17/10/2010

Sun, 17/10/2010 - 12:00

View PDF

Reading the Signs
In the same way that cuckoos harbinger spring, and robins, Christmas, the actions of sheep, slugs and toads indicate a thunderstorm is coming. I know this because Thomas Hardy told me. Since coming to live in the emerald vale, I spend more time communing with the dead – through books - than I ever do, the living.
Spotting toads and slugs, and then seeing sheep all huddled together is a sure sign, says Hardy, in Far From The Madding Crowd that a storm is brewing . So when a toad popped out of the hosepipe yesterday, and I found three slugs in a jug I had left outside, I took it as an omen that bad news was on the horizon. I quickly went and checked the sheep - luckily they were strung out like clothes on a line. But then, at 7pm they all clustered together . The sky looked grey and intimidating, tinged with fire. The toad had disappeared but legions of slugs were still about, hoovering up the winter greens. It was clearly time to switch off the lights and get away from the windows. I cocked an ear to see if I could hear a rumble – nothing. I put my palm out to see if anything landed on it. Not a tinkle.
I was starting to lose my faith in Tom H, and switched on the tv, when Lo, out of nowhere came a searing crack. In fact it was the tumble dryer blowing a fuse. But still, perhaps they did know a thing or two, the Old Masters, after all.