'Urbervilles's community of fowls to which Tess is appointed to supervise and exercise stewardship (Lyon, 280) exhibits a freedom that is fundamentally important. The fowls have their headquarters in the old thatched cottage of a ruined

tower, wherein the lower rooms are entirely given over to them. They are depicted to walk about the rooms "with a proprietary air, as though the place had been built by themselves, and by not certain dusty copyholders who now lay east and west in the churchyard" (Ch. IX, 99). Such liberty teaches Tess a lesson. It enables Tess to become experienced and conscious of her rights as she struggles for survival. Her life, which depended on her parents' guidance, is henceforth entirely in her own hands. To further enhance the bird's freedom, they are weighed and whistled to every morning to ensure that they do not degenerate by any means. The weighing of the birds by Mrs d'Urbervilles indelibly marks, in Tess's stream of consciousness, "[...] a confirmation, in which Mrs d'Urbervilles was the bishop, the fowls the young people, and herself and the maid-servant the parson and curate of the parish bringing them up" (ibid, 101). Thus, catering for the fowls becomes a spiritual and metaphysical communication through whistling; an activity Tess is instructed to be abreast of, "Then you will have to practise it every day. [...] I want you to whistle to my bullfinches; as I cannot see them I like to hear them, and we teach 'em airs that way" (ibid). In presenting Mrs D'Urbervilles and Tess as stewards over the birds, Hardy makes use of Lyon's farm life discourse.

The sudden departure of Clare from Talbothays to Emminster, as Tess, Miriam, Retty Priddle, and Izz Huett, come to learn from Dairyman Crick on the breakfast table, renders them all moody, "For four impassioned ones around that table the sunshine of the morning went out at a stroke, and the birds muffled their song. But neither girl by word or gesture revealed her blankness" (Ch. XXV, 215). The muffling of the birds is an externalisation of the suppressed feelings each of the girls has for Clare. A similar reflection of human feeling through birds is portrayed when Tess shows reluctance in accepting Clare's marriage proposal. The increase in temperature which forces the blackbirds and thrushes to creep under the currant-bushes in the manner of quadrupeds rather than of winged creatures (Ch. XXIV, 207), corroborates the rise in both Clare's body temperature and emotions, "And as Clare was oppressed by the outward heats, so was he burdened inwardly by waxing fervour of passion for the soft and silent Tess" (ibid).

Clare appreciates Tess's beauty by using an idiomatic expression linked to birds, "As everybody knows, fine feathers make fine birds; a peasant girl but very moderate prepossessing to the casual observer in her simple condition and attire, will bloom as an amazing beauty if clothed as a woman of fashion with the aids that Art can render" (Ch. XXXIV, 287-8). However, when Tess stabs Alec, the fine feathers are not only pictured as being black, they are also hidden, "She was fully dressed now in the walking costume of a well-to-do young lady in which she had arrived, with the sole addition that over her hat and black feathers a veil was drawn" (Ch. LVI, 470). By adorning herself with black feathers, Tess signals that she no longer deserves praises, rather she is prepared for scorn and death.

Clare's unannounced arrival at Emminster after his disappointment in Tess's narration of her past life is compared to the action of a bird of prey, "Clare had given his parents no warning of his visit, and his arrival stirred the atmosphere of the Vicarage as the dive of the kingfisher stirs a quiet pool" (Ch. XXXIX, 333). The image of the kingfisher bespeaks of both Clare's internal turmoil and his parents' unexplained fright at his sudden visit.

Tess's thoughts and frail physical appearance are both imaged in the several pheasants Tess finds lying under trees, when she spends the night in a plantation on her way to Flintcomb-Ash, some with "their rich plumage dabbled with blood; some […] dead, some feebly twitching a wing, some staring up at the sky, some pulsating quickly, some contorted, some stretched out – all of them writhing in agony, except the fortunate ones whose tortures had ended during the night by the inability of nature to bear more" (Ch. XLI, 352). Moreover, her decision to put "the still living birds out of torture" by breaking the necks of as many as she comes across and "living them to lie where she had found them till the game keepers should come" (ibid, 352-3), reveals the yearning that her own life be terminated by anyone sympathises with her misery. Tess's action equally prefigures her being hanged on the stone hedge at the end of the novel. This is evident in her address to the birds, "Poor darlings – to suppose myself the most miserable being on earth in the sight o' such misery as yours! […] And not a twinge of bodily pain about me! I be not mangled, and I be not bleeding; and I have two hands to feed and clothe me" (ibid). As she courageously continues her journey to Flintcomb-Ash "her recollection of the birds' silent endurance of their night of agony impressing upon her the relativity of sorrows and the tolerable nature of her own, if she could once rise high enough to despise opinion" (Ch. XLII, 354). However, with her destiny now in the hands of Clare, her husband, this thought seems a difficult task.

Farmer Groby's arrival at Flintcomb-Ash, which reminds Tess of her past deal with Alec, intensifies the physical and emotional effect of the winter on the heroine. Tess' reaction to Groby's reprimands (Ch. XLIII, 366) emphasises the significance of birds in the delineation of Hardy's novel: "Tess, between the Amazons and the farmer like a bird caught in a clap-net, returned no answer, continuing to pull the straw" (ibid, 366-7). Similar helplessness is further vividly projected when Tess, during one of Alec's persistent visits to her at Flintcomb-Ash, brutally flings her glove in his face expecting the worse to come from Alec, "'Now, punish me!' she said, turning up her eyes to him with the hopeless defiance of the sparrow's gaze before its captor twists its neck. 'Whip me, crush me; you need not mind those people under the rick! I shall not cry out. Once victim, always victim – that's the law!'" (Ch. XLVII, 411). In projecting bird's temperaments in humans and also likening human actions and feeling to those of birds, Hardy projects the interwoven relationship between human beings and birds, thereby advocating against their extinction.

V. COMFORT AND COMPANIONSHIP

This section builds on Lyon's 'solitude and back country living' dimension, which focuses on philosophical reflection. It takes into account the achievement of comfort through the escape from the city to nature. As earlier mentioned, Lyon holds that 'solitude and back country living' "works much with the contrast between conventional existence and the more intense, more wakeful life in contact with nature" (Lyon, 279). The two novels under discussion are replete with this constant search for solace in nature.

The narrator in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* insinuates that if each of the bodies of the ancient Roman soldiers buried in the Ring, where Henchard and Susan reunite, were to be excavated, he would be "found lying on his side, in an oval scoop in the chalk, like a chicken in its shell; his knee drawn up to his chest; [...]" (Ch. XI, 83). The bird-like posture in its shell depicts Hardy's consciousness of the comfort of an unhatched chick. By drawing on this image Hardy supposedly has in mind Susan's search for and attainment of comfort from the moment of her reunion with Henchard till her death.

In addition, some of the numerous items that Elizabeth-Jane is attracted to when sent on an errand by Lucetta Templeman, who wishes to receive Henchard in her house alone, are birds' eggs. Lucetta incites Elizabeth anxiety by stating, "And have you ever seen the Museum? [...] You can finish the morning by going there. It is an old house in the street [...] and there are crowds of interesting things – skeletons, teeth, old pots and pans, ancient boots and shoes, birds' eggs – all charmingly instructive" (Ch. XXI, 185). The "bird's eggs," which Elizabeth is to see in the museum, reveal both Lucetta's fragility and the development of a relationship with Farfrae later that day.

Moreover, the comfort of High-Place Hall, from Elizabeth-Jane's perception, is characterised by a romantic attraction fostered by the presence of "birds' nests in its chimneys, damp nooks where fungi grew, and irregularities of surface direct from Nature's trowel" (Ch. XXI, 167). Lucetta's leisure in the mansion is imaged in the bird's tranquillity in their nests.

Also, when Tess alienates herself from society owing to her "shameful state" (pregnancy), nature becomes her only companion. Hardy's narrator points out that at such moments when she walks "among the sleeping birds in the hedges, watching the skipping rabbits on the moonlit warren, or standing under a pheasant-laden bough, she looked upon herself as a figure of Guilt intruding into the haunts of innocence" (Ch. XIII, 135). The feeling that "she had been made to break an accepted social law, but no law known to the environment in which she fancied herself such an anomaly," makes Tess to prefer the world of birds and rabbits to that of humans. The peaceful life of the natural beings here could be likened to the harmonious and loving relationship of the horses that observe, with disgust, Henchard's incongruous sale of Susan at Weydon-Priors in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (Ch. I,13-14).

The visible calmness and indifference of natural beings to Tess's grief instils in her the courage to quietly accept single-parenthood. That "the birds sang and the sun shone as clearly now as ever," including the fact that "The familiar surroundings had not darkened because of her grief, nor sickened because of her pain" (Ch. XIV, 141), both enforces in Tess a new vision of life. She henceforth cares little about human comments relating to her misery or cheerfulness. This courage is also portrayed in the winter months when she remains "in her father's house plucking fowls, or cramming turkeys and geese, or making clothes for her sisters and brothers out of some finery which d'Urberville had given her, and she had put by with contempt" (Ch. XV, 149). The foregoing illustrations show that birds serve as an encouragement to the heroine.

Tess's excitement is also enlivened by the birds she comes across, "The sole effect of her presence upon the placid valley so far had been to excite the mind of a solitary heron, which, after descending to the ground not far from her path, stood with neck erect, looking at her" (Ch. XVI, 159). The meekness of the heron effectively ties with Angel Clare's later wondering about Tess, "What a fresh and virginal daughter of Nature that milkmaid is!" (Ch. XVIII, 176). The escape into nature to commune with natural beings as well as thought about birds help convey "the deep, poetic pull of nature on the spirit" (Lyon, 280). Little wonder that Clare's musical instruments, in a typical summer evening impresses Tess who, "like a fascinated bird [does] not leave the spot" but rather draws "up towards the performer, keeping behind the hedge that he might not guess her presence" (Ch. XIX, 178). This attraction to nature and display of the traits of a bird falls in line with Thomas J. Lyon's views that "solitude and back country" is both a means of understanding and interpreting nature writing.

As the relationship between Tess and Angel Clare develops, "The season developed and matured. Another year's instalment of flowers, leaves, nightingales, thrushes, finches, and such ephemeral creatures, took up their positions where only a year ago others had stood in their place when these were nothing more than germs and inorganic particles" (Ch. XX, 185). This metamorphosis in the environment reflects the growth of Tess's love for Clare. The birds' replacement of earlier birds metaphorically points to Clare's filling up of the gap created by Alec in Tess's consciousness. According to the narrator Tess's mood evidently shows that she "had never in her life been so happy as she was now, possibly never would be so happy again" (ibid). Such glee considerably marks "the buoyancy of her tread, like the skim of a bird which has not quite alighted" as she walks around with Clare (Ch. XXXI, 260) and emphasis the solace human beings achieve when they escape to nature to live like birds.

Just as she would later propose to her mother that they make a nest for the children before embarking on the search for accommodation when faced with no lodging at Kingsbere (Ch. LII, 447), Tess's inclination to bird is reflected in the

nest she prepares for herself when she escapes from farmer Groby on her way to Flintcomb-Ash; "she scraped together the dead leaves till she had formed them into a large heap, making a sort of nest in the middle. Into this Tess crept" (Ch. XLI, 351). It becomes clear from Tess's action that the escape to nature is not only for comfort, but also for mutual companionship.

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper has demonstrated far from being considered mere symbols meant to explain or clarify happenings in human life and society, as Nitu Srivastava claims, this paper argues that birds should be viewed as independent beings within their own community. Going by this stand, this research debunks interpretative views such as "In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Hardy concludes that man is weak like a bird and because of this weakness in the inhospitable natural world, man can be trapped" (Srivastava, 470). By asserting that 'Hardy concludes', 'man is weak like a bird' and that the natural world is inhospitable, Srivastava depicts an anthropocentric inclination. Equating human strength with the physical appearance of the swallow that flies in and out of the furmity tent is limiting the connotative meanings that underlie the very word 'strength' since being powerful or strong is contextual. It is true that birds are not as agile as human beings and equally true that they exhibit foresightedness than humans.

In a nutshell, this research argues in line with Harold Bloom that "Hardy was fond of hedgehogs and throughout his life campaigned vigorously against cruelty to animals and birds" (123). The poet/novelist understood that birds are part of the ecosystem, as human beings, and live in their own community that is not only beyond human comprehension but equally helpful for the socio-cultural, psychological, economic value, and the artistic inspiration of human beings. In this regard, when willed he "a hundred pounds to be used for "condemnatory action against the caging of wild birds" (Srivastava, 472), Hardy did not do this because birds are "weaker creatures" as Srivastava intimates (ibid). Rather he only continued his passionate altruistic and humanitarian concern for the security, preservation and protection of birds and the entire ecosystem.

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