

**Morality in Thomas Hardy's Fiction with  
reference to His Major Novels**

**Joseph T.J**

**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**



**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH  
NORTH-EASTERN HILL UNIVERSITY  
SHILLONG, INDIA  
OCTOBER 2003**

## INTRODUCTON

The fundamental content of Hardy's morality is the belief in the necessity of remaining true to one's authentic self. Closely linked to this is his intense recognition of the inscrutable, incomprehensible cosmic forces over which man has little or no control at all. Hence, the need for comprise and accommodation. When it comes to the inevitable interplay between the individual and society, Hardy seems to adopt a very balanced, common sense attitude, shifting his allegiance according to the intrinsic merit of the case.

Before we explore further into the essential moral vision of Hardy, we have to examine the morality of the novel as an art form and the divergent philosophical opinions about the moral quality of human action or conduct in social life. When does a work of art become moral or immoral from the artistic point of view? Should an artist become a moral preacher? Should he write with a moral purpose? Ever since the novel came into being as a particular literary genre in the eighteenth century, there have been polarising opinions about the morality of the novel. Speaking of morality in the novel, D.H. Lawrence observes:

Morality in the novel is the trembling instability of the Balance. When the novelist puts his thumb in the scale to pull down the balance to his own predilection that is immorality.<sup>1</sup>

What Lawrence means is that a novelist should not use the medium of the novel to preach and propagate his own set of beliefs, dogmas and creeds. While every creative writer has the right to hold on to his personal convictions, he should resist the temptation to impose those views on the reader. In other words, a moral novel must be 'open-ended'. This is, however, not the view of majority of the eighteenth and nineteenth century novelists. They have all been invariably great moralists, writing with the moral purpose of instructing and educating the readers. Henry Fielding, Samuel Richardson, William Thackeray, Charles Dickens and even George Eliot were all moral preachers. George Bernard Shaw was a propagandist writer, using his plays as a vehicle for the transmission of his ideas to transform and convert his readers to his own set of beliefs. By and large, the novelists have been divided on the question of the morality of the novel.

Thomas Hardy as a novelist has, however, maintained a fine balance, not supporting any particular set of beliefs or structures of thought. It is this balance which gives ambivalence to his fictional

imagination, especially in the later novels. This ambivalence in its turn makes his novels artistically moral. Hardy has never been a moral preacher, in the fashion of Samuel Richardson or Thackeray or George Bernard Shaw. He has repeatedly declared that his novels are only 'a series of seemings or impressions' about life. In a letter written to someone about December, 1920 Hardy wrote:

A friend of mine writes objecting to what he calls my "philosophy" (though I have no philosophy-merely what I have often explained to be only a confused heap of impressions, like those of a bewildered child at a conjuring show)<sup>2</sup>

Elsewhere, Hardy has acknowledged that his views are mere impressions that frequently change. And this change of impressions is acutely perceptible in his imaginative journey from *Far From the Madding Crowd* to *Jude the Obscure*.

For any great artist morality is first and foremost being true to one's own perception and vision of life at a given cultural and historical point. And Hardy is indisputably true to his perception of life, for his imaginative works are records of felt life. We should not forget the fact that Hardy's novels achieve their force and vitality in the context of doubt, skepticism and ambivalence of attitude. According to R.L.Stevenson, 'truth to the fact of life is morality'.<sup>3</sup> In the opinion of Flaubert, even the obscene books

become immoral only if they are deficient in truth. It is the universal truth of Hardy's apprehension of life that elevates him to the rank of a great and true artist. The morality of the novel as a form of art must be judged by how far it is truthful to the existential conflicts and tensions of life. And Hardy shows this eternal conflict between man and the universe; and between man and his social environment. In this connection it is apt to recall the observation made by D. H. Lawrence: 'If a novel reveals true and vivid relationships, it is a moral work, no matter what the relationship may consist in.'<sup>4</sup> No novelist is more deeply and persistently occupied than Hardy with man's cosmic and social relationships. His chief concern is with the total man in his relationship with the incomprehensible universal forces and the immediate socio-cultural context. Therefore, judged from the artistic point of view, Hardy's works remain truly moral.

The second kind of morality which is the chief focus of this dissertation is the moral quality of human action, behaviour and attitude in Hardy's novels. In this sphere, Hardy is simultaneously occupied with the morality of the individual self as well as that of society. Hardy resents socially disruptive tendencies of individualism as well as irrational social arrangements which destroy the authentic individual. Thus we may argue that his novels are a simultaneous celebration of the authentic individual's

autonomous 'subject position' and the natural communal ethos of a given society. But here, too, Hardy remains critical, and hence, artistically moral, for D.H. Lawrence argues that 'every work of art adheres to some system of morality. But if it be really a work of art, it must contain the essential criticism on the morality to which it adheres.'<sup>5</sup> The morally aberrant or erratic individuals cannot evade poetic justice, for they receive reward or retribution in proportion to their capacity for harmonious social existence. Similarly, though writing within the rigid Victorian tradition, Hardy's fictional works are a sustained critique of the moral dogmatism of the Victorian Age. This criticism is best expressed in his last two novels – *Tess* and *Jude*.

In Hardy there is a deep tension, a perpetual conflict between his allegiance to the authentic individual and an inauthentic social world. On the one hand he shows his heroes and heroines exploding out of the established conventions of society to create themselves, to remain true to their own natural selves. And on the other hand, such genuine individuals are shown to be finally defeated by the artificial structures of society to which they do not conform. They are mercilessly punished for their intransigence. D.H. Lawrence makes a very pertinent observation about the general pattern of Hardy's novels:

In the long run, the state, the community, the established form of life remained, remained intact and impregnable, the individual trying to break forth from it, died of fear, of exhaustion, or of exposure to attacks from all sides, like men who have left the walled city to live outside in the precarious open.<sup>6</sup>

In short what kills Hardy's heroes and heroines is the judgement of men and not the judgement of their own souls or providential judgement.

Traditional Hardy criticism studies his fictional works fundamentally as a celebration of primitive, rural forms of living. According to Douglas Brown the central theme of Hardy's novels is 'the tension between the old rural world and the new urban one.'<sup>7</sup> Similar is the view of Irving Howe who studies Hardy's novels as a lament at the loss of rural England which was 'traditional, fixed in old customary ways, rituals and speech.'<sup>8</sup> No one denies Hardy's love of the old, his nostalgic yearning for old-fashioned rural simplicity and a deep hostility to the disruptive forces of urbanism. Noorul Hasan estimates Hardy's novels as 'inescapably an evocative cultural statement about the quality of life in a rural community.'<sup>9</sup> But Hardy's powerful cultural imagination is persistently invaded by an intellectual force which is an undercurrent in his works. Though emotionally a traditionalist, intellectually Hardy was far advanced of the predominant thoughts of his time. Caught between his love for the antique mode of living and the intellectual currents of his time, Hardy's fictional works reflect and betray an inherent divisiveness which is capable

of revealing the deeper significance of his works. According to John Rabbetts, in Hardy's novels there is '.... the crucial tone of ambivalence, a characteristic which permeates his work so consistently and profoundly that few critics fail to allude to it.'<sup>10</sup>

What does it imply then? Just exposing Hardy's novels as a mere record of characters placed in a traditional, rural locale, susceptible to traumatic social changes is only an incomplete understanding of the potential strength of his imagination. His works are not an explication of fixed ideas or impressions, rather they are informed by contrasting perspectives, a common attitude of ambivalence. They are intellectually more exploratory than expository in nature. There is an authorial ambivalence towards 'the rival claims of past and present, tradition and modernity, nature and society' which confront the inhabitants of his Wessex.'<sup>11</sup> Hardy criticisms have generally been swept away by the attractiveness of his cultural personality. It has not paid enough critical attention to the deeper implications and significance of his ambivalent attitude. The chief purpose of this dissertation is to delve deep into the nature of Hardy's divisiveness and his relevance to the postmodern situation.

It is the ambivalence in Hardy's works which compels us to enquire into the essence of his moral vision. There is no doubt that Hardy's novels have a unique, particular moral design. Rutland makes a pertinent observation about Hardy's works that 'Hardy's art, taken as a whole has an ethical significance..... no one except Hardy himself has even seriously denied.'<sup>12</sup> To highlight this particular body of moral principles we have to examine the very concept and meaning of morality. In philosophical discourses on morality we come across mainly two kinds of moral theories – social morality and psychological or individual morality. According to the former, 'morality consists in habitual, involuntary conformity to the conventions, from whatever motive or motives this conformity arises.'<sup>13</sup> This is a social concept of morality which has a definite role in sustaining a harmonious, cohesive social existence. In short, it is a social enterprise. What constitutes the social moral principles is the sum total of the customs, traditions, cultures and code of conduct collectively recognized and practised by a particular society from generation to generation. 'Considered as a social system of regulation, morality is like law on the one hand and convention or etiquette on the other.'<sup>14</sup> In short, the organized social character of man may be ascribed to morality. Judged from sociological point of view morality is a set of principles or rules that are meant to guide human actions and conduct in society so that there is harmonious existence

as well as an attempt to achieve maximum good for maximum people. Any action that detracts from the general happiness is wrong and immoral. One is said to have a morality only if one has something – a set of rules, principles and ideals that he takes as a guide to action, action that produces general happiness and welfare. One must act on rules which are meant for everybody. The sociological moral theory is based on the generally accepted notion that man is a social being. Consequently, it is a practical or external condition of his well being that he should be a useful member of a happy community and, more particularly, a community that does not blame him for any of the unhappiness it suffers. Thus, sociological morality demands conformity and surrender to the established norms and conventions of a community. Here society is placed above the individual.

On the other hand, the psychological or individual moral theory holds the view that ‘morality consists, not in what other people insist that I should do, but in what I insist that I should do.’<sup>15</sup> Here morality is viewed as the content of one’s conscience. According to the psychological moralists, to accept a traditional, moral standard unreflectively is to fall short in human dignity. They hold the view that self respect and human dignity can be achieved only by individuals who accept certain standards that they consciously approve of for themselves and for others. The

traditionalist concept of morality emphasizes the positive or social concept, customs and tradition. It recommends that we should derive our moral decisions from social morality. The anti-traditionalists emphasize the autonomous concept, private judgement and reflection in deciding the moral quality of an action. Neil Cooper, a moral philosopher, sums up the essence of these two types of morality:

Those who suppose that morality is or ought to be wholly or mainly a social concept may recommend submission to a tradition. Those on the other hand, who suppose morality to be primarily an individual or independent concept will recommend independent decisions.<sup>16</sup>

And Cooper concludes his discussion by suggesting that in a rational morality each should have its own place. Similar is the view expressed by Socrates in his *Crito*. According to Socrates society is, to some extent, justified in demanding from an individual a certain minimal subscription to the moral institutions of life. But at the same time society is required to respect the individual autonomy and liberty, and in general to treat him justly. It must also remember that morality is made to minister to the good lives of individual and not to interfere with them any more than is necessary.

If we closely examine Hardy's novels, we find that he values both the individual and society. There is a shifting of allegiance between the

sociological morality and the individual morality according to the intrinsic merit of the situation. For instance, Henchard, Eustacia, Tess and Jude have a system of inner morality that does not conform to the sociological morality. They are right because they are true to their own selves. They refuse to live in the 'they-self', society's created self. On the other hand, Troy, Wildeve, Fitzpiers, Alec and Mrs. Charmond are neither true to themselves nor true to the society. The inauthenticity of their existence is a threat to the preservation of the cultural fabric of the community. Hence, they are immoral and chastised.

There is another school of moral philosophers who lay stress on motive or intention of an act. In their opinion it is the motive of an action, not its results, which determines its moral quality. If the motive is not a concern for the other, then the act is immoral. According to David Hulme, 'it is on the Goodness or Badness of the Motives that the Virtue of the action depends.'<sup>17</sup> That motive should be the fundamental determinant of right action was widely accepted in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. John Stuart Mill sees 'the rightness of actions in terms of their tendency to augment the general happiness.'<sup>18</sup> Aristotle emphasizes the importance of harmonization of desires and of practical reason in securing communal integrity and happiness. According to the Utilitarian ethics of Jeremy

Bentham and John Stuart Mill, any action which tends to promote maximum welfare and happiness for the greatest number is moral.

In all human communities there is a divergence between conscience and convention. What people in their hearts are devoted to may be something quite other than the conventionally moral. This divergence between conscience and convention is quite predominant in Hardy. He is on the side of sociological morality while castigating the inauthentic, self-deceiving individuals who disrupt the natural harmony of a community. But when society attempts to suppress the true, authentic individuals with its rigid and arbitrary moral principles and laws, Hardy rebels against society. That is why Hardy's imaginative works have universal appeal. They draw their sustenance and universal appeal by embodying real values that are humanly ennobling. To quote E.M. Forster: 'And what the story does is to narrate life in time. And what the entire novel does – if it is a good novel – is to include the life by values as well.'<sup>19</sup> It is the presence of real human values – both individual and social – which make Hardy's novels both enduring and universally appealing. In the ultimate analysis, both the individual and society are vital to Hardy's cultural imagination. They fall out of his favour only when they tend to be inauthentic.

Authenticity and morality are inseparable for Hardy. They are inextricably interwoven in any ethical judgement of either the individual or society. His fictional works are essentially an exploration of the perennial confrontation between the authentic individual self and the inauthentic self of society and vice versa. Philosophical discourses always draw an affinity between authenticity and morality. 'Authenticity' is a moral concept in the sense that at least it lures us to live for the realization of something naturally good. It is a value which ought to be sought and 'inauthenticity' is a dis-value which ought to be rejected. In existentialist ethics, authenticity refers to an 'individual's autonomy in making moral choices that are not bound by society's norms.....it replaces conformity and shifts moral choices from the society to the individual..... Authentic person acts from a sense of innate principles and does not depend on social acceptance for his or her standards of ethics.'<sup>20</sup> An authentic life is one in which an individual owns up his being, his true self. We must note here that authenticity is neither ethical nihilism nor irrational iconoclasm. It is the struggle into being. It is a manifestation of the soul's relentless desire to remain loyal to itself. It is not going against all conventions of society. In fact, most of the existentialist philosophers stress the inevitable link between the individual and the community. Authenticity, in short, is being true to one's natural self that should not in any way interfere with the

happiness and welfare of others. It is the 'recognition that one's life and choices are one's own responsibility.'<sup>21</sup> And inauthenticity is the suppression of responsibility for one's life. The ultimate tragedy of Sue Bridehead in *Jude the Obscure* springs from her inauthenticity. She does not own up to her created self and responsibility for her actions unlike Henchard or Jude.

In Hardy authenticity may also be identified with instinctive, natural responses to life. The terms, 'instinctive' and 'natural' do not, however, mean animal drives without the recognition of reason. Anything that has historical and cultural durability is natural. Features, traits or characteristics that are historically and culturally durable are generally regarded as natural. However, all that is natural does not promote virtue. For example, cruelty, vengeance and hypocrisy are natural features. If not tempered by reason, these natural traits can be detrimental to society. According to Hardy, irrational instincts must be suppressed or tempered if they obstruct the cultivation and continuation of general happiness of the community. While authenticity is remaining true to one's own inner self, inner value system, sometimes an authentic individual may consciously slide into inauthenticity in order to bring happiness to others. This is exactly what happens to Tess when she voluntarily returns to Alec in order to save her

impoverished and destitute family. Very often inauthenticity provides security and safety because it is conformity to the larger external world. It is this occasional lapse of his major characters into inauthenticity which often obscures the otherwise forceful advanced tendencies in Hardy. His major objection comes when the inauthentic society tries to destroy the authentic individual whose authenticity is not a threat to society or its happiness. It is this balanced approach to life which compels some critics to allude to his ambivalence or ambiguity. Hardy's imagination is caught between the natural man and the unnatural social arrangements.

The essence of Hardy's moral vision is nowhere expressed with more clarity and precision than when he studies his major characters in relation to society and the universe. Traditional criticism of Hardy is tempted to acclaim him as a societal man who prefers the expulsion of the autonomous, authentic individual in his passion for the preservation of conventional society. This is actually not the ultimate impression that his fictional works leave upon the postmodern readers. His works are not a mere endorsement of Victorian moral universalism and social arrangements. Rather they are a sustained critique of the Victorian moral dogmatism. The readers must guard themselves against being carried away by the conventional superstructure of his novels. For, beneath it remains



hidden the intellectual skeptic who questions and ridicules the established moral paradigms of his time.

When we approach Hardy's works with the help of the postmodern theoretical apparatus, they acquire a new significance. Through the dynamics of reading, so popular in the present day, we may explore the unwritten or implicit in Hardy's works. He is 'more alive today than at any time since his death.'<sup>22</sup> His full greatness has been obscured, to some extent, by the clouds of orthodox criticism which concentrates only on his acute sensitivity to the appeal of rural life. True, Hardy is an ardent celebrant of rural life. But limiting his fictional works to an expression of his cultural imagination will severely restrict an adequate response to his great imagination. In all his major novels, there is a conflict between the individual and society. While dramatizing this conflict Hardy does not conceal his intellectual and emotional resentment at the arbitrarily constructed social laws and institutions. He does not hesitate to articulate his skepticism to the claims of universal truth. The ultimate focus of his major novels is on the merciless destruction of the authentic individual by the inauthentic society. Majority of Hardy's heroes and heroines are victims of societal attempt to obliterate their 'subject position' as autonomous individuals. They are defeated or killed for their uniqueness.

Taken together Hardy's novels engage into a persistent questioning of the validity of the social institutions, considered against the touchstone of the natural and the instinctive communal life of the countryside.

What is remarkable about Hardy is his capacity and skill to accommodate multiple perspectives within his much acclaimed cultural personality. The divergent, often opposing perspectives, offered with a detached authorial voice, do point to the greatness of a fecund imagination.

Virginia Woolf makes a very perceptive observation about Hardy's works:

It is as if Hardy himself were not quite aware of what he did, as if his consciousness held more than he could produce, and he left it for his readers to make out his full meaning and to supplement it from their own experience.<sup>23</sup>

In this dissertation we are trying to explore Hardy's moral vision by penetrating into the inexhaustible possibility that a text offers. Today it is generally accepted among literary circles that 'the potential text is infinitely richer than any of its individual realizations.'<sup>24</sup> Hardy's novels are porous in nature and are open to a variety of interpretations. This is not falling into 'intentional fallacy'. A long-standing contention in literary theory today is that

the meaning of a work is not what the writer had in mind at some moment during composition of the work, or what the writer thinks the

work means after it is finished, but rather, what he or she succeeded in embodying in the work.<sup>25</sup>

A clinical examination of Hardy's works would reveal that his primary imagination has had the seeds of many of the postmodern tendencies. They were in their embryo. One of the chief characteristics of postmodernism is the rejection of fixity, immutability and the possibility of an eternal world order. Postmodernism undertakes a radical critique of philosophical and ethical systematization of grand theories or meta-narratives, paving the way for pluralism in all spheres of life. Steven Connor observes that one of the striking features of the postmodernist discourse is 'the authoritative announcements of the disappearance of final authority and the promotion and recirculation of a total and comprehensive narrative of a cultural condition in which totality is no longer thinkable.'<sup>26</sup> Postmodern discourses have an inherent tendency to be centrifugal rather than centripetal. That is, they refuse to believe in any fixed centre. They move away from any established centre towards multiple centres all of which are true in their own rights. Was not Hardy centrifugal when he called Henchard 'a man of character' and Tess 'a pure woman'? Was he not rebelling against the Victorian moral universalism? Yes, he was. He refused to surrender to the Victorian world view of fixities and the myth of unified destiny of man based on irrational paradigms of thought. If he

could not be as radical and revolutionary as D.H. Lawrence, it was because of his inescapable conditioning by the conventions of the Victorian society. By and large he wrote for the general Victorian public. Whenever, he deviated from the general expectations of his readers as in *Tess* and *Jude*, he confronted vitriolic criticism which compelled him to give up novel writing altogether. After the hostile reception of his last novel, *Jude* Hardy said:

Well, if this sort of thing continues no more novel-writing for me. A man must be a fool to deliberately stand up to be shot at.<sup>27</sup>

The nineteenth century rigid social and moral conventions are partly responsible for Hardy's reluctance in exploring the full potentialities of the individual – a serious allegation made against Hardy by D.H. Lawrence in his '*Study of Thomas Hardy*.'

As mentioned earlier, Hardy's moral vision is informed by his remarkable understanding of the pluralistic nature of man. The hope of a universal ethical system for mankind is beyond his system of thought. He does not seem to believe in any universal principles or totalisation. George Panthanmackel in his short survey of postmodern map makers observes:

Shattering the inherent tendency of modernity and enlightenment tradition to universalize everything, postmodernity opened the door for the possibility of pluralism and contextuality.<sup>28</sup>

Didn't Hardy plead, long ago, for a contextual judgement of Henchard, Eustacia, Tess and Jude? Just as postmodernism rejects any form of absolutes, Hardy too had rejected them, especially the moral absolutes. In *Tess* and *Jude* Hardy calls for dissolution of the universal perspectives and an acceptance of specificities in judging the moral behaviour of individuals. In these two novels Hardy has shown that the language of the universal is the language of control, hegemony and domination. In his view, as also for the postmodernists, it is the instrument for the suppression of the native qualities of an authentic individual.

The Victorian world was intolerant of multiplicities. It craved for universality and tried to eliminate the 'other'. Speaking of the Pre-modern world Jim Powell observes:

If they should encounter an individual or a society that was different, then the strategy was to conquer it militarily, economically and sexually; to convert it to one's own religion, or to kill it. The very existence of the other, posed a threat to the supposed universality of one's own beliefs.<sup>29</sup>

The Victorian Age, and to some extent, even modernism tried to repress the atavistic nature of man. That was why Hardy could not write any more fiction after 1895. His thoughts were far in advance of his time. In this connection Arnold Kettle's remark about Hardy is worth quoting:

On the one hand there is the rather conservative and conventional literary man.....and on the other hand the curiously lovely and uncompromising figure who terrified the publishers and shocked the bishops and maintained throughout his life attitude so radical and unpopular that even nearly forty years after his death we cannot always persuade ourselves that he really believed what he wrote.<sup>30</sup>

In fact this conflict between the conservative and the radical informs Hardy's art just as persistently as it divided his life. Though Hardy had declared that 'a novel is an impression, not an argument', today his "impressions" relate to postmodern intellectual discourses. That is how Hardy has become more alive and relevant today, no matter what the traditional critics feel about it. Katherine Anne Porter, a critic of Hardy stands vindicated today: 'A novel by Thomas Hardy can be a chastening experience, an appalling one, there is great and sober pleasure to be got out of those novels, the mind can be disturbed and the heart made extremely uneasy.'<sup>31</sup> This uneasiness is caused by the very nature of confrontation between the individual and the society.

In all of Hardy's major novels the ultimate tragedy of his heroes and heroines is caused by the social laws and conventions which refuse to make allowances for the authentic individual. Henchard, Eustacia, Tess and Jude are highly particularized individuals with undoubted authenticity. However, in a society organized on rational principles alone, such individuals are doomed to failure. They do not, and cannot, conform.

Therefore, they are ruined. Moral systems, Hardy seems to argue, should not be a mere academic creation or philosophical abstractions. They ought to be inspired by a deeper understanding of the real nature of man. Hardy is very distrustful of rational culture like D.H. Lawrence. His imagination refuses to validate the prevalence of dogmatic doctrines. His novels are faithful pictures of the pluralistic nature of man. They are pictures of high realism; they are a tribute to his keen sense of reality and humanism. Having comprehended the seemingly intractable mysteries of the universe, Hardy suggests that no singularity of moral perception is true or valid. Like Jacques Derrida, a postmodern thinker, Hardy does not believe in the 'metaphysics of presence' – that there is a world of essence or ideas with independent existence. In the absence of any such objective truth, no codified rules or laws can be accepted as the ultimate. Hardy vehemently resents the obstinate adherence to an artificially constructed code of conduct. This is best expressed, apart from his novels, in his short story, *On the Western Circuit* (1891).

Martin Heidegger – an existentialist Philosopher – in his renowned book *Being and Time* shows that the human being is forced into an inauthentic life by the social systems into which he is merged. The uniqueness and individuality of human beings is often submerged in the

social demands to conform. Only the exceptional few, the courageous can remain true to themselves because of insurmountable social pressures. In Hardy's novels the major characters are shown to be forced to lead a life in a borrowed self, the self of the society. Hardy himself once remarked:

The irritating necessity of conforming to rules which in themselves have no virtue.<sup>32</sup>

Those who do not conform are eventually destroyed. D.H.Lawrence is perplexed at Hardy's motive in making his blameless, naturally authentic individuals succumb to the formidable pressures of man made laws. Why does Hardy do so? We may argue that this pattern is an ironic device to ridicule and awaken the society to an awareness of its irrational social institutions and ethical formulations which are against the greater natural laws. Moreover, through this device Hardy shows the powerful hold of society over the individual. He seems to see culture as 'an expression of the people and culture as imposition on the people....'<sup>33</sup>. It is a natural expression of the people as well as an oppressive ideological formation. People are both shaped and manipulated by cultural forces. No other novelist has perceived acutely this dual role of culture as Hardy has done. Hence, his apparent ambivalence, for he supports the shaping aspects of a culture and criticizes those aspects which try to manipulate the individual

and deny the possibility of authentic existence. In this Hardy seems to share the view of Roland Barthes who is

especially interested in demystifying what in culture comes to seem natural by showing that it is based on contingent historical constructions.<sup>34</sup>

In Hardy's novels society rejects and even frustrates authentic individuals when they refuse to conform. He shows that it is a rather difficult task to remain authentic and continue to enjoy social acceptance. Hence, the oppression of the authentic might lead to extreme reactions and even to madness. This is what happens to Hardy's authentic heroines like Eustacia and Tess. In death Tess escapes to her authentic self from the inauthenticities of her social world. A similar situation can be found in the way Ivan welcomes death in Tolstoy's short story, *The Death of Ivan Illyitch*. In Hardy's sympathetic allegiance towards his authentic characters we can find echoes of modern existentialists like Nietzsche, Sartre and Camus who believe in the need for creation of one's own selfhood, which in short, is authenticity. The notion of a universal essence is abhorred by the existentialists and later by postmodernists. During his lifetime Hardy was influenced by thinkers like Darwin, Spencer, Huxley and J.S. Mill, to name a few. Darwin's thoughts compelled Hardy to rethink the very concept of an external Being. Spencer taught him that the power beyond the phenomenon is utterly inscrutable. Huxley and Mill nudged him toward

open disbelief; the universe being unsponsored, it contains neither inherent purpose nor moral quality.<sup>35</sup>

Living among such flurry of radical thoughts, Hardy began to be skeptical about social laws and conventions which claim to have objective validity. Consequently, there was a gradual leaning towards the authentic individual who was oppressed by the established social structures. It is in this intellectual shift of Hardy we that we may trace many of the inherent tendencies of postmodernism. As a cultural and intellectual movement, postmodernism questions all attitudes of certainty and definiteness by pointing to the indefiniteness and ambiguity in our knowledge. It represents the triumph of the subjective, the ephemeral and the fragmentary over the unchanging and the universal. It does not believe in any one centre. Western intellectuals like Jean Francois Lyotard, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, to mention only a few, stand for multiplicity and diversity in every sphere of life Foucault is a champion of anti-totalisation. For him there is no such thing as objective knowledge. Similar is the view of Lyotard who expresses the postmodern skepticism on the possibility of truth. Jacques Derrida – a proponent of ‘Deconstruction’ – shows that what are customarily accepted as ‘centres’ and ‘origins’ have no basis in reality. He does not believe in the ‘metaphysics of presence.’ The Victorians and

even the moderns had succumbed to what Derrida calls 'the metaphysics of presence' - that things or truth have independent existence. Majority of postmodern thinkers reject this notion. According to them, nothing is certain. We cannot be certain about anything. Thomas Hardy was deeply skeptical about the finality of Victorian thoughts especially with regard to moral principles. He questioned the validity of the metaphysical authority which is believed to be the basis of social and moral laws. He always displayed his incredulity towards the 'meta-narratives.' The Victorian 'text' of morality is continuously under censure, especially in *Tess* and *Jude*.

According to Hardy, the traditional morality of the Victorian Age had failed to take into account the pluralistic nature of man. Such a moral system was founded on pure rationality which 'knows not of heart's passions', to use the words of Blaise Pascal. In Hardy there is an intense respect for the individual and a belief in the value of the individual consciousness as the source of all perceptions and knowledge. He recognizes the dignity and individuality of every human being. Hence, one must be prepared to respect pluralism. But paradoxically, in his novels, the individual is without any significance when viewed against the immensity of the Universe and the oppressive social systems. In the process of living

one's own authentic self, all of Hardy's major characters are destroyed by man made social laws. The demands of society restrict individual possibilities. To some extent this pattern is the very essence of western tradition. Jonathan Culler observes that 'novels in the Western tradition show how aspirations are tamed and desires adjusted to social reality.'<sup>36</sup> Being a Victorian novelist Hardy had many compulsions not to subvert the established structures of society. That is why D.H.Lawrence accuses Hardy of a 'lack of sternness.' But in spirit Hardy remained an uncompromising intellectual skeptic. In this connection David Cecil makes a pertinent observation about Hardy:

Intellectually Hardy was a man of the new age – the so called advanced thinker, in open rebellion against traditional, orthodox views about religion, sex and so on and he used his novels to preach these heretical opinions.<sup>37</sup>

In all of Hardy's major novels, there is an ironic sense of what man deserves and what he actually manages to get from life. His heroes and heroines suffer not so much for the infringement of the immutable, incomprehensible natural laws as the infringement of man made laws. In *Tess* and *Jude*, Hardy tries to show the irrationality of following one dominant narrative. For instance, the sufferings and the ultimate tragic death of Tess vividly reveal the inadequacy of convention to provide a sound foundation for judgement in personal matters. The Victorian society

never cared for the individual. And Hardy protested against this callous attitude in his own way. His novels are a critique of the monolithic structures of western thoughts and ethical system. It is here Hardy anticipated many of the postmodernist concerns:

In postmodern societies many micro-narratives are jammed together. And this carnival of narratives replaces the monolithic presence of one metanarrative.<sup>38</sup>

Hardy's plea was to 'think otherwise' as the postmodernists do. He tried to break away from certain accepted rules in the realm of moral thinking. But he never tried to systematize his thoughts into a philosophy as Michel Foucault and Derrida have done. However, he has registered his protest against the totalising views for their inhibiting effect on the individual. Like the postmodernists, Hardy believes that the meaning is never final; therefore, differences have to be respected and approached sympathetically. Hardy is apprehensive about any single system because it always tries to silence or alienate the minority voices. The postmodern critique of universality demonstrates that totality and universality are claimed dishonestly in the name of structures of power that are neither total nor universal. These are concepts which were not alien to Hardy. Rather, his implied meanings in different novels are potentially capable of constituting a thesis not quite different from postmodern discourses. It becomes more convincing especially in the light of the postmodern

contention that '..... one text is potentially capable of several difficult realizations and no reading can ever exhaust the full potential.'<sup>39</sup> Hardy as a novelist is multifaceted. His imaginative works, taken together, constitute an eloquent statement of his anti-totalizing attitude. They register his intellectual protest against all forms of foundationalism. Hardy's occasional or even consistent retreat into the innocence of rural simplicity is not a token of the blind acceptance of all that passes off as natural. He is apprehensive of anything that does not respect the authenticity of the individual. Crudely put, what Hardy objects to is the exploitation of the individual in the name of universal truth, something that is non-existent. In the absence of such truth multiplicity should receive its own share of recognition.

Apart from the interplay of relationship between the individual and society, another vital aspect of Hardy's moral vision is the necessity to surrender unconditionally to the inscrutable universal forces. Mystery is an integral part of the cosmic design of human existence. Hence, it is futile and unreasonable to indulge in promethean rebellion against a power that is neither comprehensible nor intelligible. D.H.Lawrence in his *Study of Thomas Hardy* cites two types of morality in Hardy's novels – morality of the unfathomable Nature, and the social, human morality. Hardy's quarrel

is with the nature of social laws and not with the natural scheme of things. Violation of natural laws is not tolerated in Hardy. Given the mysterious, incomprehensible nature of the cosmic scheme, Hardy suggests a morality of accommodation and compromise. It is incumbent upon the individual 'to control the impulses which put one in opposition to the forces of the universe.'<sup>40</sup> In *Far From the Madding Crowd* Troy's fault lies in the negligence and betrayal of the natural principle of love. He desecrates the very principle of love both in his relations to Fancy and Bathsheba. On the other hand, it is Gabriel Oak's intuitive understanding of nature's ways which sustains him through his ordeals and brings him ultimate happiness. In *The Return of the Native*, Eustacia rebels against her own true self and her natural situation, and meets with irrevocable tragic end. Even Clym initially disowns his true self, but ultimately he is able to achieve some kind of self realization and return to his original self, to the heath. Michael Henchard's adversities in *The Mayor* spring from the sale of his wife – a violation of the natural moral law. It drags Henchard to his tragic death although his inner value system, his authenticity, triumphs not only in his life but also in his death. In *The Woodlanders* Grace Melbury's tragedy is brought about by the surrender of her natural self to the demands of the inauthentic social world, patronised by her father. Giles Winterborne, on the other hand, fails to discern between the authenticity of Marty and the

inauthenticity of Grace Melbury. Hence, his tragedy. In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, we find Hardy exploring deeply the dialectic of authenticity and inauthenticity. Tess's natural, authentic self is assailed by the inauthentic social world represented by both Alec and Angel Clare. In *Jude the Obscure* Hardy is simultaneously concerned with the tragedy of inauthentic self as represented by Sue and the absurdity of an artificially structured social world. Sue's ultimate failure lies in her voluntary refusal to own up to her own created self. Her return to Phillotson is an eloquent statement of that failure. Jude, on the other hand, is a victim of both his own impulses and the stratified social world. But what is redeeming about his character is that he remains true to his own natural, authentic self till his death.

The peasants in Hardy's novels live in harmony with Nature; they have an ineffable sense of belonging to their natural world unlike the modernists. The cheerful acceptance of life on its own terms characterizes their way of life, of which Gabriel Oak, Diggory Venn, and Giles Winterborne are the most representative. William Golding's Neanderthal world is identical with Hardy's rural community where innocence exists in its primeval state. Hardy saw rural England in danger of total extinction along with its antique simplicity and the sense of oneness with nature. He

regretted the disappearance of such pristine existence. The concept of man's fall from innocence is aptly illustrated by Golding in his novel, *The Inheritors*. Golding here presents, in contrasting light, the world of the Neanderthals and the Homosapiens. On the rational level, the modern man may be superior to the rural folk, but on the moral level, he is inferior to them. Hardy shows that Wessex is a microcosm of the universal order and that it contains a great morality for mankind. Hardy anticipated what Golding was to explore later that man must learn to live with the natural chaos of existence without forcing artificial patterns on it. He questioned the primacy of thought over feeling, reason over instinct. We must not forget the fact Hardy does not consider all conventions as manifestations of the natural. Many are simply historical, cultural products. He accepts conventions only when they remain as expressions of all that is natural and instinctive. What he regrets most is the intrusion of radical rationalism into the fabric of a stable social order.

In the postmodern world there is a realization that our ideas about truth are not eternal, but made; realities are social, relative perspectives. Hardy's novels can be read as a sustained and consistent critique of cultural and social inventions which try to suppress the natural, authentic self of man. They question the Victorian pretensions to truth and universality.

They are an intellectual protest against the Victorian attempt to expunge the local or the particular. Hardy had resented the persisting Victorian refusal to recognize the pluralistic nature of man. His objection to universalism or totalisation can be best observed in his own remark:

I consider a social system based on individual spontaneity to promise better for happiness than curbed and uniform one under which all temperaments are bound to shape themselves to a single pattern of living.<sup>41</sup>

Here 'spontaneity' definitely refers to the natural self, the authenticity of the individual. Hardy places instinct and spontaneity above the intellectual and rational patterning of life. In the dialectic of individual specificity and social foundationalism, Hardy is undoubtedly on the side of the individual. Any criticism which tends to study Hardy as a mere traditionalist or conformist is a reductive one. The Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin describes the novel as fundamentally polyphonic (multi-voiced) or dialogical rather than monological (single voiced). According to him 'the essence of the novel is its staging of different voices or discourses and, thus, of the clash of social perspectives and points of view.'<sup>42</sup> Hardy's fictional works are multi-voiced, with opposing and divergent points of view. Without giving the impression of a moral preacher or advocate of any particular set of beliefs or creeds, Hardy has given expression to his

varied, often conflicting points of view. In this context it is apt to recall the comment of Ian Gregor on Hardy:

With *The Return of the Native* the Wessex world is fractured and it is the successive imaginings of the nature of that divisiveness that constitute the shaping spirit of the remainder of the Wessex novels.<sup>43</sup>

This shaping spirit has, as we have already argued, affinity with the fundamental assumptions and beliefs of postmodernist discourses about the very nature of human life. Postmodernism presents a vision of cultural as well as intellectual pluralism which has neither hierarchies nor any centre. There is a greater acceptance of cultural and individual differences with deeper understanding and sympathy hitherto unknown to mankind.

Thomas Hardy had anticipated the essential postmodern plea to embrace every form of diversity without recourse to any universal principles which in themselves are not true. Like postmodernists Hardy does not believe that the phenomenon conceals secret and universal principles of truth. His chief concern in his novels is ontological and not epistemological – that is, attempting to know what the world is and not how the world is to be known. This today is the focus of postmodern discourses as well. In trying to explore what the world is, what human life is, Hardy has shown himself a humanist par excellence. And it is his inalienable humanist concerns which make his novels what they are.

## Conclusion

Reading Hardy's novels is a perplexing experience. In his novels he has fictionalized the fundamental existential conflicts of man with the inscrutable universe and the social world. The conflicts and tensions that inevitably attend the reality of human existence are the chief focus of his creative work. He is an expositor of man's sufferings and cosmic alienation. Hardy was quite aware of a crisis, a threat, a fragmentation and alienation that were happening in the nineteenth century. Like Shakespeare Hardy shows an awareness of the cruel irrationality of the conditions of human life. The puerile gods torture us not for punishment, but for sport. Hardy presents a world forsaken by God. H. C. Duffin makes a pertinent observation about Hardy's Works:

Hardy is among those who have given us works of art wherein, having grasped the central idea of each, we find it to be not only a thing of beauty but a grand moral lesson also.<sup>1</sup>

Hardy believes in the absolute incomprehensibility of the universal forces, and also in the inevitable tragedy of human struggle against them. All of Hardy's major novels are a record of this deep rooted belief. In novel after novel, he stresses the need to understand this truth and to accommodate to the invincible forces of the universe. Those who rebel are either defeated or killed; and those who surrender continue to achieve at least minimum

success and happiness, but at the cost of their authentic existence. Another chief focus in his novels is the perennial struggle between the individual and society. His highly humanistic imagination calls for a social order that has enough space to accommodate individual differences. Both the rigidity of society and unbridled individualism are brought under severe attack in his novels. Any rational system of morality must synthesise social and individual claims. When either of them is excluded, there is tragedy for the individual as well as for society.

Most of Hardy's great characters are archetypal. They are engaged into a dual struggle against the forces of the universe and the irrational elements in social traditions. Each of his major characters embodies within himself the totality of human nature. His characters transcend time and place. They are essentially true to life. Judged against the scenario of postmodern approach to life, Hardy assumes greater relevance in his particularly intense respect for cultural and individual specificities. In his novels Hardy critically examines the possibility of happiness in both rural and urban contexts. He loved his Wessex- a metaphor for rural life- for its simplicity and natural forms of living. He is 'the first writer to achieve the necessary range and realism of the novel of English country life.'<sup>2</sup> But at the same time, he was not totally averse to the changes that were fast

transforming rural England. Though acutely and painfully conscious of the gradual disappearance of the familiar world, he yet accepted the modern changes as inevitable. In his sociological essay, *The Dorsetshire Labourer*

Hardy wrote:

They are losing their individuality, but they are widening the range of their ideas, and gaining in freedom. It is too much to expect them to remain stagnant and old-fashioned for the pleasure of romantic spectators.<sup>3</sup>

But Hardy's major objection to the emergent civilization was its emphasis on rationality and the tendency towards universalism. The Enlightenment belief that reason and science alone can achieve human progress and happiness was distrusted by Hardy. He did not believe in Modernism's optimism about achieving a unified destiny for mankind. Hardy's division, especially in his last two novels, shows that no simple solutions are possible to the crisis of mankind. In his refusal to take side with any particular form of life as the ultimate, he remains relevant to the postmodern condition which refuses to accept any fixed formulas about life. In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy protests the intransigent Victorian social and moral systems. Though he lived in both the Victorian and the modern world, he was far in advance of his time as Jude and Sue were. Steven Connor's observation of postmodernist culture can be easily applied to the essential spirit of Thomas Hardy as a seer:

First of all, postmodern theory legitimates the evacuation of the centre or the idea of the centre, splintering it into 'dissident micro-territories', 'constellation of voices', and 'plurality of meanings', allowing and promoting specificity and regionalism, social minorities and political projects which are local in shape, or surviving traditions and oppressed forms of knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

Hardy's novels are fundamentally a recognition of the 'voices' of rural England, its virtues and enduring humanity. Modernism failed in the cultivation of the fundamental human virtues of concern and kindness for others. Two World Wars bear witness to this truth. And postmodernism gropes in the ocean of indeterminacy and uncertainty. As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, there are many postmodern thinkers like Lyotard, Derrida and Foucault who hark back to some of the pre-modern values as a solution to the contemporary crisis. What Hardy believed so passionately seems to be valid today. Noorul Hasan makes a very pertinent observation that Hardy saw the rural matrix as 'an alternative to the chaos of rationality and progressive assumptions.'<sup>5</sup> His greatness consists in bringing to light the wealth of a life of the marginalized, common people. William Howitt(1792-1879) in his book *Rural Life of England* writes about rural England in the following words: 'There is no part of the population for whom so little is done, and of which so little is thought.'<sup>6</sup> But Hardy thought and wrote about them more effectively than any English novelist. In rustic life Hardy found, as did Wordsworth, the real emotions and

feelings of humanity. Hardy's works have some influence upon and affinities with writers such as John Cowper Powys, John Fowles, William Faulkner, Ibsen, Zola and Dreiser. All these writers base the details of their narratives on ordinary life. Their works present the helpless subordination of the individual to external forces. Like Hardy, they too are sympathetic to the individual whose identity and individuality are recognized. Hardy does not seem to believe that 'self identity is constituted within the gaze of the other.'<sup>7</sup> For him the individual weighs more than society. But in their passionate quest for authentic existence, Hardy's heroes and heroines are ruined by society. They protest against unbearable human conditions; they challenge the basis of prescribed social morality without any success. They succumb to public opinion and the 'human compact.' So in Hardy's novels there is a consistent confrontation between the individual conscience and social conscience. The illustration of this division is one of the themes of Wessex novels.

Hardy's disapproval of any attempt to shape the world in the image of the privileged is evident in all his novels, especially in *Jude the Obscure* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. The Victorian attempt to interpret reality in a centralist mode is called in question. Victorian England was not quite different from its colonizers outside the country, where they suppressed the

other for their difference. But in the twentieth century we find an inversion of many of the western paradigms of thought. And by the time we come to the postmodern world, the distinction of centre and periphery becomes more and more blurred. The nineteenth and twentieth century conceptions of social and moral theories are deconstructed in the postmodern critique of western epistemology. Many of the Victorian social and moral perspectives which Hardy questioned are today deconstructed or dismantled as absurd. Hardy's novels are indictments of Victorian ethical hegemony and modern trust in rationality and its ability to arrive at the truth. He tried in his own way to critique the dominant categories of ethical and social systems of his time. It would not be wrong to describe Hardy as a 'Victorian postmodernist.' According to Terry Eagleton, we are simultaneously and inextricably modernists and traditionalists-always in and out of time simultaneously.<sup>8</sup> The Victorian society had witnessed a deep cultural crisis- a transition from the traditional to the modern which offered no real solutions to the basic problems of life. This anxiety is evident in Hardy's novels more than in any other novelists of his time. To quote Frederick R. Karl:

Although Hardy's roots, like George Eliot's were solidly within a nineteenth century intellectual framework- a pre-Freudian world of Darwin, Spencer, and Huxley- nevertheless, his characters and plots move in a sphere unknown to his contemporaries, an area that no other

Victorian, excepting Dickens in some of his minor characters, had attempted to define<sup>9</sup>

Hardy's understanding and observation of life, his knowledge of human character, his insight into motive and passion, his wisdom and his quality as a seer- all these combine to give to his view of the world a moral significance which no thoughtful reader is likely to overlook. When we speak of morality in Hardy, we do not mean that Hardy wrote his novels to prove any thesis or to convey any moral lesson. But, his impressions about life and morality seem to be the fundamental problems of mankind. And all his novels can be read as pointers to this problem. In this connection Wolfgang Iser's observation is worth quoting:

The unwritten aspects of apparently trivial scenes, and the unspoken dialogue within the 'turns and twists', not only draw the reader into the action, but also lead him to shade in the many outlines suggested by the given situation, so that these take on a reality of their own.<sup>10</sup>

Like his autobiography, they seem to conceal more than they tell. Hardy pleads, like the postmodernists, to employ more than one hermeneutic approach to decipher the meaning and purpose of life. Meanings are not single, but multiple. Besides, they are devoid of any 'metaphysics of presence.' They are historical and social constructs. Any approach to life that does not respect pluralism in all walks of life is against the very nature of man. Hardy objected to the arbitrary construction of historical and

cultural realities. He admired rural culture and resented unreasonable importation of rationality into it. As mentioned earlier, man is engaged into a battle against the universal order and society. And in these conflicts, it is the latter which destroys the individual. Hardy is opposed to the suppression of the natural in man. In his novels all the major characters are destroyed by the mechanical and legalistic aspects of society. They are defeated or ruined by the false social world. All the major characters of Hardy are defeated or killed for their authentic selfhood, for their difference. This is true of Eustacia Vye, Michael Henchard, Tess, Jude and Sue. With relentless courage Hardy has tried to communicate that life cannot be reduced to a system of mere rationalistic ideas. An individual's existence is unique and distinct. He is responsible for his actions and life. He exists authentically in so far as he strives to realize values that are really his own. Beyond a certain point Hardy's authentic characters refuse to be shaped by the artificial social and moral laws. They transcend all categorization. In its essence Hardy's novels capture the existential truth that the very fact of communal existence points to a confrontation with that which is other than itself. Lance St. John Butler's observation about Hardy's work is worth looking at:

Hardy's world view probably coincides far more closely with what we are now likely to see as the truth than the world view of most of the said great.<sup>11</sup>

Hardy is fundamentally a celebrant of the uniqueness of individual life. He castigates the individual only when there is a rebellion against the values embodied in a cultural community. He has always seen a traditional, cultural community as a true representative of the natural world. It is the artificially constructed social world which is opposed to the cultural self of his characters. According to him the social world is an irrational historical construct. It tries to alienate man from his natural self. Therefore, it should go.

In Hardy there is no division when it comes to a confrontation between the authentic individual and the inauthentic social world. He dismisses society's intransigent attitude as irrational. His novels are a record of this perennial conflict and dilemma encountered by humanity. But Hardy's ultimate approach to these existential problems is informed by a deep insight into and understanding of the nature of human existence. Individual authenticity and moral conscience are recognized by him in so far as they conform to what he believes to be the laws of nature. He does not let the individual undermine certain moral laws if that leads to chaos in society. Similarly, society is castigated for its intransigent attitude towards genuine, authentic individuals. When individual selfhood is in danger of

being submerged in some impersonal kind of collectivism, he champions the legitimate right of the individual. Hardy lets the individual stand out as the unique person he is. He does not believe in any supreme power that establishes values or sets an ideal towards which all must strive. The only ideal he values is the ideal of the incomprehensible, primal morality of nature. The struggle to free oneself from the tyranny of society is one of the obvious themes of Hardy's novels. Unless the individual frees himself from the crowd, he cannot be fully himself.

Hardy believes that the individual and society are indissolubly bound together. His novels are an eloquent reminder of this truth. They reveal the inevitable interpenetration of the individual and his social world. They are rooted in the common experience of humanity. Hardy is simultaneously a celebrant of age old forms of traditional living and a discerning critic of the irrational elements of social conventions that restrict human freedom or diminish human dignity. His much acclaimed cultural imagination has been able to accommodate individual specificity and authenticity of existence. Hardy's postmodern tendency lies basically in his particular concern for the uniqueness of the individual subject and an acknowledgment of the plurality of human nature. In the contemporary world the conditions of life are changing so fast. Consequently, there is a continuous search to find solutions to the problems of living. Hardy's

suggestion to look inward rather than outward seems to have relevance in our time of cultural crisis.

The apparent contradictions and inconsistencies in his novels suggest not a lack of intellectual integrity or emotional balance; rather it is the sincerity of a mind in search of a meaningful and happy life. That he has refused to subscribe to any particular system is the mark of his greatness as a true artist. The essence of Hardy's impressions about life is summed up in his own words:

After reading various philosophic systems, and being struck with their contradictions and futilities, I have come to this: Let every man make a philosophy for himself out of his own experiences. He will not be able to escape using terms and phraseology from earlier philosophers, but let him avoid adopting their theories if he values his own mental life. Let him remember the fate of Coleridge, and save years of labour by working out his own views as given by his surroundings.<sup>12</sup>

It is a view which resists all forms of universalism. Hardy's view of life is tentative and transitory. His art selected and gave imaginative shape to various and sometimes conflicting experiences. Hence, his ambivalence. Taken together his major novels from *Far from the Madding Crowd* to *Jude the obscure* constitute a prophetic and intuitive understanding of what is recognized today as the inescapable reality of living. At birth, Hardy was thrown aside as dead till he was rescued by the woman who attended as nurse. Finding him alive, she exclaimed to the surgeon, 'Dead! Stop a

minute: he's alive enough, sure!'<sup>13</sup> Indeed, Hardy is more alive and relevant in today's world than he was in his own.