THE TRADITIONAL BASIS OF THOMAS HARDY'S FICTION

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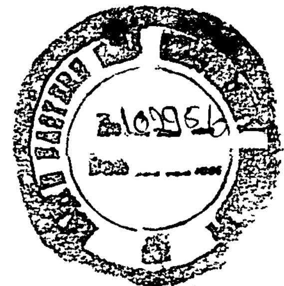

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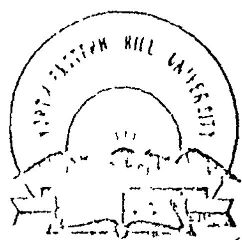

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CERTIFICATE

I certify that the dissertation entitled **The Traditional Basis of Thomas Hardy's Fiction,** submitted by **Jano Liegise** in part fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of **Master of** Philosophy of the North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, embodies the record of original investigation carried out by her under my supervision.

She has been duly registered and the dissertation presented is worthy of being considered for the award of the Master of Philosophy degree. This work has not been submitted for any degree of any other University.

December 17th, 1992

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Supervisor

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(JANO LIEGISE)

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Chapter-I

INTRODUCTION

Several speculations, even contradictory criticisms, have gone into the study of Thomas Hardy (1840 to 1928). To answer the query - what kind of Fiction did Hardy write? - would lead to three broad views - the traditional, the modern, and the transitional. To Douglas Brown, Donald Davidson, David Cecil and others, tradition runs strong in Hardy. Tradition, they point out, deeply affected him, shaped his creative faculty, and inspired his art - 'The wessex books are ballads writ large'[1]; 'that his talent was of the old kind enabled him to achieve effects unattainable by most modern rationalist writers'[2]. On the other side, there are the modern readings of Hardy's works - 'a parable of our times' (Karl Frederick)[3]; 'Hardy's fiction is full of modern tensions

and ambiguities ... in line with Joyce, Proust, Gide, Kafka' (M.D. Zabel)[4]. Leonard W. Dean sees Hardy's novels as setting a pattern of modern writings, a forerunner of the twentieth century novel of cosmic absurdity, disillusioned scepticism, introspection, and the sense of isolation in an alien society, and that the later tragedies are not heroic in the traditional manner, but ironic and pathetic[5]. Robert Heilman, Jean Brooks, A.J. Gucrard, D.H. Lawrence, N.A. Scott, Ian Gregor all render deeper psychic processes of the modern novel to Hardy's later novels. In Gregor's The Great Web, Lawrence stands ~~stands~~ as heir to Hardy's psychic process - 'Where Jude ends the Rainbow begins'[6]. Again, to some other critics, Hardy is essentially a transitional writer - 'Hardy is a transitional figure between what Donald Davidson identifies as the "traditional narrator" of the nineteenth century and earlier (SL,VI,1940) and the symbolic modern novelists' (Richard H. Taylor)[7]; 'Neither as a traditionalist alone nor a modernist alone is Hardy at his best. In his first role he is sometimes too self-conscious and in the second too uncritical. His writings at its most distinguished, displays a unique convergence of traditional and modern' (Irving Howe)[8]. Rather than a 'convergence', Robert Schweik senses in Hardy a traditional versus modernism tension - 'The conclusion of the novel [The Mayor of Casterbridge] seems to be as much

an affirmation of faith in the transcendent worth of the human person as it is an acknowledgement of man's precarious situation in a blind and uncertain universe'[9].

It is futile 'to scrutinize the tool marks and be blind to the building' (P.W., p.56), so also would criticism fail to give a total picture were we to treat in isolation the various aspects of Hardy's art, an art where the author is inextricably a part of his work - 'the novelist, with all his assurances and doubts, hopes and fears, is present in his work in a very direct way, and yet in a way which quite forbids us to confuse fiction with autobiography' (Gregor)[10]. While C. Dey Lewis feels that Hardy has put a certain amount of himself into Angel Clare, to J. Hillis Miller it is in the person of Tess. That Hardy the man permeates and determines the art that is peculiarly his own is a general agreement, and from it spring much praise as also blame. Hardy's authorial intrusion, philosophy, autobiographical elements, nostalgia, pessimism, regionalism and provincialism, have attracted attention. Hardy himself would declare that 'A writer who is not a mere imitator looks upon the world with his personal eyes, and in his peculiar moods; thence grows up his style, in the full sense of the term' (P.W., p.122). We can say that the impact of the rural community with its way of life, its traditions and customs, beliefs, left a lasting impression on Hardy, the sensitive,

precocious child. Hardy's nostalgia for 'a vanishing life' (P.W., p.46) goes much deeper than mere passive sentimatality. His notalgia is creative and is woven into the very texture of his art, one that goes to celebrate the natural man. The supplanting of the cottagers by migratory labourers distressed Hardy because it led to a discontinuity, fatal to the preservation of legend, folklore, close inter-social relations, and threatened to erode the intimate relationship that the worker had for the land. For Hardy, to snuff out ballads and balladry would symbolise the extinction of a self-contained race, an organic culture, a tradition marked by the voices of generations, whose music, passion, mystery, religion, poetry easily shade into one another. The Hardys, it is said, had played in the parish for the congregation, at weddings and festivals for close to a century. The blend of nostalgia and imaginative vision in Hardy, Brown notes, 'is there most obviously in his zest for the folklore that knits the community with its ancestry and its environment', though it is not as Brown went on to say, 'a restricted devotion to a closed - in area of experience'[11]. Hardy would not let us forget that Wessex is a 'partly real, partly dream-country' and that it 'has something real for its basis, however illusively treated' (P.W.,pp.9,46). Wessex is, 'a moral touchstone' as Prof. Hasan goes to show, and Hardy, 'an explorer of the governing metaphors of rural life ... Dorset became Wessex

and, freed from the frigidities of annalistic history, the novelist's imagination began to play upon universally valid structures of community'[12].

In the general preface to the Wessex edition of 1912, the title, 'The Wessex Novels' was adopted for his novels. The first group is called 'Novels of Character and Environment'. The second group being, 'Romances and Fantasies', and the third, 'Novels of Ingenuity'. The novels under discussion - Far from the Madding Crowd, The Mayor of Casterbridge, Tess of D'urbervilles and Jude the Obscure, come under the first and more important group of the classification. Hardy's art absorbs much Balladry. As in Ballads, Hardy's love stories, the man-woman relationships, are set within an elegiac framework. There is the beautiful heroine, the wicked seducer, the faithful lover. His characters are a masterly variation of these stock figures. His themes are the age-old themes of ambition, love, jealousy, greed, which ultimately lead to the central theme of man's relationship with the environment. The ceaseless rhythm of traditional agricultural activities, the eternal cycle of the seasons, the grotesque, fate and chance, the ironic, the mysterious and the awesome, are the heart-beat of the Wessex novels as also of ballads. As noted by Marlene Springer, 'by linking with the universal, the coincidences which act upon his characters,. and in turn joining the universal

with the natural', Hardy ties his situation and his people to the land'[13]. Hardy's theme, plot and character, the setting, his narrative art - all are traditional. His humour is 'rustic, it is elemental, it is grotesque, it is Gothic, it is traditional' (Cecil)[14]. As in the folk tales, 'story' is central to Hardy and his 'Ancient Mariners', with suspense, high drama, the element of surprise, as necessary ingredients - 'The real, if unavowed, purpose of fiction is to give pleasure by gratifying the love of the uncommon in human experience, mental or corporal,' Hardy writes, and that 'the whole secret of fiction and the drama - in the constitutional part - lies in the adjustment of things unusual to things external and universal' (The Life, pp.150,252). Hardy's art is vivid and dramatic, fabular in conception not realistic, for he would that readers ride, 'the witche's broomstick' (P.W., p.111). If he is not an innovator of fictional forms, neither is he a slavish imitator. He skilfully adopts and adapts such details that inspired his creative mind. His story rests upon an arrangement of plot and action which reflects his general impression about the universe, encapsulated in his concept of the Immanent Will which Hardy regards as an archetypal truth, not a point of view of theoreticians and philosophers. In Hardy's novels, Immanent Will is at work as an external force in the form of storms, coincidences and chances, and as an internal intrinsic power, it is manifested as

desires and aspirations. The will is energy, not providence. Love, as the strongest passion known to man, illustrates the working of the will. If the will causes to desire, it also thwarts, if it aids, it also hinders. It is both destructive as well as creative. 'Fate' in Hardy's novels is not wholly deterministic but accommodates the element of free-will and choice. To Hardy the will of man is neither wholly free, nor wholly unfree. An appreciation of Hardy's novels leads Barbara Hardy to conclude - 'Those who serve the life-force, like Arabella, prosper best, but those who have inspiration and aspiration meet with the frustration of nature's blind biological purpose and society's conventional restrictions'[15].

That Hardy's stories are love stories is not without a basis : 'Life being a physiological fact, its honest portrayal must be largely concerned with, for one thing, the relations of the sexes' (P.W., p.127). Hardy's subject is mankind not individual man. Rather than explore the psyche with the introspectiveness of modern novelists, the life Hardy portrays is life at its most elemental. George Eliot, Hardy, D.H. Lawrence, were all drawn towards the feminine, but it was not for Hardy to analyse their motivations as did George Eliot, or like Lawrence, subject them to psychological readings. In Hardy's fiction, the event governs rather than motive or

psychology, with action as the pulse of the story: The 'ostensible undertaking of novelists', Hardy lays down, is to give 'a picture of life in action', and the teaching to depend upon 'intuitive conviction, and not upon logical reasoning ... for by their emotion men are acted upon, and act upon others' (P.W., p.144-5). The rural norm is the inspiration behind Hardy's Wessex novels. A way of life at its most elemental, bared of all superficial modes of civilization, where archetypal men and women respond freely to natural instincts, is what moved Hardy. Hardy knows only too well that mere material improvement will fail to meet the demands of the soul - this finds an illustration in Clym Yeobright - 'Mother, what is doing well?'[16]. Hardy's heroes and heroines - Oak, Bathesheba, Henchard, Tess, Jude, Marty South, Giles Winterbourne, are all sturdy countrymen, and it is their essential human qualities that carry them through in the end. Their passion, their power of endurance, honesty of feeling, and instinctive spontaneity reveal the finer side of their humanity. The proud heart, it is said, can subdue the hardest fate even in submitting to it. This attitude of acceptance and defiance is what stirs us. Hardy's tragedies are unique but are still in line with the tradition of the great tragedians. Tragic pity is aroused, as Dobree argues, 'not because someone suffers, but because something fine is bruised and broken'[17]. Hardy advocates that fiction should be a reflection of the

truths of the human heart. The inner meaning, the deeper reality is all - 'the business of the poet and novelist is to show the sorriness underlying the grandest things, and the grandeur underlying the sorriest things; (The Life, p.171). To Miss Hamilton, 'Tragedy's one essential is a soul that can feel greatly'[18]. It is for this precise quality of feeling that Hardy's figures are memorable and convincing. And it is Hardy's language of feeling that has won over the most insensitive of his critics, and for which others would take the well-known inspite-of attitude even while being censorious - 'It is by this intuitive sympathy with humanity in all its moods that Mr. Hardy is great. His pessimism too springs from this sympathy with mankind, from the depth of richness of his emotional nature which finds its fullest expression in Tess and Jude' (F. Manning)[19]. Hardy never loses faith in the essential goodness of mankind, which is indicative of an optimism that critics usually deny him. As The Mayor of Casterbridge draws to a close, we hear the echo of Hardy's belief that no 'human being deserved less than was given... that there were others receiving less who had deserved much more' (The Mayor, p.411). With Hardy, 'The human interest', 'The beauty of association', reigns supreme in life as in art. The protection of an ancient edifice is seen as the preservation of memories, history, fellowship, fraternities. For Hardy, 'beauty is defined in affective rather than in aesthetic terms' (P.W., p.207; The Life,

p.120,128). We read in Tess of the D'Urbervilles: 'Beauty to her, as to all who have felt, lay not in the thing, but in what the thing symbolised' (p.245). The human experience is what Hardy is interested in, and towards which he directs all his energy and delight. The virtues that Hardy holds most dear are personal loving kindness, selflessness, compassion: '"charity seeketh not her own" ... In that chapter we are at one, ever beloved darling, and on it we'll part friends. Its verses will stand when all the rest that you call religion has passed away' (Jude, p.438). His denial of formal faith did not crush his habitual reverence of Christian sentiments. He would rather be called 'churchy, not in an intellectual sense, but in so far as instincts and emotions ruled' (The Life, p.376). For him, 'poetry and religion touch each other' (P.W., p.56). Hardy's Tess is singularly effective for its rich poetry and sacredness of natural beauty. Tess's spontaneous rhapsody is 'a Fetichistic utterance in a monotheistic setting' one that is expressive of the animistic joy of the devout 'fair sufferer'. The meads around Talbothays, 'the long-sought-for vale', paradise and Arcady, raise love and religion - 'Every day, every hour, brought to him one more little stroke of her nature, and to her one more of his. Tess was trying to lead a repressed life, but she little divined the strength of her own vitality', that, 'All the while they were converging, under an irresistable law, as surely as two streams in one

vale' (Tess, pp.85,111,84,103,106). Religion becomes a mere husk of arbitrary, dogmatic theology without the inner joy of worship.

Hardy's voices at their best are inherent to the story and the setting. They illuminate and enrich the theme in all its intensity; feeling his way with the characters and the readers, now commenting, now describing, guiding and suggesting. Hardy would evoke, in the best of ballad tradition, a sense of a shared experience. J.C. Maxwell well argues that the authorial intrusions become "a safer guide than the critics' judgement"[20]. Wearied of condemnatory censure Hardy would say - 'It must be obvious that there is a higher characteristic of philosophy than pessimism, or their meliorism, even than the optimism of the critics - which is truth'. Hardy's art is of the simple revellers' home-spun tale, where the 'author should be swallowed whole', and appreciative readers, 'Catch the vision which the writer has in his eye' (P.W., pp.49,111,117). Hardy shares with the English romantic tradition its virtue of stressing the free-play of the writer's imagination and a taste for quaint sublimity. Incidentally, Hardy's apprenticeship to John Hicks sharpened his sensibility for the cunning irregularities of Gothic architecture. Moreover, Hardy's art has much to do with the Gothic literary tradition of the times. James F. Scott brings

out in his study that both Hardy and the Gothic romances drew their subject matter from similar sources, among the most important of which are legend and folklore, and that both turned to art and architecture for sublime effects.[21] The entrancing effects of the interplay of light and colour in Hardy's Tess has been largely inspired by Turner's paintings as J.B. Bullen points out. Such effects are not confined to the visual alone; it is emotive and poetic as well. Hardy, he argues, creates the latent and mysterious affinities between character and environment 'by employing the archetypal power of light and darkness to suggest joy and sorrow, life and death'[22]. Again, Hardy as also the Gothic romancers, were stirred by the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists, particularly Shakespeare and Webster, with all their Gothic sensationalism and terror, the sublime and the grotesque. It remains to be said that in Hardy, the dominant Gothic fancy finds a credibility within the mould of rural community, its customs and traditional beliefs.

Rather than being the first of the modern school, Hardy's affinities lie with an older traditional form of fiction. With his compelling sense of tradition, Hardy stands at the turn of the century as the last representative of a great tradition. It is said that when Chew placed Hardy in the tradition of the Brontes, George Eliot, trollope and Blackmore, Hardy wrote in the margin - '?

Fielding? Scott'. Hardy's aesthetic views and his fictional form are in the tradition of Fielding and the English novel which has its roots in the English drama, where actions, speech, dramatic incidents highlight the story, chart out the plot, reveal characters, and entertain readers, and is distinct from the subtle, exploratory, analytical mode of D.H. Lawrence, Henry James, Virginia Wolf, James Joyce, and other contemporary novelists. Hardy's unconventional views of marriage and morality is not so modern in outlook, but is rooted in the Victorian age. Hardy's Victorianism can be considered in his definiteness and wholesome certainty of what is really valued. As a rebel against arbitrary social forms, Hardy has been linked with Camus. But the nature of Hardy's rebellion is different from that of the existentialists, whose revolt stems from a sense of alienation, of absurdity and ambiguous modern tensions. Hardy's revolt springs from a rooted organic cultural sense that validates 'the essential principle of social order' (P.W., p.131). Once critics begin to interpret his works rather than try to understand his art, Hardy is not only misunderstood in parts but simply not understood at all. His is of 'the straight forward expression of good feeling' (P.W., p.107). Throughout his career, even as a novelist, Hardy never failed to give poetry its due - 'It is, of course, simply a carrying into prose the knowledge I have acquired in poetry' (The Life, p.105). Essentially

a homely artist, Hardy declares that the secret of a living style lies in not having too much style :

> 'A sweet disorder in the dress ...
> A careless shoe-string, in whose tie
> I see a wild civility,
> Do more bewitch me than when art
> Is too precise in every part'. (*The Life*, p.105)

Donald Davidson writes that Hardy 'grew up in Dorset where fiction was a tale told or sung'[23].

In conclusion, an appreciation of Hardy's Fiction demands a sensitivity to the traditional basis of his fictional art.

NOTES

1. Douglas Brown *Thomas Hardy* (London, Longmans 1954), p.111.
2. Frederick R. Karl, 'The Mayor of Casterbridge : A new Fiction defined' in *Modern British Essays in Criticism*, ed. Mark Schorer (Oxford Press, London, 1969) p.29.
3. David Cecil, *'Hardy the Novelist : An Essay in Criticism'* (London, Constable and Company Ltd., 1943, new edition fifth reprint 1969) p.151.

4. M.D. Zabel, 'Hardy in Defense of his Art : The Aesthetic of Incongruity' in Hardy : A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. A.J. Guerard (N.J. Prentice-Hall, Inc.,1963) p.43.

5. Leonard W. Dean 'Heroism and Pathos : The Return of the Native' in Hardy : The Tragic Novels, ed. R.P. Draper (London, Macmillan, 1975) p.119.

6. Ian Gregor, The Great Web : The form of Hardy's Major Fiction (London, Faber and Faber, 1974) p.233.

7. Richard H. Taylor, 'Thomas Hardy : A Reader's Guide in Thomas Hard : The Writer and His Background, ed. Norman Page (London, Bell and Hyman, 1980) p.247.

8. Irving Howe, Thomas Hardy (New York, Macmillan, 1966) p.30.

9. Robert Schweik, 'The Mayor of Casterbridge' in Hardy : The Tragic Novels ed. R.P. Draper, op. cit., p.146.

10. Ian Gregor, op. cit., p.208.

11. Douglas Brown, op. cit., p.42-3.

12. Noorul Hasan, Thomas Hardy : the Sociological Imagination (London, Macmillan, 1982) p. 179,177.

13. Marlene Springer, Hardy's Use of Allusion (London, Macmillan, 1983) p.11.

14. David Cecil op. cit., p.94.

15. Quoted in F.R. Southerington in Hardy's Vision of Man (London, Chatto & Windus, 1971) p.35.

16. The Return of the Native, ed. George Woodcock (Britain, Penguin, 1978) p.234.

17. Quoted in Jean Brooks - 'The Poetic Structure' in Thomas Hardy : The Tragic Novels, ed. R.P. Draper, op. cit., p.85.

18. Quoted in Ted. R. Spivey "Thomas Hardy's Tragic Hero" in Nineteenth Century Fiction, Vol.9, 1954-55, p.182.

19. F. Manning 'Novels of Character and Environment' in Hardy : The Tragic Novels, ed. R.P. Draper, p.62-3.

20. J.C. Maxwell, "The 'Sociological' Approach to the 'Mayor of Casterbridge'" in Hardy, The Tragic Novels, ed. R.P. Draper, p.156.

21. James F. Scott, 'Thomas Hardy's Use of the Gothic : An Examination of Five Representative Works', Nineteenth Century Fiction, Vol.XVII, p.364.

22. J.B. Bullen 'The Expressive Eye : Fiction and Perception in the Work of Thomas Hardy' (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1986) p.192.

23. Donald Davidson : 'The Traditional Basis of Thomas Hardy's Fiction' in Hardy - A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Albert J. Guerard, pp.13,12.

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Chapter-II

FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD

Far From the Madding Crowd (1874) stands between the formative years of Hardy's apprenticeship and courtship, and the years of his marriage and emergence as a great writer.

In the true Hardyan tradition, Far From the Madding Crowd celebrates the abiding rural verities. The story had been commissioned by Leslie Stephen, Editor of Cornhill Magazine, whose admiration for the descriptive pictures in Under the Greenwood Tree was great. Hardy began to work on the novel in 1873, at a time when it was still possible for him to happily handle the continuity of of bucolic life with Verve :

"So Hardy went on writing Far From the Madding Crowd - sometimes indoors, sometimes out, when he would occasionally find himself without a scrap of paper at the very moment that he felt volumes. In such circumstances he would use large dead leaves, white chips left by the wood-cutter, or pieces of stone or slate that came to hand. He used to say that when he carried a pocket-book his mind was barren as the Sahara.

This autumn Hardy assisted at his father's cider-making - a process he had always enjoyed from childhood - the apples being from huge old trees that have now long perished. It was the last time he ever took part in a work whose sweet smells and oozings in the crisp autumn air can never be forgotten by those who have had a hand in it." (The Life, p.96).

The rural norm is what Hardy understands best, genuinely imagines, and articulates the best. Hardy calls Far From the Madding Crowd a pastoral tale, but as Professor Noorul Hasan argues, 'the sensuousness and the pastoral vein in Hardy's imagination are not a matter of literary parody or pastiche, but are directly rooted in his moral apprehension of life'[1]. It is in this novel that the author first adopts the word "Wessex" from the pages of early English history, giving it a fictitious significance. Wessex with its landscape and workfolks, community and culture, the traditional activities,

festivities, beliefs - all are so drawn through the meshes of the writer's imagination that Far From the Madding Crowd becomes one of his most vivacious novels. While it is true that man must relate to the environment for existence, the external world becomes meaningful only in its relation to man. Hardy holds that 'an object or mark raised or made by man on a scene is worth ten times any such formed by unconscious nature. Hence clouds, mists and mountains are unimportant beside the wear on a threshold, or the print of a hand' (The Life, p.116). The religious emphasis on fundamental physical labour is vital to Hardy, and work, disciplined labour, is everywhere felt in Wessex. In Far From the Madding Crowd Gabriel Oak, firm as an oak tree, is the apostle of work, and guardian of the rural community and its mistress, Bathsheba Everdene - 'Gabriel had almost constantly preceded her in this tour every evening, watching her affairs (p.141). Gabriel Oak is literally the Saviour of the strickened-flocks - "He could cure them all if he were here" (p.121). When fire breaks out at the Rickyard and threatens to destroy 'the divinest form that money can wear - that of necessary food for man and beast' (p.217), the proverbial Restorer and Preserver comes in the down-to-earth person of Oak - 'he must save them with his own hands' (p.218). Hardy successfully infuses life into a stock characters, common plots, traditional themes, particularising his

story without losing its universality. Basically, Hardy's art is conventional. His plots are simple enough with plenty of drama and action, incidents, suspense, irony, humour. Hardy lays down that 'A story must be exceptional enough to justify its telling. We tale-tellers are all 'Ancient Mariners', and that 'In a work of art it is the accident which charms, not the intention, that we only like and admire'. Inevitably, Hardy and Henry James part company - 'The great novels of the future will certainly not concern themselves with the minutiae of manners ... James' subjects are those one could be interested in at moments when there is nothing larger to think of' (_The Life_, pp.252,191,211). Whereas in a Jamesian novel consciousness precedes all other external factors of time, place and action, for Hardy, plot and character are 'the essential constituents of a novel', and stories should be 'of most disastrous chances, of moving accidents by flood and field' (_P.W._, p.112). He takes it for granted that a novel like all regular tales should have a beginning, a middle, and an end, and that the indication of time, place, and action is made clear. _Far From the Madding Crowd_ opens with a caricature of Gabriel Oak as the clumsy, rural-simpleton 'Hodge', which is typically a superficial perception of the labouring community by the urban bourgeoisie : "When Farmer Oak smiled, the corners of his mouth spread till they were within an unimportant

distance of his ears, his eyes were reduced to chinks, and diverging wrinkles appeared round them, extending upon his countenance like the rays in a rudimentary sketch of the rising sun" (p.1).

Only at a closer look, the 'true' Gabriel Oak emerges. Likewise, in Tess of the D'Urbervilles we read : 'The conventional farm-folk of his imagination - personified by the pitiable dummy known as Hodge - were obliterated after a few days residence. At close quarters no Hodge was to be seen' (p.97). To get to essential values behind appearances is a recurring aesthetic intention of the novelist - 'in general, the novel affords scope for getting nearer to the heart and meaning of things than does the play' (P.W., p.139).

The story is set in the 1840's. At the very outset we are given a general, even cosmic, description of Norcombe Hill : "Norcombe Hill - not far from lonely Toller-Down - was one of the spots which suggest to a passer-by that he is in the presence of a shape approaching the indestructible as nearly as any to be found on earth. It was a featureless convexity of chalk and soil.

The sky was clear - remarkably clear - and the twinkling of all the stars seemed to be but throbs of one body, tied by a common pulse ..."(p.6-7).

And in a way that is typical of the openings of Hardy's stories, our attention narrows down to focus on the particular :

"Suddenly an unexpected series of sounds began to be heard in this place up against the sky. They had a clearness which was to be found nowhere in the wind, and a sequence which was to be found nowhere in nature. They were the notes of Farmer Oak's flute" (p.7-8).

The story continues without losing its universality - 'The image as a whole was that of a small Noah's Ark on a small Ararat' (p.8). There is much in the story to make it timeless. Hardy's novelistic technique merges with balladry. Far From the Madding Crowd tells a powerful story of the irresistible, timeless ballad heroine, Bathsheba Everdene, and her three stock lovers - Gabriel Oak - the steady, selfless, faithful lover who 'belonged to the even-tempered order of humanity' (p.29). Boldwood with his 'unreasoning devotion', 'fond madness', 'fevered hope' (p.296), is the unstable man of passion, whose 'natural manner has always been dark and strange' (p.317); Francis Troy is 'a doctor's son by name ... or earl's son by nature!', one, 'who can so well afford to despise opinion', and who 'to women lied like a Cretan - a system of ethics above all others calculated to win popularity at the first flush of admission into lively society' (pp.146,145,147). He is the enticing soldier who seduces

a young maiden and wins over her mistress with vain flatteries. Within the novel itself one of the favourite ballads is 'The Banks of Allen Water' that spins a tale of brief joy ending in sorrow; a popular theme of many folk ballads -

"For his bride a soldier sought her
And a winning tongue had he
On the banks of Allan Water
None was gay as she" (p.138).

If Fanny Robin ends up in the 'Reprobates' quarter of the graveyard (p.285), Boldwood slays his rival and is confined to 'Casterbridge goal' (p.345). Bathsheba would cry out to Boldwood, 'my treatment of you was thoughtless, inexcusable, wicked! I shall eternally regret it' (p.314), but was crushed with anguish at Troy's heartlessness : 'If she's - that, - what - am I?' (p.268) - she would sob pitifully. As for Sergeant Troy his 'rare invention' (p.151) and irrepressible waywardness heap untold misery and grief on himself and on others :

'Capacity for intense feeling is proportionate to the general intensity of the nature, and perhaps in all Fanny's suffering, much greater relatively to her strength, there never was a time when she suffered in an absolute sense what Bathsheba suffered now' (p.267). There is pathos, notwithstanding the heartlessness involved, as Troy cries out - 'Ah! don't taunt me, madam.

This woman is more to me, dead as she is, than ever you were, or are, or can be' (p.268). And ultimately, even as the love between Bathsheba and Oak is firmly sealed, it is after our heroine has attained a certain ''beauty in loneliness' (p.347).

Dialogues reveal emotions, and the characters are delineated in simple strokes rather than being given a complex treatment. Gabriel Oak is clearly the Hardy hero. Ronald Blythe sees this unconscious leader in a simple but somewhat overpowering moral dimension like 'a shepherd in a Blake painting, glowing and archetypal'[2]. On the other side, Troy and Boldwood stand as negative factors, as foils to the hero of the novel. Far From the Madding Crowd discusses the necessity of equilibrium in relationships. Hardy views equilibrium as the perfect balance of enormous antagonistic forces which is never in a permanent state. The timely arrival of Oak, whose 'special power, morally, physically, and metally, was static' (p.9), brings stability for maintaining equilibrium in Weatherbury, where the inhabitants are a mixture of indigenous old people and new-comers. Individuals, and the community as a whole, look to Oak for help and friendship. If the mistress of the farm pleads, 'Do not desert me, Gabriel'! (p.124), he wins the assent of the workfolks : "He's a clever man, and 'tis a true comfort for us to have such a shepherd" (p.58). Oak's

personal integrity and work ethic combine individual and communal values. Significantly, natural growth and the cycle of agricultural activities are closely associated with the Farmer-shepherd Gabriel Oak. Indeed, he is in league with nature. He becomes a sort of farmer that is mentioned in The Mayor of Casterbridge : a 'flesh-barometer, with feelers always directed to the sky and wind around him' (p.257). It is Troy who is indifferent to 'every voice in nature [That] was unanimous in bespeaking change' (p.216). Oak observes and understands the 'dumb expressions' (p.216) of Nature to be the 'direct message from the great Mother' (p.213) to prepare for foul weather. Whereas 'Sergeant Troy had so strenously insisted, glass in hand, that drinking should be the bond of their union' (p.218) throwing 'wealth in jeopard' (p.212), to Gabriel was left the task of righting the wrong. And in their struggle in the storm to protect 'food for man and beast' (p.217), Oak and Bathsheba show a capacity for mutual love and fellowship: 'Gabriel, you are kinder than I deserve! I will stay and help you yet' (p.224). In the words of Professor Noorul Hasan, 'thematically, Gabriel and Bathsheba are closely aligned. Their unity is not the easily perceivable unity of external forms, but an intuitive, imperceptible unity of feeling and cultural psychology. This unity is clouded over by the plot which requires Bathsheba often to act in violation of her cultural sensibility and values.

The action of the novel does not take the change so much of the taming of Bathsheba by Gabriel Oak as that of the slow emergence of a cultural, communal basis for human action amidst the chaos of warring egos and disoriented personalities', and that, 'Bathsheba is both the dazzling, infernally coquettish heroine of popular romantic fiction and the embodiment of a community sensibility and culture.'[23] The gradual evolvement of Oak-Bathsheba relationship contrasts sharply with Bathsheba's erratic, impulsive affairs with Boldwood and Troy. A mere 'toss' (p.86) idly made leads Boldwood 'in the direction of an ideal passion' (p.87), while Troy had 'the effect of a fairy transformation' (p.143). There is no possibility of achieving balance in either of the relationships. Boldwood is all extremity - 'the equilibrium disturbed, he was in extremity at once. If an emotion possessed him at all, it ruled him; a feeling not mastering him was entirely latent (p.106). As for Troy, his activities were never 'based upon any original choice of foundation or direction' (p.148). Characteristically, he is all for modernisation : 'Creation and preservation don't do well together' (p.211), he would say, and is disgusted with the humdrum tediousness of a farmer's life. Both the men, in their self-centredness, would repress and isolate the mistress of the Farm. Boldwood's idealisation is limiting: 'You shall never have so much as to look out of doors at hay-making time, or think of the weather in the harvest'

(p.113). On the other hand, to Troy, Bathsheba is a mere object. The dazzling sword-play is one of the most accomplished seduction scenes in literature. Seduction in Hardy's novels is a distracting, intrinsic, as well as an externally wilfull force that deflects the course of the characters, and sets off dramatic consequences. The tragedy in Tess springs primarily from Alec D'Urberville's seduction of Tess. Here in Far From the Madding Crowd, Hardy brilliantly presents the seduction scene without causing offence to the 'respectable Mrs. Grundies' and cautious editors by casting it in rich symbolism and suggestive imagery. The sword-drill is mesmerising : 'She was enclosed in a firmament of light, and of sharp hisses, resembling a sky-full of meteors close at hand'. And the 'magic' left Bathsheba 'powerless to withstand or deny him' (pp.161-165). As Bathsheba is to confess later : 'between jealousy and distraction, I married him!' (p.255).

Post-Freudian readers see in the episode a symbolism not consciously designed by the author. However, Hardy is not an innovator. Throughout his career, whatever Hardy assimilates - history, philosophy, or human psychology, his creative mind gave it back naturally and spontaneously in his writings. It has been noted that in one of his early poems, 'The Harvest Supper', Hardy plays with the idea of a country girl's double

longing for a faithful husband at the plough and a mate from the neighbouring barracks.

In Under the Greenwood Tree the plot develops with the movement of the seasons as the chapter headings indicate. The rural folks participate in the seasonal work and festivities as the Mellstock Quire tunes in the carols. Here in Far From the Madding Crowd, there is a similar cadence that integrates the cycle of the seasons with the development of the plot. The simple lyric of Joseph Poorgrass also goes :

> I sow'-ed the'-e seeds of love',
> I-it was' all' i'-in the-'e spring',
> I-in A'-pril, Ma'-ay, and sun'-ny' June',
> When sma'-all bi'-irds they' do' sing (p.136).

Love grows as agricultural activities progress. With the Sheep-washing, the sheep-shearing season matures when all is health and colour. And through it all, "Gabriel's soul was fed with a luxury of content by having her over him, her eyes critically regarding his skillful shears" (p.129). The great shearing-barn evokes a sense of indestructible timelessness :

'One could say about this farm, what could hardly be said of either the church or the castle, old in age and style, that the purpose which had dictated its original erection was the same with that to which it was still

applied ... The defence and salvation of the body by daily bread is still a study, a religion, and a desire' (p.126-7).

The celebrations in the novel, too, assume an indestructible continuity - The 'shearing-supper' came round, and the folks 'grew as merry as the gods in Homer's heaven'. Jacob Smallbury's ballad is 'as inclusive and interminable as that with which the worthy toper old silenus amused on a similar occasion'. And as the entertainment wore on, 'The shearers reclined against each other as at suppers in the early ages of the world' (p.137-8).

The Hardyan emphasis is not so much on the individual but on the inter-relationship of people in a community. The novelist brings out the characters, both at work and at play. When we first encounter the ancient malster he is the mysterious figure of the older tales - 'his frosty white hair and beard overgrowing his gnarled figure like the grey moss and lichen upon the leafless apple-tree' (p.46). However, in the ensuing 'chat' at "WARREN's Malthouse", he emerges as the old man about the place, who takes pride in regaling patient listeners with an exaggerated account of 'the pedigree' (p.56) of his life.

The workfolks are not mere literary devices like

the chorus, nor clowns functioning as comic-relief. They are an integral part of Hardy's unique art. The unity of their words and actions is expressive of the organic community constituted by the workfolk. They share a tradition, and that they relate by virtue of a long, intimate association, is everywhere felt : '"That's never Gable Oak's grandson over at Norcombe - never!" he said, as a formula expressive of surprise, which nobody was supposed to take literally' (p.47). Again, referring to the two-handled tall mug, it is said :

'It may be observed that such a class of mug is called a God-forgive-me in Weatherbury and its vicinity for uncertain reasons; probably because its size makes any given toper feel ashamed of himself when he sees its bottom in drinking it empty' (p.48).

As the age-old adage gives : 'suffering refines', Bathsheba's bitter experience moulds her character.

Thus, the girl with a 'vernal charm' (p.4) revives with the spring, and Hardy makes his own point about love as she makes her final bond with 'her old disciple' (p.350), the 'love-led man' (p.125), Gabriel Oak:

'Theirs was that substantial affection ... the romance growing up in the interstices of a mass of hard prosaic reality ... love which is strong as death - that love which many waters cannot quench, nor the floods

drown, beside which the passion usually called by the name is evanescent as steam' (p.355).

The novel ends in a complete resolution, a moral resolution. However, such morality is not superimposed, but is inherent in the tale itself.

Far From the Madding Crowd finally demonstrates the beneficent effect of traditional mores and values on a capricious and self-destructive individualism. The willful Bathsheba learns to say : 'Now, I care a little for your good opinion' (p.255). She has 'elasticity in her firmness' (p.80), and is of 'the stuff of which great men's mothers are made' (p.339). Both Troy and Boldwood irreparably violate social ethics and stand outside the community. Communal norm implies an interdependence and a close interaction among its members :

'She suddenly felt a longing desire to speak to someone stronger than herself, and so get strength to sustain her surmised position, with dignity and her carking doubts with stoicism' ... (p.262). F.R. Southerington marks; 'the inter-relationship between environmental stability, economic stability, and moral stability is one of Hardy's most subtle and valuable perceptions.'[4]

The meaningful coherence of plot and character, background, story and ideas seems to have been missed out

by Henry James

'Mr. Hardy's novel is very long, but his subject is very short and simple, and the work has been distended to rather formidable dimensions and descriptive padding, and the use of an ingeniously verbose and redundant style'[5].

Others like R.D. Hutton would allege that the language of the workfolk is inconsistent. Incidentally, it has been noted that the linguistic divisions in Hardy's writing, a Wessex dialect and educated English, is, in fact, the result of a cultural conflict; that at the time that Hardy wrote, the language of eighty percent of the population was clumsy and laboured[6].

Virginia Woolf's appraisal aptly sums up - "Hardy's genius was uncertain in development, uneven in accomplishment, but, when the moment came, the moment came completely and fully, in Far From the Madding Crowd. The subject was right, the method was right; the poet and the countryman, the sensual man, the sombre reflecting man, the man of learning, all enlisted to produce a book which, however, fashions may chop and change, must hold its place among the great English novels'[7].

Hardy's art is spontaneous, vibrant, and original. His retention of the traditional form, never a reproduction, is essentially inspirative adaptation.

In the Wessex novels nature is indissolubly integrated into the very tale - 'today the large side doors were thrown open towards the sun to admit a bountiful light to the immediate spot of the shearers' operations, ... Beneath them a captive sheep lay panting, quickening its pants as misgiving merged in terror, till it quivered like the hot landscape outside ... So the barn was natural to the shearers, and the shearers were in harmony with the barn' (pp.127-8).

Eventually, at the turn of a new year with spring not far behind, Bathsheba marries Oak quietly - 'As though a rose should shut and be a bud again' (p.359).

The final union between Bathsheba and Oak bodes well for the Weatherbury community as traditional values are reasserted. The positive factors triumph over the destructive forces. The novel ends in a complete resolution, a moral resolution. However, such morality is not superimposed, but is inherent in the tale itself.

NOTES

1. Noorul Hasan, op. cit., p.30.
2. Introduction to 'Far From the Madding Crowd' (Britain, Penguin, 1978), p.27.
3. Noorul Hasan, op. cit., pp.17,25.

4. F.R. Southerington : Hardy's Vision of Man (London, Chatto and Windus, 1971), p.63.
5. Quoted in F.R. Southerington, ibid., p.61.
6. See George Wotton, Thomas Hardy : Towards a Materialist Criticism (New Jersey, Macmillan, 1925), p.206.
7. Quoted in the Introduction to Far From the Madding Crowd, ed., James Gibson, op. cit., pp.xxii-iii .

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Chapter-III

THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE

The Life and Death of the Mayor of Casterbridge : A Story of a Man of Character, published in 1886, marks a departure from Hardy's earlier novels. The rural community strikingly portrayed in the other works now begins to disappear. Unlike Weatherbury Farm in Far From the Madding Crowd, or Egdon Heath in The Return of the Native, Casterbridge emerges as partly country, partly town - 'Casterbridge was the complement of the rural life around; not its urban opposite' (p.126).

The Mayor of Casterbridge attracted varying criticisms. Douglas Brown considers the book to be about transition, about the defeated agricultural man : "The Mayor of Casterbridge, then, is the tale of the struggle

between the native countrymen and the alien invader; of *the defeat of dull courage and traditional attitudes by insight, craft, and the vicissitudes of nature"*[1]; while Albert J. Guerard's emphasis is on - 'a very modern dramatization of an impulse to self-destruction'[2]. Henchard has also been compared with Biblical and literary figures - Job, Samson, Lear, Oedipus, etc. The truth is that, Hardy's art draws upon factual details, parables, tales, allusions that appeal to his creative imagination. The novel is never wholly representative, mythical, or symbolical. Hardy's stories and his characters evoke deeper issues that concern humanity, both on the cosmic plane, as well as on an immediate local level. No doubt Hardy was curious about the impact of industrial modernisations and the inroads made by the railways, but he was little interested in probing into the individual psyche, nor did he write about life in the urban towns. His predilection de artiste is traditional - 'the miraculous or nearly miraculous, is what makes a story, a story, in the old way' (The Life, p.193). Hardy notes down as the serial of The Mayor of Casterbridge is being launched - '*My* art is to intensify the expression of things ... so that the heart and inner meaning is made vividly visible' (The Life, p.177). The surface day-to-day happenings do not stir Hardy's imagination. The underlying elements of chance, coincidence, the grotesque, and the ironic are what engaged him - 'Art is a

disproportioning (i.e., distorting, throwing out of proportion) - of realities, to show more clearly the features that matter in those realities, which, if merely copied, might possibly be observed, but would more probably be overlooked. Hence, "realism" is not Art' (The Life, p.229).

The legends, the ballads, and the folk-tales that hinges on the mysterious and the awesome; the beliefs that go beyond the everyday facts are essential elements in Hardy's narrative art. Hardy wrote at such a period when modernism was clearly felt, as in the works of D.H. Lawrence, but Hardy instinctively preferred the traditional form. What Hardy did was neither to attack or defend the order of things, but poetically present the beauty and intrinsic worth of a way of life that lies close to nature, enriched by tradition, chronicles, ballads and folklores. Man's relationship with his environment has always preoccupied Hardy. Just before he set out to write The Mayor of Casterbridge, he noted in his diary (1884): 'when trees and underwood are cut down, and the ground bared, three crops of flowers follow. First a sheet of yellow; they are primroses. Then a sheet of blue, they are wild hyacinths, or as we call them; graeggles. Then a sheet of red, they are ragged robins or as they are called here robin-hoods. What have these plants been doing through the score of years before the

trees were felled, and how did they come there?' (The Life, p.104). Hardy's concern for ecology has a moral basis. His nostalgia for the rural world that was passing away has a strong imaginative force and poetic beauty. More often than not, Hardy succeeds to make a point he wants to make, yet maintain objectivity at the same time : "The great corn and hay traffic conducted by Henchard throve under the management of Donald Farfrae as it has never thriven before. It has formerly moved in jolts, now it went on oiled castors. The crude viva voce system of Henchard, in which everything depended upon his memory, and bargains were made by the tongue alone, was swept away. Letters and ledgers took the place of "I'll do't", and "you shall hae't"; and as in all such cases of advance, the rugged picturesqueness of the old method disappeared with its inconveniences" (p.160).

Hardy's heroes are instinctive countrymen who express themselves through labour. Henchard had been voted to the chief magistracy 'on account of his amazing energy' (p.184). He dealt largely with the nursery or bed of small farmers close at hand in the Durnover corn-growing uplands - "A street of farmer's home-steads - a street ruled by a mayor and corporation, yet echoing with the thump of the flail, the flutter of the winnowing-fan, and the purr of the milk into the pails - a street which

had nothing urban in it whatever" (p.162).

The narrator's treatment of the characters is that of a balladist's. Their goodness, their passion, their strength and their weaknesses are simply stated, the subtle development of character not being a matter of concern for Hardy. Henchard is Henchard till the last, 'a man who knew no moderation' (p.146). Henchard the hay-trusser, the husband, the parent, the friend, the suitor, the mayor, the mayor-turned-haytrusser, is all of a piece. The phrases and terms used to describe Henchard all indicate that he is an instinctive man of no moderate disposition - '"No, no, Susan; you are not to go - you mistake me!" he said, with kindly severity' (p.143); though under a long reign of self-control he had become Mayor and churchwarden and what not, there was still the same unruly volcanic stuff beneath the rind of Michael Henchard, as when he had sold his wife at Weydon Fair' (p.183); '"Ho, no no! - nothing serious, man!" he cried with fierce gaiety' (p.261). Even in chasticement he is 'the netted lion', 'a Samson shorn' (pp.378,399). And when Farfrae began to look Elizabeth Jane's way once again, she, whom Henchard now looks upon as his own 'cherished stepdaughter', 'Thereupon promptly came to the surface that idiosyncrasy of Henchard's which had ruled his courses from the beginning and had mainly made him what he was' (p.379). When remorse filled him, it

overflowed. He died 'as one of his own worst accusers' (p.405), as his 'will' summarised. The narrator goes on - 'what Henchard had written in the anguish of his dying was respected as far as practicable by Elizabeth-Jane, though less from a sense of the sacredness of last words, as such, than from her independent knowledge that the man who wrote them meant what he said. She knew the directions to be a piece of the same stuff that his whole life was made of ...' (p.410).

The episodic and dramatic movements, the successive pattern of Henchard's struggles - expectation - anxiety-rejection chart out the plot of the story and reveal the character of Henchard. It is action which gives life to the tale, and is its source of strength. His imagination found nourishment in traditional narrative materials. The Mayor of Casterbridge virtually has a conventional 'once upon a time' ring as the story begins: 'one evening of late summer, before the nineteenth century had reached one-third of its span, a young man and a woman, the latter carrying a child, were approaching the large village of Weydon-Priors, in Upper Wessex, on foot' (p.69). The narration is dramatically captivating as the 'ancient mariner' proceeds to tell his timeless tale - 'the voice of a weak bird singing a trite old evening song that night doubtless have been heard on the same hill at the same hour, and with the self-same thrills, quavers, and breves,

at any sunset of that season for centuries untold' (p.71). Hardy sets off the course of action at a definite time and place like in all folktales. The story of The Mayor of Casterbridge begins about 1830 and its main action is placed around the mid-century, while his Casterbridge closely resembles Dorchester of the eighties. With this novel, Hardy's tenth published novel, the sheer pulsating force of Wessex, vivid rural landscapes, and close portrayal of communal way of life begins to be less tangibly felt. And by the time we come to Jude the Obscure Wessex disappears out of sight, though it remains within the inner world of imagination. In The Mayor of Casterbridge, Casterbridge is 'a fair distant part of Wessex' (p.85). Agriculture is its mainstay : 'and even at the dinner-parties of professional families the subjects of discussion were corn, cattle-disease, sowing and reaping, fencing and planting' (p.130). That Casterbridge is not in any sense a modern suburb is hinted at; there is no 'transitional intermixture of town and down' (p.162). However, Casterbridge adapts to new methods that will 'revolutionize sowing' (p.240). It is Donald Farfrae who initiates such changes : 'though not a farmer he was closely leagued with farming operations' (p.238). Farfrae is the 'numerical' expert, a foil to Henchard who had 'in a modern sense received the education of Achilles' (p.146). The Henchard-Farfrae opposition is 'in some degree', Northern insight matched against southern

doggedness - The dirk against the cudgel' (p.186). The clash is not merely a clash between two individuals; and it is more than a social clash between the old ways and the new ways. Henchard-Farfrae struggle brings into play conflicting values that directly concern humanity. Henchard may be wrong-headed, impulsive, fetichistic, harsh, a man of violent temper, an erring man. But gradually his innate virtues of generosity, selflessness, spontaneous kindness emerge in his dealings with others. It is Henchard who is grand in endurance and finer in spirit, stonger-minded and more humane. On the other hand, we come to suspect the obviously blameless, pleasant, level-headed Farfrae to be far less human, shallow in spirit, more materialistic, mechanical and calculative even in his acts of good deeds. For Farfrae, 'a man must live where his money is made' (p.231). He is incapable to feel deeply - "He liked Henchard's warmth, even if it inconvenienced him; the great difference in their characters adding to the liking" (p.146). Henchard's treatment of Abel Whittle's besetting fault may seem harsh, but it is out of genuine concern - 'It is to make him understand' (p.170). Whereas, Farfrae's apparent sympathy for Abel Whittle is superficial - "a man o'your position should ken better" (p.170), he chides Henchard. Characteristically, Farfrae found it 'undesirable to come personally in contact with the Ex-corn-factor more than was absolutely necessary' (p.301).

Professor Noorul Hasan summarizes that 'Henchard is great only in his alignment with natural forces', and that 'his character expresses itself in memorable acts of archetypal piety' Because of his responsiveness to instinct Henchard cannot be 'deliberately moral'. He further points out that 'Henchard is more and more alienated from the social context as the novel builds up a cumulative suggestion of his natural propensities. The dissonance between the hero and the "contemporary" situation means, at one level, the total degradation and defeat of the discordant protagonist, but at another, and a more important level it means a reassertion of the values represented through him'. Hardy's characterisation centers around traditional and cultural images - 'There is no clinical investigation of moral or psychological quality in Hardy. Behaviour or character for Hardy is conceivable only in terms of cultural images. Where individual character does not express itself in these images, it seems peculiarly impoverished and inferior'[3]. Farfrae, 'the innovator' (p.238), takes well to the emerging world of Casterbridge - 'Casterbridge had sentiment - Casterbridge had romance; but this stranger's sentiment was of differing quality. Or rather, perhaps, the difference was mainly superficial; he was to them like the new poet of a school who takes his contemporaries by storm; who is not really new, but is the first to articulate what all his listeners have felt, though but

dimly felt till then' (pp.122-3). Gradually, Casterbridge rejects, and is rejected, in turn, by Henchard - 'Henchard, who had hitherto been the most admired man in his circle, was the most admired no longer' (p.171). His traditional entertainment at 'a spot whereon the Casterbridge people usually held any kind of merry-making, meeting, or sheep fair' (p.174), becomes an absurdity - 'A man must be a head strong stunpoll to think folk would go up to that bleak place today' (p.177). Ultimately, Henchard sinks 'into the earth', in 'that ancient country whose surface never had been stirred to a finger's depth, save by the scratchings of rabbits, since brushed by the feet of the earliest tribes' (p.406). Vestiges of the ancient Casterbridge echo a past with which the present has no link - 'They had live so long ago, their time was so unlike the present, their hopes and motives were so widely removed from ours, that between them and the living there seemed to stretch a gulf too wide for even a spirit to pass' (p.140). Hardy always retained his sympathy for the traditional rural norm : 'under some of the roofs abode pure and virtuous souls whose presence there was due to the iron hand of necessity, and to that alone. Families from decayed villages - families of that once bulky, but now nearly extinct, section of society called "liviers', or lifeholders, - copy-holders and others, whose roof-trees had fallen for some reason or other, compelling them to quit the rural spot that had been their home for

generations - came here, unless they chose to lie under a hedge by the wayside' (p.380). Earlier in the novel, Hardy mentions that the signboard of the 'Three Mariners' could not be restored due to 'The lack of a painter in Casterbridge who would undertake to reproduce the features of men so traditional' (p.110). Indeed, we come across a demoralised community at Mixen lane - 'rural mechanics too idle to mechanize, rural servants too rebellious to serve, drifted or were forced into Mixen lane' (p.328). The furmity-woman, Mrs. Goodenough, would exclaim - 'tis the sly and the underhand that get on in these times!' (p.89). An offender herself, she drags out Henchard's private shame to public disgrace in an ironical situation, as he attends to 'Petty Sessions' (p.272) in the absence of Dr. Chalkfield, the mayor for the year. Such an incident may be almost grotesque, but Hardy's art absorbs the abnormal and the incongruous. This 'haggish creature' (p.73) is a grotesque balladic element - witch-like, she is 'attired in a shawl of that nameless tertiary hue which comes, but cannot be made - a hue neither tawny, russet, hazel, nor ash', who seems 'to be no native of the country-side or even of a country-town' (p.272). However, the supernatural fiendish elements of the gothic romance and the ballads take on down-to-earth forms, as the waifs and strays of the Wessex poor. Gothic sensationalism, the capricious, and the elegiac strain of the ballads, the stark literature of the Greek dramatists, sharpened

Hardy's ironic vision. Darwin and the discoveries of modern science, or German philosophy, hardly came as a surprise to him. Hardy's first impression of life is also his last. 'The seer', Hardy writes, 'should watch that pattern among general things which his idiosyncrasy moves him to observe, and describe that alone' (The Life, p.153). Hardy's ironic vision is his idiosyncrasy which habitually moved him to ponder over the relationship of man with the environment, the disparity between the individual's desires and the order of the universe. The gothic and the balladic motiffs are sublimated to give emphasis to the central theme - that of a fate which overwhelms man's understanding : 'The hypocrisy of things ... that nothing is as it appears' - (The Life, p.176) which is said to be the traditional irony, the disparity between what seems to be and what is in reality, gives occasion to a number of dramatic ironical situations in Hardy's novels. 'We plan to do this but we do that that' (p.316), utters Farfrae. Henchard is baffled and mocked by forces within him and outside of him. Indeed, the two opposing forces; the 'will', and the other thwarting the will, are at work within the protagonist - 'The centrifugal tendency imparted by weariness of the world was counteracted by the centripetal influence of his love for his stepdaughter. As a consequence, instead of following a straight course yet further away from Casterbridge, Henchard gradually, almost unconsciously,

deflected from that right line of his first intension ... till thought of Newson's and Farfrae's counter-influence would pass like a cold blast over a pool, and efface her image. And then we would say of himself, '"O you fool". All this about a daughter who is no daughter of thine!' (p.395). In the last round, Henchard's struggle is not against another fellow-being. Henchard may have committed a crime against Susan Henchard, wronged Elizabeth-Jane, erred against Newson, and on more than one occasion he was ashamed of his own behaviour towards Farfrae, yet all recognise his strength of character. His faults may have led him to his downfall, but in his struggle we see a man more sinned against than sinning. When we feel for 'this man of moods, glooms, and superstitions' (p.324), the narrator makes us feel at one with humanity. And Henchard, the archetypal protagonist, takes on an epical stature as the novel draws to as end : 'But my punishment is not greater than I can bear!' (p.388). Such heroic defiance in the face of inscrutable, overwhelming forces, such heroic powers of endurance are the essential stuffs that have gone to contribute in the making of a 'hero' since the days of the Greek classics, down to Shakespearean tragedies, to the novels of Hardy who lays down that "Good fiction may be defined here as that kind of imaginative writing which lies nearest to the epic, dramatic, narrative masterpieces of the past" (P.W., p.114).

NOTES

1. Douglas Brown, op. cit., p.65.
2. Albert J. Guerard in his _Introduction to 'Hardy : A Collection of Critical Essays'_ (New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, 1963), p.4.
3. Noorul Hasan, op. cit., pp.61,76,78,72.

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Chapter-IV

TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES

There is an intensification of feelings in Hardy's 'Tess of the D'Urbervilles - a pure woman', published in 1891. There is beauty and poetry in this dark novel, that many consider it to be the writer's most profound novel.

Of his novels, only Tess of the D'urbervilles and Jude the Obscure are set in the world of his mature years; the rest are presented within the world of his early memories.

Tess is folk tragedy that turns on the drama of wronged women, wicked seducers, crushed affairs, unrequited love, brief joy, revenge and hanging, which are part of his childhood memories. Tess, the beautiful pure maiden, suffers rejection at the hands of her lover-

husband, Angel Clare, and is deceived by the flashy imposter, Alec D'Urberville, and ultimately ends her life on the gallows. Tess was hailed as modern and advanced when it appeared, but when followed closely it quite simply narrates the tale of a lonely ballad heroine :

'She had seen daily from her chamber - window towers, villages, faint white mansions; above all the form of Shaston standing majestically on its height; its windows shining like lamps in the evening sun' (p.26).

Very often, Hardy's plots work on the age-old technique of revealing the past that gives occasion to dramatic development. This well-known device is suitably employed in both Far From the Madding Crowd and Tess but not without a good measure of Hardy's own creative slant. Hardy also imaginatively draws upon the narrative method whereby an 'encounter' leads to new dramatic avenues, giving life to the tale. Here in Tess the initial encounter of Parson Tringham, a local antiquary, with Jack Durbeyfield sets off a drama laced with irony - 'I thought we were an old family; but this is all new! (p.27) - Tess exclaims with some misgivings.

It culminates into the fateful journey of Tess and the death of Prince, the horse that sustains the family, and for which Tess acutely feels responsible - 'Nobody blamed Tess as she blamed herself' (p.24).

This tragedy, we are told, makes up Tess's mind for her after her initial reluctance to claim kinship with the stoke - d'Urbervilles of Trantridge, who, ironically, is actually a family of tradesman which has falsely 'annexed' (p.28) this distinguished title.

Again, Tess's fateful encounter with Alec d'Urberville has disastrous consequences. The swarthy imposter Alec, the 'representative of the spurious house' (p.29), with his red-glowing cigars and 'bold rolling eye' (p.29) lurking 'behind the blue narcotic haze' (p.31) has all the makings of a villain.

That Hardy closely associated with balladry is clearly seen in his handling of characters, stories, and plots of the Wessex novels. Prompted by traditional arts, Hardy excelled in bringing about an inimitable art. Noticeable throughout, is Tess the sacrificially weak, alternating with Tess the heroically strong; a pattern that points out the aesthetic design and meaning of the novel :

'After wearing and wasting her palpitating heart with every engine of regret that lonely inexperience could devise, commonsense had illuminated her. She felt that she would do well to be useful again - to taste anew sweet independence at any price' (p.74).

She learns from the disastrous attempt of her family to claim kin with the rich d'Urbervilles, 'that the serpent hisses where the sweet bird sing' (p.61), and that - 'Yet even now Tess felt the pulse of hopeful life still warm within her' (p.81). Her essential vitality is always restored and there is always a resurgence of new life :

'All the while she wondered if any strange good thing might come of her being in her ancestral land; and some spirit within her rose automatically as the sap in the twigs. It was unexpended youth, surging up anew after its temporary check, and bringing with it hope, and the invincible instinct towards self-delight' (p.82).

Through it all, 'It is Tess Durbeyfield, otherwise d'Urberville, somewhat changed - the same, but not the same' (p.73). Tess continues to be a simple country girl, notwithstanding her heroic stature - 'she would be the dairymaid Tess, and nothing more' (p.82). She stays close to her roots and draws reality from it - 'The vale of Blackmoor was to her the world, and its inhabitants races thereof' and "Every contour of the surrounding hills was as personal to her as that of her relatives' faces", so that she wilts outside "The valley of her birth and the valley of her love" (p.232).

Tess, like Henchard, is both individualised as well as representative. Her individuality rests upon the

specific historical and cultural context she is placed in, but Hardy's characters assume an impersonal dimension, representative of all mankind as their stories intensify; and Tess is not only a field-woman but a spectacle of all betrayed women; indeed, of human vulnerability itself. Factual details shade into cosmic timelessness : "Thus Tess walks on; a figure which is part of the landscape; a field-woman pure and simple, in winter guise" (p.231).

The coexistence of the factual and the fictional is characteristic of Hardy's habit of mind. The concreteness and wild imaginings of the stonehenge scene is particularly arresting. Stonehenge is the heathen temple, 'the wonder of Salisbury Plain', 'a sacred possession' (Personal Writings, pp.197,198). The stonehenge scene evokes a sense of awesome grandeur : 'He went to the stone and bent over her, holding one poor little hand; her breathing now was quick and small, like that of a lesser creature than a woman. All waited in the growing light, their faces and hands as if they were silvered, the remainder of their figures dark, the stones glistening green-grey, the plain still a mass of shade. Soon the light was strong, and a ray shone upon her unconscious form, peering under her eyelids and waking her' (p.328). The interplay of the growing light gives the scene its cosmic sublimity. It is said that Hardy 'made special visits to stonehenge to get his lights for the chapter'

(P.W., p.196). It takes the art of a master for objective physical reality to take on the moral perspective that is incorporated into the novel.

Hardy's view of life is often said to be nostalgic. But his novels are not merely a rural-urban opposition. His aesthetic intension is to demonstrate the timeless truths. True, Tess's ordeal on the threshing machine is a monstrous intrusion of modern machinery, and Angel Clare may see in Tess something of 'The ache of Modernism' (p.102). But when all is said and done, her plight is timeless, and as Angel senses, her melancholy is akin to that 'which men and women have vaguely grasped for centuries' (p.102).

We read in The Life that Hardy sought to keep 'his subject close to poetry and his narrative close to natural life as the conditions would allow, and often regretted that those conditions would not let him keep them nearer still' (The Life, p.291).

The moral claim of the sub-title - 'A pure woman' - unsettled many readers. But as Hardy is to emphasize, purity is not an immunity from physical experience but, rather, an unhypocritical frame of mind : "Why it was that upon this beautiful feminine tissue, sensitive as gossamer, and practically blank as snow as yet, there should have been traced such a coarse pattern as it was

doomed to receive" (p.59). Tess's innocence and purity are seen in a special context of nature : "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' (p.70). Tess is 'a fresh and virginal daughter of nature' (p.99) who is 'foreign to the gleaming cranks and wheels' (p.154). Her pace is of 'the bold grace of wild animals' (p.143). Her oppression is repeatedly likened to that of a hunted animal or a helpless bird - She flees from a mocking pedestrain who knows her dark past into the woods to make 'a sort of nest' (p.229) for the night. Tess may be constantly made to suffer oppression but she is never dull and spiritless. That in her all was real vitality, real warmth, real incarnation, she lives it out. Her beliefs, we are told, are 'Tractarian as to phraseology but Pantheistic as to essence' (p.142). 'You used to say at Talbothays that I was a heathen' she tells Angel, lying on the stone - alter at stonehenge, 'so now I am at home' (p.326).

Talking about readers who cannot associate the word 'Pure' with Tess, Hardy remarks that they, 'reveal an inability to associate the idea of the sub-title adjective with any but the artificial and derivative meaning which has resulted to it from the ordinances of civilization', and that, 'They ignore the meaning of the word in Nature, together with all aesthetic claims upon it, not to mention

the spiritual interpretation afforded by the finest side of their own christianity' (P.W., p.27). The continual stress on the discrepancy between the natural values and the artificial social code of conduct is a pointer to Tess's innate purity : 'Most of the misery had been generated by her conventional aspect, and not by her innate sensations' (p.75); 'a sense of condemnation under an arbitrary law of society which had no foundation in nature' (p.230-1), and that - 'But for the world's opinion those experiences would have been simply a liberal education' (p.81). Religious 'dogmas' are mere insentient arbitrary laws, having no relevance to human experience : '... the dignity of the girl, the strange tenderness in her voice, combined to affect his nobler impulses - or rather those that he had left in him after ten years of endeavour to graft technical belief on actual scepticism. The man and the ecclesiastic fought within him, and the victory fell to the man' (p.79). In the concluding paragraph Hardy writes - ' "justice" was one, and the President of the Immortals, in AEschylean phrases, had ended his sport with Tess' (p.330). Here, 'justice' within inverted commas questions the social code which could cause and condemn at the same time, and, broods over an inscrutable power that denies human responsibility, yet mete out punishment. Hardy notes down in the preface - 'it was quite contrary to avowed conventions that the public should welcome the book, and agree with me in

holding that there was something more to be said in fiction than had been said about the shaded side of a well-known catastrophe' (P.W., p.26). Whatever philosophical readings Tess may be subjected to, and despite the authorial intrusions, Tess retains her full human figure, and the novel, in its totality, never loses its credibility. It has been noted that for Hardy to bring a character to life, it is crucial that it is a temperament that is capable of feeling passionately : 'The deeper-passioned Tess' (p.113), 'could answer no more than a bare affirmative, so great was the emotion aroused in her at the thought of going through the world with him as his own familiar friend. Her feelings almost filled her ears like a babble of waves, and surged up to her eyes' (p.160). As Angel Clare would say of her, Tess is 'brim full of poetry - actualised poetry ... She lives what paper-poets only write' (p.135). In considering Hardy's power of creating men and women, Virginia Woolf observes : 'we look back at a number of these characters and ask ourselves what it is that we remember them for. We recall their passion. We remember how deeply they have loved each other and often with tragic results ... But we do not remember how they have lived'[1]. Hardy himself declares that the novel was neither intended to be didactic nor aggressive, but 'in the scenic parts to be representative simply, and in the contemplative to be oftener charged with impressions than with convictions' (P.W., p.27). As

Professor Noorul Hasan puts it - 'It is not a structure of rationalisation designed to support a dogma, but the story of a woman whose struggle for self-fulfilment follows a universal or archetypal tragic pattern individualised by the cultural imagination of the novelist'. He points out that the heroine's individuality is 'not a product of the anchorless ego of existentialist fiction', and that Hardy is not 'championing individual consciousness against social and cultural barriers - not even dallying with the kind of total subjectivism that Lawrence saw existing but, much to his dismay, eventually frustrated and withheld in the Wessex novels. Tess's personality issues from cultural compulsions. Her profoundest responses in the novel are so evocative of cultural archetypes that she sometimes acquires the impersonality of the immemorial ballad heroine'[2]. Tess's cry at the entrance of her ancestral vaults - 'why am I on the wrong side of this door!' (p.303) - Dorothy Van Ghent argues, construct all the hopelessness of her cutlural impasse, and that her stabbing of Alec is her 'heroic return through the "door" into the folkfold'[3] and that her traditional gesture of the revenge of the instinct joins her to an innumerable company of folk heroines.

Alec's moral coarseness makes him the 'wicked seducer' of so many tales. He begins by treating Tess as a sex-object - "that's what every women says" (p.62) - he

casually remarks when she claims to be ignorant of his intentions until it was too late. At the other extreme, Angel's idealisation of Tess blinds him for a time. It is through suffering at Brazil that Angel gains an insight into humanity, enabling him to share a second brief chance of happiness with Tess. Critics may question the consistency of the two characters of Alec and Angel, but eventually they do not matter so much. As the title bears it, the novel is largely the story of Tess. Irving Howe stresses that, 'Nothing finally matters in the novel nearly so much as Tess herself: not the other characters, not the philosophic underlay, not the social setting. In her violation, neglect and endurance, Tess comes to seem Hardy's most radical claim for the redemptive power of suffering; she stands, both in the economy of the book and as a figure rising beyond its pages and into common memory, for the unconditional authority of feeling'[4].

It would not only be unfair, but grossly out of context, if we begin to consider Tess to be anything else but a story told by a teller of traditional tales.

NOTES

1. Virginia Woolf, 'The Novels of Thomas Hardy (1928)' in Hardy : The Tragic Novels, ed. R.P. Draper, op. cit., p.74.
2. Noorul Hasan, op. cit., pp.130,138.

3. Dorothy Van Ghent, 'On Tess of the D'Urbervilles' in _Modern British Fiction : Essays in Criticism_, ed. Mark Schorer (London, N.Y., Oxford University Press, 1969), p.44.
4. Irving Howe, op. cit., p.110.

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Chapter-V

JUDE THE OBSCURE

Jude the Obscure published in 1895 was to be the last and most problematical of Hardy's novels. It has been subjected to a host of contradictory interpretations, and as Hardy remarked, while one party of readers saw the novel as perverse - 'unholy anti-marriage' and 'an attack on venerable institutions', there were others who found the same novel a moral work, as 'a religious and ethical treatise'[1]. So also some critics consider Hardy to be essentially a Victorian, others contend that the novelist emerges as a distinctive modern writer.

As far as Hardy is concerned, like the former productions of his pen, Jude the Obscure is simply an endeavour to give shape and coherence to a series of

seemings; a story of 'a deadly war waged between flesh and spirit', and 'to point the tragedy of unfulfilled aims'[2].

In a letter to Edmund Gosse, he remarks :

'It is curious that some of the papers should look upon the novel as a manifesto on "the marriage question' (although, of course, it involves it), seeing that it is concerned first with the labours of a poor student to get a University degree ...' (The Life, p.271-2). He adds in a postscript that the "grimy" elements had gone into the story to show ideal life at odds with the squalid real life.

In Irving Howe's reading of the novel, there is 'a major drift in outlook' and the world of Wessex comes to lose a moral and emotional support, and the characters become 'intensely individualized figures'[3]. Such emphasis misses out on the novel's vital effects, for, as Professor Noorul Hasan points out, the anti-Wessex element in Jude 'exposes an inadequacy for a humanly satisfying existence', and that 'Hardy evinces an irreversible faith in a cultural moral centrality and achieves in his last, seemingly modern, novel as acute indictment of modern society'. He concludes that 'the novelist's consciousness of the past provides him with a standard by which to judge the present', and the novel, most convincingly, itself to be a 'logical completion of Hardy's sociological fiction'[4].

Jude, far from being the anti-hero of the modern fiction, is the tragic hero, the central character of the novel that bears out the traditional theme of the vulnerability of a man caught between two worlds, the flesh and the spirit, the real and the ideal.

At the very outset, we find Jude orphaned, poor, unwanted. He is literally dumped into a 'meanly utilitarian' (p.53) world. In Tess of the D'Urbervilles, we have sightings of urbanisation : 'Modern life stretched out its steam feeler to this point three or four times a day, touched the native existence, and quickly withdrew its feeler again, as if what it touched had been uncongenial' (p.153). With Jude, the world of Marygreen, of hypocritical farmer Trouthams, quack-doctor Vilberts, and calculatedly downright selfish Arabella Donns, is shorn of any traditional values or associations that Hardy can recall - 'echoes of songs from ancient harvest-days, of spoken words, and of sturdy deeds. Every inch of ground had been the site, first or last, of energy, gaiety, horseplay, bickerings, weariness ...' (p.53). This very sustaining vitality and vibrant energy that Marks Hardy's earlier characters come from a healthy interaction with nature, which in Jude we lose sight of. Indeed, we see a painfully morose, aged face in the person of Little-Father-Time : 'The outcome of new views of life. They seem to see all its terrors before they are old

enough to have staying power to resist them' (p.411). Little-Father-Time is out of touch with the 'substantial world' (p.347) : 'I should like the flowers very much, if I didn't keep on thinking they'd be all withered in a few days' (p.366).

It culminates into the gruesome act - 'Done because we are too Menny' (p.410).

Jude cannot find anchorage in a world that is deprived of any coherent meaning - Marygreen, Christminster, Melchester, Shaston all lack coherent meaning. The harder he struggles to reject the denaturalising influence, the deeper he gets enmeshed in its workings. Hardy notes down - "The human race to be shown as one great network or tissue which quivers in every part when one point is shaken, like a spider's web" (The Life, p.177).

A failure at Marygreen, Jude, 'whose spirit was touched to finer issues than a mere material gain' (p.124) enters Christminster, 'the city of learning' (p.235), but he 'saw nothing of the real city' (p.124). The narration goes on : 'that medievalism was as dead as a fern-leaf in a lump of coal, that other developments were shaping in the world around him, in which Gothic architecture and its associations had no place. The deadly animosity of contemporary logic and vision towards so much of what he

held in reverence was not yet revealed to him' (p.131).

Gradually, Jude learns that Christminster's doors are shut to the very people it was originally meant for - 'a man with a passion for learning, but no money, or opportunities, or friends' (p.205).

The title, Jude the Obscure indicates his status. Jude had been struggling 'unequipped, poor, and unforeseeing' (p.166). Jude's preoccupation with Christminster's colleges obscures his sight, but when 'he awoke from his dream' (p.166), he saw that there was another Christminster, the working town - "He began to see that the town life was a book of humanity infinitely more palpitating, varied and compendious than the gown life. These struggling men and women before him were the reality of Christminster, though they knew little of Christ or Minster' (p.168). Hardy's emphasis on work has been stated again and again. As in the Wessex novels, here in Jude the Obscure, there is the deep intensity of feeling for traditional physical labour. Jude saw that his destiny lay not with the educational institutions of Christminster, 'but among the manual toilers in the shabby purlieu which he himself occupied, unrecognised as part of the city at all by its visitors and penegyrists, yet without whose denizens the hard readers could not read nor the high thinkers live' (p.166). Gabriel Oak, Henchard, Jude are all Hardy heroes - 'The numberless architectural

pages around him he [Jude] read, naturally, less as an artist-critic of their forms than as an artizen and comrade of the dead handicraftsmen whose muscles had actually executed those forms'. (p.130). In the urban areas, work-specialization robs labour of its true meaning and disrupts the working community - 'In London the man who carves the boss or knob of leafage declines to cut the fragment of moulding which merges in that leafage, as if it were a degradation to do the second half of one whole', but Jude, we are told, 'was a handy man at his trade, an all-round man, as artizens in country-towns are apt to be' (p.145). Hardy's heroes have a profoundness of passion and an ability to endure suffering. His tragic heroes display an attitude of acceptance and defiance, in the best traditions of tragedy; one whose spirits are indomi~~na~~table against all odds. With a lump of workman's chalk, Jude wrote along the wall of the college - 'I have understanding as well as you; I am not inferior to you; yea, who knoweth not such things as these?' - Job Xii.3 (p.169). Far from being crushed, his spirit soars higher - "I don't regret the collapse of my University hope one jot. I wouldn't begin again if I were sure to succeed. I don't care for social success any more at all. But I do feel I should like to do some good thing, and I bitterly regret the church' (p.177). Once again the protagonist sets out, and once more the visionary Jude misses out the fact that the 'ecclesiastical' (p.182) city of Melchester

had been reduced to a commercial, materialistic pile. He was rudely shaken when he found that the composer of the hymn - 'The Foot of the Cross', the piece that has moved his soul was a mere, spiritualess, mercenery, 'most commonplace' (p.262) man - 'you must go into trade if you want to make money nowadays. The wine business is what I am thinking of' (p.254), and a hypocrite as well - 'when the musician found that Jude was a poor man his manner changed' ... (p.254). Jude himself concludes that 'he was a man of too many passions to make a good clergyman' (p.151), that 'the human was more powerful in him than the Divine' (p.267). Sue Bridehead had been his 'human interest' (p.182) all the while - 'she was nearer to him than any other woman he had ever met, and he could scarcely believe that time, creed, or absence, would ever divide him from her' (p.208). Jude would go on building dreams one after another, only to watch them shattered helplessly at every turn - intellect, religion, love. And through it all, there is the war between the flesh and the spirit. If Sue is a deterrent to his aspiration towards apostleship, it was Arabella who obstructs his aspiration towards intellectual proficiency; the pig-pizzle incident interrupts his 'deep concentration on these transactions of the future' (p.80) and heralds Arabella's appearance. Their married life is marked by the killing of the pig - a gory, grotesque episode. Arabella's association with pigs symbolises the grossness of the flesh, while Sue comes to

symbolise the spiritual. Sue may be 'the slight, pale, "bachelor" girl - the intellectualised, emancipated bundle of nerves that modern conditions were producing' (Preface, 1912), she may echo the sceptical voice of the contemporary world - "That's [the railway station] the centre of the town life now. The Cathedral has had its day!" (p.187) - "I at least don't regard marriage as a sacrament" (p.222) - "for a man and woman to live on intimate terms when one feels as I do is adultery, in any circumstances, however legal" (p.285) - and the pagan pieties of the free-spirit may be her patrons who sanction her unconventional life. But when a personal, emotional crisis confronts her all her conscious intellectual defences give way - ' "We must conform!" she said mournfully. "All the ancient wrath of the power above us has been vented upon us, his poor creatures, and we must submit. There is no choice ..." '(p.417) - '"I see marriage differently now. My babies have been taken from me to show me this! Arabella's child killing mine was a judgement - the right slaying the wrong" (p.425). And Sue decides to leave Jude to join Phillotson, with whom she is now convinced, she is bound legally and morally - "you don't see that it is a matter of conscience with me, and not of dislike to you!" (p.430). Her intellectual, theoretical mind had suppressed her emotional impulses far too long, and had sharpened her 'collosal inconsistencies' (p.231). Even in the earlier days when in her 'rightest mind'

(p.205) she could quote profane verse - 'O Ghastly glories of saints, dead limbs of gibbeted Gods!' (p.205) - in one breath she would confess - 'To be sure, at times one couldn't help having a sneaking liking for the traditions of the old faith' ... (p.204). She confesses to have married Richard Phillotson when at a time her 'theoretic unconventionality broke down', when she could not find 'an honourable way to break it [engagement] off' (p.284) and come out of circumstances, then, socially unscathed. Some critics would rather see Sue as a psychological case-study, an illness, than a tragic figure that she is, who, along with Jude, struggles to survive in a society that has lost its relevance to them. Hardy's tragic figures - Henchard, Tess, Jude, Sue may not be fulfilled in the eyes of society, but their sufferings and final rejection assert the values they stood by. Sue voices Hardy's views when she cries - 'Jude! your worldly failure, if you have failed, is to your credit rather than to your blame. Remember that the best and greatest among mankind are those who do themselves no worldly good' (p.438). In <u>Jude</u> the crumbling, barren landscape symbolises an inner desolation, a lack of beauty in man's partnership with nature - '... All around you there seemed to be something glaring, garish, rattling, and the noises and blares hit upon the little cell called your life, and shook it and warped it' (p.57). Jude cuts an obscure figure in society like the 'obscure alleys, apparently

never trodden now by the foot of man, and whose very existence seemed to be forgotten' (p.125). He would retire to obscure places for consolation; 'obscure', perhaps, but 'which was well known to certain worthies of the place' (p.170).

A nostalgia for traditional values gives the novel its strength instead of dissipating energy - "Ah! Poor soul! Weddings be funerals 'a b'lieve nowadays. Fifty five years ago, come Fall since my man and I married! Times have changed since then!' (p.479). The speaker, the aged widow Mrs. Edlin, stands in the novel as a link with the past, a past that is mentioned in Tess of the D'Urbervilles as 'When faith was a living thing'[5] - when nothingelse would matter but the simple truth - "the truth's the truth" (p.444). She has no doubts about where religion ends - 'Lord, you be too strict!' she chides Sue - 'Upon my life I don't call that religion" (p.442). Her wisdom is religion enough, and it springs from a spontaneous sense of fellow-feeling, of selflessness, and personal loving-kindness - "I was never much for religion nor against it, but it can't be right to let her do this and you ought to persuade her out of it. Of course everybody will say it was very good and forgiving of 'ee to take her to 'ee again. But for my part I don't" (p.444).

If in the end there is a sense of defeat, it is not one of passive submission - 'It was my poverty and not my

will that consented to be beaten' (p.398). Jude's sensitive mind draws inspiration from the past and its meaningful values - 'Of course Christminster is a sort of fixed vision with him, which I suppose he'll never be cured of believing in. He still thinks it a great centre of high and fearless thought' (p.383). When at the end Jude dies uttering Job's curses amidst the cheers of 'The Remembrance games' (p.485), the ironical incongruity finally dissociates him from the dehumanising world. The reference to Job's curses is suggestive of a heroic endurance in the face of adversity. The many Biblical references, imagery and symbolism in Jude give the work a universal significance and aids Hardy in creating his archetypal figures. Sue and Jude in their sufferings and rejection, find a parallel in the suffering and rejection of Christ in his humanity. Sue echoes Christ when she chooses to drink the cup of suffering - 'I must drink to the dregs!' (p.477). Jude's rejection by Christminster, his 'city of light' (p.66) calls up Biblical paradigms - 'His fixed idea was to get away to some obscure spot and hide, and perhaps pray', thus setting out, 'he sat down by the well, thinking as he did so what a poor Christ he made' (p.175). Because the family becomes socially unacceptable for their unconventional ways and independence from social codes, no lodging was forthcoming - 'Leaving Kennethridge for this place is like coming from Caiphas to Pilate' ... (p.402). Hardy poetically weaves

the Biblical allusions into the story, rather than being blasphemous as some critics see it. Arabella, a woman of rank passions, cunning precision and premeditated guile, is the legendary Delilah, and Jude, 'her shorn Samson' (p.457). In Jude, it is in the struggle of the two chief characters, Sue and Jude, that the greatness of the book lies, a heroic struggle that evokes a sense of tragic waste of human potentials. What ultimately concerns Hardy is the basic elements of life - birth, labour, love and death. Jude ends conclusively with the hero dying an inevitable obscure death, and the finality about the heroine's course of life is distinct - 'she's never found peace since she left his arms, and never will again till she's as he is now!' (p.491). Truely, Hardy's stories are love stories. In Jude Hardy is still in line with a form of fiction that necessitates an ending.

A 'feeler' before a 'thinker' throughout his career, Hardy keeps close to his roots and early inspirations. He finds in his readings, however varied, a basis for supporting impressions already formed. With Jude, his traditionalism seems to have been stretched to the furthest point that could be achieved in novels. And he returns to the realm of poetry for solace hereafter.

NOTES

1. Postscript, April 1912, <u>Jude the Obscure</u>, ed., C.H. Sisson (Great Britain, Penguin Books, 1981), pp.41-2.
2. Ibid., p.39.
3. Irving Howe, op. cit., pp.137-8.
4. Noorul Hasan, op. cit., 158-9, 156.
5. <u>Tess of the D'Urbervilles</u>, op. cit., p.91.

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Chapter-VI

CONCLUSION

That traditional materials form the basis of Thomas Hardy's fiction has been my argument. Tradition, in the Wessex novels, generates a powerful sense of stability, dignity and sanctity.

Hardy stands in line with a great tradition that is characteristically English. As pointed out in the earlier discussion, it has Fielding as its antecessor, and it is a tradition that relies for its effects on action and dialogue, its form being primarily dramatic and descriptive, not symbolical or analytical. Hardy's art incorporates much of the English traditional cultural art of balladry. T.S. Eliot's Tradition and the Individual Talent has given a new meaning to the term. However, tradition in its literal sense, is the aggregate of

customs, beliefs and practices that give continuity to a culture, or a social group and thus shape its views; the handing down from generation to generation. It is a natural and instinctive process. With Eliot, it is different : 'It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour'. What is basically instinctive and inherited, is given a negative twist to suggest 'a blind or timid adherence'[1]. The simplicity of Hardy's conviction that 'All we can do is write on the old themes in the old styles, but try to do a little better than those who went before us'[2], firmly places him at the centre of an old tradition, the 'handing down' tradition, so to say. But far from being 'blind' or 'timid', Hardy's assimilation of tradition is one of active participation, not a passive or arbitrary acceptance, and in application it is creative, never imitative. Hardy would significantly remark : 'In future I am not going to praise things because the accumulated remarks of ages say they are great and good if those accumulated remarks are not based on observation. And I am not going to condemn things because a pile of accumulated views raked together from tradition, and acquired by instillation say antecedently that they are bad' (The Life, p.161).

Hardy and tradition draw mutual strength from each other. Tradition strikes a fit representative in Hardy.

And in turn, only as a traditionalist can Hardy find a true representation - 'One fact is certain : in fiction there can be no intrinsically new thing at this stage of the world's history. New methods and plans may arise and come into fashion ... but the general theme can neither be changed, nor can the relative importance of its various particular be greatly interfered with' (P.W., p.114). Hardy's notion has a directness, it is familiar and continuous. Eliot's historical sense, on the other hand, involves a difficult search where the fragments come together to make a whole; one that does away with the general attitude of expectation, and is rather abstract : '... a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless together, is what makes a writer traditional'[3].

This concept leaves us with only literature. It has not taken into account the world of actual experience, which in Hardy finds a home - 'He has read well who has learnt that there is more to read outside books than in them' (The Life, p.107). Hardy's critical views widely differ from that of Eliot's - 'The materials of Fiction being common nature and circumstances, the science thereof

may be dignified by calling it the codified law of things as they really are' (P.W., p.134). And as Samuel Hynes remarks, Eliot's notion of the presence of the past seems in comparison to Hardy's sense of the living reality of the past, 'abstract, bookish, and cold', that 'It was a theory in terms of which a poet might make a new tradition from a heap of broken images' and that -'It expressed the modernist sense of the past as the sum of European culture, now fragmented, mixed, lost, and it established a modernist relation to that past - as individual, volitional, and effortful'[4] which is why, Hardy's sensuous understanding of tradition is unsurpassed. There is Wessex and the rural community, the ballads and the sharing community, his idea of an organic culture, his sense of beauty in affective terms and the beauty of association that sees 'a beloved relative's old battered tankard' superior to 'the finest Greek vase' (The Life, p.120-1), and considers ancient monument to be "chronicles in stone" (P.W., p.204), for, he concludes : 'life, after all, is more than art' (P.W., p.215). Hardy brings into this tradition, a world of experience - 'comprehensive and accurate knowledge or realities which must be sought for, or intuitively possessed, to some extent, before anything deserving the name of an artistic performance in narrative can be produced' (P.W., p.134). Hardy's localized field contrasts sharply with Eliot's so-called international one. But in Wessex we have an effective microcosm of the

world. Indeed, Wessex becomes a moral world; the very centre of changeless values. Going further is Professor Noorul Hasan's argument : "Hardy's novels celebrate a wider rediscovery of the metaphor of rural community in life and art in the nineteenth century ... this metaphorical or quasi-metaphorical view of rural life was not a literary stance but a habit of sociological imagination that extends to the rural people themselves. We can see this emotive view of rural life in the petition submitted to the British Parliament by the people of Raunds in Northamptonshire as early as 1797 against the impending enclosure of their village. The metaphor of community was exploited and articulated by the literary imagination, but its roots went back to the native soil of rural experience'. He concludes that Hardy, a true historian 'is not only concerned with social data, with gross historical references, but with the elusive shape and rhythm of historical and social reality. Wessex is an emotive model for the discovery and communication of forms of social reality which are seldom acknowledged or felt by factful historians'[5].

Hardy's essences are, necessarily, those of creative nostalgia, an imaginative insight, the poetic language of feeling. Not surprisingly, Hardy the man is not only felt in his work, but his presence directly defines the quality of his art.

Such a participation may unsettle Eliot's theory of a depersonalised tradition. Eliot's derogatory charges against Hardy are neither balanced nor justified. Hardy's involvement and expressiveness far from being 'emotional paroxyms'[6] is, by nature, poetic and disciplined, his appeal is 'to the emotional reason rather than to the logical reason' (P.W., p.115). His great theme, as has been reiterated, is man and his relation with the environment - the society, the natural world, the universe. His picture of life reflects the basic truths of life - living, feeling, suffering, dying; one that gives continuity to human experience. Their passion, their ability to suffer, their grand endurance, are what bring characters alive and make them memorable, not only in Hardy's novels but since the days of Shakespeare, and even that of the Greek tragedians. Irving Howe is emphatic that what won affection the world over is not merely 'Hardy's literary achievement in its own right, and certainly not his formal ideas, but a quality of feeling, a modest and brooding serenity', that his novels reflect a sense that 'here is a man who knows, who has seen and felt'[7]. Since art is a creative representation of an inner imaginative apprehension, total depersonalisation is not realisable nor is it desirable. Eliot, inspite of his theoretical impersonality, is no exception. It is interesting to note that in Proust's 'Rememberance of things past', the life of the artist becomes important as subject and as

metaphor[8]. While in psychological analyses of the authors and their works, Walter Bagehot, in his 'Estimates' focusses on the essential role of the emotions.[9] And in The Life we read that 'the position of having to carry on his life not as an emotion, but as a scientific game' (p.104) irked Hardy. He would stress that ideas are subservient to intuitive truths. For Hardy, 'To see in half and quarter views the whole picture, to catch from a few bars the whole tune, is the intuitive power that supplies the would-be story writer with the scientific bases for his pursuit' (P.W., p.137). With Eliot it is different. It is not inherited, it is not spontaneous, but it is laboured.

Hardy's tradition is conservative as the very term implies. It carried on with an assurance of continuity extending itself and imbibing qualities valuable to its form and taste. It has survived the widespread literary movements of Ezra Pounds and Eliots.

What authenticates Hardy is the fact that the master never imitated, be it Shakespeare who largely inspired him, or Byron, Keats, Milton, Coleridge, Tennyson, Browning, Fielding, Aeschyles, Sophocles, for whom his admiration is distinct. Hardy was well acquainted with the Bible, Greek and Latin classics, English and American literature. He also admitted his source to be such authors as William Barnes and George Crabbe. As for

Agnosticism, Hardy openly acknowledged his debt to Leslie Stephen, Huxley, Spencer. Hardy's own animistic feeling is akin to Swinburne's paganism, and the pagan self-assertion in John Stuart Mill's essay, On Liberty deeply impressed him. Shelley's statement on love and marriage - that the essence of love is liberty, and of love as an affinity of the mind and spirit and more important than the physical, bears a similarity with Hardy's views on the subject. Again, his concept of art as an application of ideas to life in Arnoldian, and Darwin's The Origin of Species had an impact on him. Schopenhauer's existentialism features in his reading list. Hardy may also have a certain affinity with the French Socialist, Charles Fourier, and his anti-rationalism; that passion not reason is the primary motive power in human life. There is a related idea in Auguste Comte and the positivists, in their emphasis on the instinctive and effective elements in human experience, though Hardy cannot fully accept the details of the argument. In his close associations with thinkers and their ideas, artists and their works, Hardy, rather than mimic, would sympathize and admire, be convinced of certain matters, or is inspired by others. Moreover, certain experiences sharpened his sense and confirmed long-standing beliefs. In short, Hardy learnt through intuition, and his power of understanding is instinctive. With Jude the Obscure, Wessex 'as a moral and cultural symbol',[10] scores a final

victory over the anti-Wessex elements. By then, Hardy's traditional fictional art has reached its peak, and thereafter he took leave of novel-writing. But his tradition continued as, a poet all the while, he found his final home in poetry. With 'Winter Words' came his last appearance on the literary stage.

Hardy is still alive in a very convincing manner, as has been testified by many who would rather trust their experiences before anything else.

'Nobody has taught me anything about writing since Thomas Hardy died' - Ezra Pound'.

Hardy 'still breathes, and at any moment will walk, run, spring upon us, or hide, with all the elusiveness and unpredictability of life' - R.P. Draper[12].

'Sometimes when talking to him you felt this child was as old as humanity and knew all about us, but that he did not attach importance to his knowledge because he did not know that he had it. Just by chance, in the drift of the talk, there would be a word by Hardy, not only wide off the mark, but apparently not directed to it. Why did he say it? On the way home, or some weeks later, his comment would be recalled, and with the revealing light on it' - H.M. Tomlinson[13].

What he had said in the Preface to Select Poems of William Barnes, that - 'criticism is so easy, and art so

hard : criticism so flimsy, and the life-seer's voice so lasting' (P.W., p.81) - the same can be said of Hardy himself. Hardy has learnt well from life, 'a life twisted of three stands - the professional life, the scholar's life, and the rustic life - combined in the twentyfour hours of one day' (The Life, p.32).

Tradition as a metaphor for influence receives an unmistakable authenticity and an undeniable authority with Hardy, for much of what he learnt has been taught by experience.

NOTES

1. T.S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' in 20th Century Literary Criticism, ed. David Lodge (London, Longman, 1972), p.71.
2. Quoted in Samuel Hynes, 'The Hardy Tradition in Modern English Poetry' in Thomas Hardy - the Writer and his Background, ed. Norman Page (London, Bell and Hyman, 1980), pp.76-7.
3. T.S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', op. cit., p.72.
4. Samuel Hynes, 'The Hardy Tradition in Modern English Poetry', op. cit., pp.178,175.
5. Noorul Hasan, op. cit., pp.1,3,11.
6. See T.S. Eliot, After Strange Gods : A Primer of Modern Heresey (London, Faber and Faber, 1934), pp.54-8.

7. Irving Howe, op. cit., pp.189,62.

8. See Peter J. Casagrande 'Three "Nostalgicians" : Hardy, Marcel Proust and Alain-Fournier' in Hardy Studies (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Macmillan, 1987), p.113.

9. See Lennart A. Bjork 'Hardy's Reading' in Thomas Hardy: The Writer and his Background, ed. Norman Page, op. cit., p.105.

10. Noorul Hasan, op. cit., p.163.

11. Quoted in Douglas Brown, op. cit., p.145.

12. R.P. Draper (ed.), in his Introduction to 'Hardy : The Tragic Novels' (London, Macmillan, 1975), p.11.

13. Quoted in Irving Howe, op. cit., p.191.

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