FIFTY YEARS OF HARDY CRITICISM 1928 - 1978 : A REVIEW

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirement of the Degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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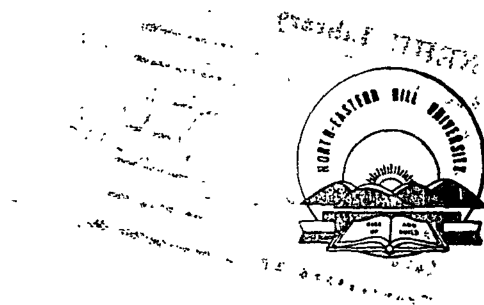

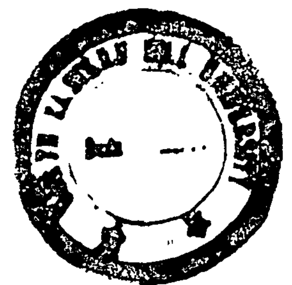

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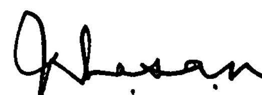
CERTIFICATE

I certify that the dissertation entitled ***"Fifty Years of Hardy Criticism - 1928-1978: A Review"****, submitted by Robert M. Beddoe in part fulfilment of the requirement of the degree of the* ***Master of Philosophy*** *of the North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, embodies the record of original investigation carried out by him under my supervision.*

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



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Dt. 18 . 6 . 19 '86

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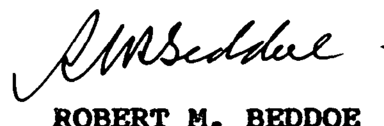

Dt. 18. 6. 1986 **ROBERT M. BEDDOE**

INTRODUCTION

> In your novels and poems you have given us a tragic vision of life which is informed by your knowledge of character and relieved by the charity of your humour, and sweetened by your sympathy with human suffering and endurance. We have learned from you that the proud heart can subdue the hardest fate even in submitting to it .... In all that you have written you have shown the spirit of man, nourished by tradition and sustained by pride, persisting through defeat.[1]

This was the tribute paid to Thomas Hardy on his eighty-first birthday by over one hundred English writers. Since then numerous studies have been produced by many great critics who have all justified and vindicated the tribute paid to him by fellow-authors. Though much attention has been paid to his novels, and his reputation as a modern novelist is firmly established, I shall try in this account to trace the development of Hardy criticism and of the final critical consensus about his stature as a great novelist.

Hardy's most impressive novels are set in what he called "Wessex" (his native county of Dorset) and derive much of their strength from his intimate knowledge of the speech, customs, and way of life of people in that part

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[1]Quoted by Irving Howe: Thomas Hardy, Masters of World Literature Series, Louis Kronenberger, general editor Collier Books, New York, p.192.

of England. The Wessex Novels were written between 1872-1895 - the period of Hardy's greatest achievement as a novelist. The reception given to Jude so disgusted Hardy that he wrote no more novels, henceforth devoting his energies to poetry.

Literary criticism was slow in throwing light on Hardy's genius, on the tensions and contradictions in his art. It discovered late that Hardy was a great and honest writer. This different work is an attempt to explore and review the kinds of critical responses to the Wessex Novels mainly to offer a view of the change and development in Hardy criticism since his death.

For this purpose I have divided this work into four chapters. The first chapter deals with reactions to Hardy's novels during his life-time and his reaction to reviews, essays and accounts by a cross section of contemporary critics. The second chapter entitled "The Hardy Revival" covers the period 1940 to 1950. Hardy had to wait until 1940 for the special and brilliantly edited number of The Southern Review for anything like an adequate summing-up. It is easy enough to demonstrate the importance of this moment in the history of Hardy criticism for it inaugurates a serious critical concern with Hardy's fiction. I have reviewed in detail the works of the following critics whose articles appeared in The Southern Review: Donald Davidson,

Morton Dauwen Zabel, W.H. Auden and Katherine Anne Porter. Following these brilliant accounts came detailed studies of Hardy that helped enormously towards a better understanding of the novelist. Here my selection includes, David Cecil, Edmund Blunden and a brilliant critical study of Hardy by Albert J. Guerard. Each of these writers have in their accounts revealed the English master as an ingenious artificer who anticipated some of the best writing of our own day. The Third Chapter is an attempt to show the critical approaches to Hardy in the 50's and 60's. To this period belong two distinctive critical attitudes and much credit goes to critics in both groups for their contribution to the development of Hardy criticism. To the first category belong the thematic critics like Douglas Brown, Irwing Howe, Arnold Kettle, Arymond Williams. These critics give us an insight into Hardy's response to history and admit that in the period from George Eliot to Hardy the English countryside underwent radical changes. They take Hardy's fiction as an account of the sad passing of the stable rural life and the decay of old customs. Critics in the second category felt that the thematic critics had missed out on the real imaginative centre of the novels and so failed to understand what he was writing about. Critics like Dorothy Vanghent, John Holloway and Tony Tanner reacted against the thematic approach. Their accounts were a counterbalance to the much emphasised importance of history in Hardy. These critics

came forward with serious, indispensably relevant critical statements which have stood the test of time. The Fourth chapter deals with the more recent criticism of the '70'sm terminating with John Bayley's study of Hardy, published in 1978. In the conclusion I have tried to assess the works of critics through the years and show how their contribution has added to the awareness that Hardy is still with us.

CHAPTER - I

CONTEMPORARY VIEWS ON HARDY'S FICTION

> If you mean to make the world listen, you must say now what they all will be thinking andsaying five and twenty years hence.[1]

Hardy wrote this to Mrs. Hennicker in 1893. It was not till more than seventy years later that Hardy critics began to recognise how much he had to say to the modern world.

Thomas Hardy died over half a century ago in 1928. Over the last fifty years, studies of his fiction by some of the most outstanding critics have given us an entirely new, modern Hardy. By looking at him in a variety of fresh ways Hardy's great critics have come to identify the more valuable aspects of his novels.

The circumstances which led Hardy to write fiction are interesting. After spending four years in trying to pursue an architectural career he began to see the futility of a materialistic civilization and its meanness. Hardy could no longer cope with the strain of London life and having no stakes in staying in the city and remarkably devoid of ambition in his chosen career, returned to his native Dorchester. Back in the country Hardy was himself again and went into a reading spree. He now considered writing

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[1] Quoted by Rosemary Sumner: Thomas Hardy: Psychological Novelist, Macmillan, 1981, p.1.

as a possible career more seriously. He considered that he knew fairly well both West country life in its less explored recesses and the life of an isolated student cast upon the billows of London with no protection but his brains. Hardy's inclination at this stage lay in rediscovering an ancient way of life and this is why he chose Wessex as his province and left London and town society. The two contrasting experiences seemed to afford him abundant materials out of which to evolve a striking 'Socialistic novel' - not that he consciously defined it as such, for the word had, probably never or scarcely ever, been heard of at that date.

So he started working at the novel The Poor Man and the Lady, which was never published but of which Alexander Macmillan said, 'If this is your first book, I think you ought to go on',[2] Chapman and Hall hereby published the novel but their reader George Meredith wanted an interview with the author before he couldgive clearance. Meredith referred to the book as injudiciously provocative and full of indiscriminative satire. The publishers were ultimately advised against publishing the book. Hardy took the humiliation and went back to architecture.

The forty odd years from the appearance of Hardy's first novel in 1871 saw a steady flow of reviews in the

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[2]Florence Emily Hardy: The Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840-1928, London Macmillan, 1962, p.58.

principal periodicals, increasing both in number and length until the nineties, when the special problems of Tess of the D'Urbervilles and Jude roused controversy on a much larger scale. Hardy always remained sensitive to the numerous attacks.

The belligerent attacks on his great novels considerably embittered him and proved the futility of criticism which he described as a kind of intellectual boxing.

Literary criticism was slow in throwing light on Hardy's genius, on the tensious and contradictions in his art. It discovered late that in spite of his pessimism he was a man of courage and vitality. Critical accounts which appeared during Hardy's life-time generally contained negative cliches or unsubstantial, effusive and self-defeating plaudits by Hardy enthusiasts. These misinterpretations and malicious carping criticisms resulted in many false myths about the kind of novelist Hardy was.

The first attack on Desperate Remedies came in 1870 when the Spectator came down heavily on the prematurely happy volumes, the reason for this being the author's daring to suppose it possible that an unmarried lady owning an estate could have an illegitimate child. The review began:

> This is an absolutely anonymous story. No assumption of a 'non-de-plume' which might at some future time disgrace the family name and still more the Christian name of a repentant and remorseful novelist - and very right too. By all means let him bury the secret in the profoundest depths of his own heart, out of reach, if possible, of his own consciousness.[3]

He remembered, for long years after, how he had read this review. The bitterness of that moment was never forgotten. All the reviews agreed in selecting for praise those parts of the novel which point forward to Hardy'as most characteristic later work; their censure is directed against sensationalism and an over-complicated plot.

With the publication of the next novel: Under the Greenwood Tree (1872), he clearly emerged as a great novelist. It was entirely a story of rural life. Hardy in a letter to Macmillan and Co. stated:

> In that story the rustic characters and scenery had very little part yet to my surprise they were made very much of by the reviews.[4]

The Athenaeum said:

> The characters are often exceedingly good ... The parish clerk 'a sout of Bowdlerized rake who refers to the time' before he took orders is really almost worthy of George Eliot ... We see no reason why the author should not write novels but little, if at all inferior to the best of the present generation.[5]

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[3]Florence Emily Hardy, Op.cit., p.84

[4]Richard L. Purdy and M. Millgate: The Collected letters of Thomas Hardy, Vol.I, 1840-1892, Oxford Univ. Press, p.11.

[5]Richard L. Purdy and M. Millgate, Op.cit., p.11.

The Spectator said:

> The is an unusual and very happy facility in catching and fixing phrases of peasant life - in producing for us, not the manners and language only but the tone of thought ... and simple humour of consequential village worthies and gaping village rustics ... The scenes allotted to these humble actors are few and slight but they indicate powers that might and ought, to be extended largely in this direction.[6]

The Pall Mall Gazette referred to it as "a story of much freshness and originality". Further, Horace Moule, Hardy's distinguished countrymen and friend, called attention to the superbly achieved realist basis of Hardy's fiction *in his review of Under the Greenwood Tree'*:

> Anyone who knows tolerably well the remoter parts of the South-Western counties of England, will be able to judge for himself of the power and truthfulness shown in these studies of the better class of rustics who isolated lives have not impaired a shrewed common sense and insight together with complete independence set off by native humour which is excellently represented in those two volumes.[8]

Moule's review won Hardy the attention of prominent editors and intellectuals. Encouraged by the success of Greenwood Tree he now felt more confident about his literary talent.

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[6]Richard L. Purdy andM. Millgate, Op.cit., p.11.
[7]Ibid., p.11
[8]Ibid., p.14.

The reception of the next novel, A Pair of Blue Eyes published in May, 1873 surpassed his expectations. The influential Saturday Review pronounced it to be:

> The most artistically constructed of the novel of his time - a quality which bye the bye would carry little recommendation in these days of loose construction and indifference to organic homogeneity.[9]

The Athenaeum (28 June 1873) saw Elfride's adventure as rather Forcial, but the Graphic (12 July 1873) said "Mr. Hardy seems to us to excel everyone but George Eliot", and the Pall Mall Gazette (25 October 1873) hailed him as "distinctly a man of genius," adding "there are chapters in Under the Greenwood Tree which rival the most admirable rustic pieces of George Eliot herself."[10] At a later date Tennyson was to tell him that he liked A Pair of Blue Eyes the best of his novels. It continued to be surprisingly popular up to about the end of the century.

Far from the Madding Crowd (1874), Hardy's next novel, aroused interesting reactions. Many critics found its rural characters and situations unhistorical. Andrew Lang, for instance wrote in his Academy review:

> The country folk in the story have not heard of strikes, or of Mr. Arch; they have to all appearance plenty to eat and warm clothes to weather and when the sheep are sown in the ancient barn of Weatherbury, the scene is one that Shakespeare or that Chaucer might have watched. This immobile rural existence is what the novelist has to paint.[11]

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[9] Florence Emily Hardy: The Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840-1928, p.95.

[10] R.G.Cox, ed., Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970, p.xvi.

[11] Ibid., p.35.

Others madethe claim thatthe novel was historically true. If that truth appeared exaggerated to some, argued The Examiner, it was because they were simply ignorant.

> Mr. Thomas Hardy's novels have been favourably received and many of their merits recognized. Yet their most characteristic feature have either been passed over in silence or pronounced exaggerated simply because very few of the readers are able to judge in thos matters of his workmanship.[12]

Horace Moule, in his review of the novel, particularly drew attention to its masterly depiction of 'the inner life of a rural parish.' He called it 'a prose idyll' but one that was remarkable for its fidelity to truth. He wrote:

> Anyone who knows tolerably well the remoter parts of the South-Western counties of England will be able to judge for himself all the power and truthfulness shown in these studies of the better class of rustics.[13]

The majority of the contemporary reviewers tried to solve the problem by taking the novel as simply an idyll, although some did not fail to notice that idyllism could not account for the novel in its entirety.

The Guardian while accepting the novel as 'purely pastoral', argued that it was pastoral with a difference:

> It is in truth a purely pastoral idyll, in which however the shepherds and shepherdesses and of a very different strain from the Corydon and Phyllis of conventional poetry[14]

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[12] Quoted by Noorul Hasan: Thomas Hardy, The Sociological Imagination, Macmillan 1982, p.13.

[13] Ibid., p.36.

[14] Ibid., p.14.

The Saturday Review praised the graphic description of farming life, but the reviewer found his confidence in their truthfulness somewhat shaken by what he felt to be an idealized rendering of rustic wit and conversation He also had some strong criticisms of the general style. R.H. Hutton in *The Spectator* echoed the general praise of the novel's freshness and imaginative power but he found the farm labourers incredible in their biblical wit and 'intellectual banter'.

Hardy himself described the novel as 'a pastoral tale'. Further, the preface to *Madding Crowd* offers many clues to Hardy's real intentions as a novelist. He called his imagined world 'WESSEX' which was the ancient name of the region described in his novels. He did so not because here he had seen the persistence of the past into the present. He states:

> I first ventured to adopt the word "WESSEX" from the pages of early English history and give it a fictitious significance as the existing name of the district once included in that extinct kingdom. The series of novels I projected being mainly of the kind called local, they seemed to require a territorial definition of some sort to lend unity to their scene.[15]

Far From the Madding Crowd is the first of Hardy's novels to attract the attention of readers outside England. In France readers of the *Revue des deux Mondes* (1875)

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[15] Thomas Hardy: *Far From the Madding Crowd*, From Aughor's Preface, p.v.

were introduced to Hardy in a substantial article by Leon Boucher called "Le Roman Pastoral en Anglet erre". Boucher in his account praises the presentation of rural life, the rustic chorus, and the reality of the descriptions of nature, and predicts that Hardy will continue to command the respect of serious readers.

With Hardy's next novel The Hand Of Ethelberta (1876) reviews tended to be rather lukewarm and lacking in enthusiasm. George Saintabury thought there was less laboured eccentricity in this novel than in the earlier works, but found it scrappy. The Saturday Review saw original force in the book, but misapplied to an unworthy theme. The editor of Harper's Magazine was less polite in his 'Literary Record' : he said the book could be read, 'with no intellectual effort and very little emotional excitement' and the heroine was 'not intriguing enough to disgust nor unselfish enough to attract'[16] Hardy's son own view, as expressed in his contribution to the Life of Leslie Stephen was a claim to be in advance of his readers: he thought that the novel was published thirty years too soon.

The Return of the Native (1878) was published by Messrs Smith and Elder in November. The Times remark upon the book was that the reader found himself taken further from the madding crowd than ever. The Times foud the world

[16] R.G. Cox: Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul 1970. Introduction, p.XX.

of Egdon remote and alien, and "not able to get up a satisfactory interest in a people whose history and habits are so entirely foreign to our own". Yet the story is a striking one and well worth reading, were it only for those graphic scenes and descriptions with which the clever author has enriched his pages.

The Saturday Review thought the book less entertaining than its predecessors and found even the vivid descriptions weakened by eccentric expressions and strained metaphors. Hardy's invention of characters' was said to be unjudicious and their treatment unrealistic. On the other hand there was praise for the atmosphere of the setting, the vividness of individual scenes like the gambling by the light of glow-worms, and the humour of the rustics.

The Illustrated London News thought the description good, the movement slow, the personages uninteresting, the action poor and the conclusion flat. This reviewer, too, dwelt on the gambling scene, but warned Hardy against relying 'more upon the mere fringe of his story than upon his story itself for the exhibition of his powers.'[17]

Further, the accusation of putting improbable language into the month of peasants was repeated by Britten, but his general tone was more favourable. Mr. Hardy seems to be in the way to do for rural life what Dickens did for that of the town.[18]

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[17] R.G. Cox: Op.cit, p.XXII.
[18] Ibid., p. XXIII.

With his next novel A Laodicean (1881), the Saturday Review and the Athenaeum both referred back Desperate Remedies. The former found the characters not sufficiently explained: the latter was mildly favourable with one or two objections, for example it noted that:

> Without being in the least degree a "fleshy" writer Mr. Hardy has a way of insisting on the physical attractions of a woman which, if immitated by weak writers, may prove offensive.[19]

Two on a Tower (1882) was hardly more popular with critics than A Leodicean. In The Spectator, Harry Quilter found the story "as unpleasant as it is practically impossible ...... melodramatic without strength, extravagent with object, and objectionable with truth."[20]

Around 1881 an adventurous young medical man called Havelock Ellis, had become an avid reader of Hardy and in order to write a critique on the novels he had toured Dorset. His essay appeared in the Westminister Review of April 1883, and was not lost upon Hardy. He enjoyed it both for its generous tribute and as a practical help.

With his particular blend of talents, as psychologis and man of letters, Ellis was able to discuss Hardy's woman with more subtlety and insight than any of the

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[19] R.G. Cox: Op.cit., p.XXIII.
[20] Ibid., p. XXIV.

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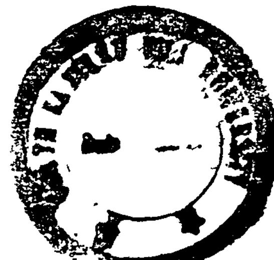

critics of the 1920's and 1930's. Hardy had the pleasure of reading two warm critical appreciations of his work. With these essays there began a line of criticism which, despite the rantings of priggish reviewers, took Hardy with the utmost seriousness. Hardy's fame as a great novelist was established when in 1895 Lionel Johnson brought out his important study of Hardy's fiction.

Upto the mid-eighties the reviewers' chief points against Hardy had been on grounds of style, and of melodramatic improbabilities inplot and character, with occasional minor uneasiness about his handling of sexual relations. With the next two novels there was added to these the issue of 'pessimism'. Hardy's sensitivity to adverse criticism did not generally imply deference to the critics' advice. For themost part he pursued his own way with a certain dogged obstinacy.

The Mayor of Casterbridge was issued complete about the end of May 1886. It was a story which Hardy fancied he had damaged more recklessly as an artistic whole, in the interest of the newspaper in which it appeared serially than perhaps any other of his novels. However, at this time he called his novel writing 'mere journey work'.[21] He cared little about it as art, though it must be said

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[21]Florence Emily Hardy: TheLife of Thomas Hardy, p.179.

in favour of the plot, as he admitted later, that it was quite coherent and organic, in spite of its complication. Others thought better of it than he did himself, as is shown by the letter R.L. Stevenson wrote to the novelist.

> I have read The Mayor of Casterbridge with sincere admiration. Henchard is a great fellow and Dorchester is touched in with the hand of a master.[22]

Hardy was pleasantly surprised by the way The Mayor was received by important critics and to Robert Louis he wrote: "I feel several inches taller at the idea of your thinking of dramatizing the Mayor.[23]

Both The Spectator and The Westminister declared the character of Henchard as "a great study which has not, so far as we recollect, its prototype in fiction."[24] In The Boston Literary World a short paragraph in a chronicle of Minor Fiction spoke of the hand of a master in contrast to "the place average fiction of every day."[25]

Private comments by individuals were often more enthusiastic. The incident of the wife-sale was singled

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[22]Florence Emily Hardy: Op.cit., p.179.

[23]Richard L. Purdy and M. Milgate: The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, Vol. I, 1840-1892, Oxford Univ. Press, p.146.

[24]R.G. Cos: Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage, London Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970, p.XXV.

[25]Ibid., p.XXV.

out for praise by Gerard Manly Hopkins in a brief reference to Hardy which appears in a letter of October 1886. He wrote:

> In my judgement the amount of gift and genius which goes into novels in the English Literature of this generation is perhaps not much inferior to what made the Elizabethan drama and unhappily it is in great part wasted. How admirable are Blackmore and Hardy ... ...[26]

We find George Gissing sending Hardy a respectful letter with the gift of one of his novels: "I have not been the least careful of your readers and in your books I have constantly found refreshmentand onward help."

Coming to The Woodlanders (1887), Hardy liked it the most as a story. Britten in the Athenaeum praised the novel as an example of Hardy's 'second manner' -- less sensational, less broadly comic. "The Novel", he concluded, is distinctly not one for the "young person" of whom we have lately heard, but should be read by all who can tell masterly work in fiction when they see it."[27] The Saturday Review admired the atmosphere and description but foundsome stiffness and artificiality in the incidents especially in the earlier part. It also noted some inconsistency in the standard

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[26]Edmund Blunder: Thomas Hardy. Macmillan's Pocket Lib. First ed., 1942, reprinted 1954, 1958, pp.55-56.

[27]Ibid., p.XXVII.

of conversation given to the villagers. Concluding with praise for the portait of Giles Winterborne, the reviewer warned Hardy not to be led astray by the desire to idealize. The Westminister's brief notice spoke of 'a treat for all lovers of imaginative literature of a high order.'[28] Over in Boston the Literary World spoke of the touch of a master's hand', but deplored the pessimism of the novel which leaves the reader "baffled, stupefied, cast down".[29]

It was around this time that Hardy in the middle of his novel-writing put together his thoughts on fiction They constitute a record of Hardy's opinions, extending over a full half-century, that surely interested his readers throughout the world. He defined good fiction as:

> That kind of imaginative writing which lies nearest to the epic, dramatic, or narrative masterpieces of the past. The higher passions must ever rank above the inferior -- intellectual tendencies above animal and moral above whatever the treatment, realistic or ideal.[30]

At another time Hardy referred to himself as an "Ancient Mariner." Many a 'great' has testified to his Mariner-like powers of inducing a willing suspension

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[28]Edmund Blunder: Op.cit, p.XXVII.

[29]Ibid., p. XXVII.

[30]Harold Orel: The Final Years of Thomas Hardy, Macmillan Press, 1976, p.114.

of disbelief. The adverse contemporary reactions to a number of his books stung Hardy into contemplating the end of his fictional career. He thought that "a man must be a fool to deliberately stand up to be shot at."

The publication of Tess of the d'Urberville's (1891) certainly did not improve matters as far as his reputation went for from the very start it was the subject of much critical controversy and confusion. An unknown critic stated:

> Hardy postulates an all powerful being endowed with baser human passions, who turns everything to evil and rejoices in the mischief he has wrought.[31]

The reception accorded by the various Journals and reviews was, of course, one of the literary scandals of the late Victorian age.[32] In the National Review Tess was ridiculed as "A Prig in the Elysian Fields". This was no significantly counterbalanced by the praise of H.W. Massingham, Richard le Gallienne, William Watson and in 1813 Lionel Johnson, Matters were not helped by the addition of a subtitle, 'A Pure Woman' which intensified the storm. Some local libraries in English-speaking countries 'suppressed' the novel -- with what effect

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[31]Florence Emily Hardy: The Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840-1928,p.243.

[32]Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings, Prefaces, Literary Opions, ed. by Harold Orel, p.261.

[33]Ibid., p.261.

was not ascertained. Hardy's good-natured friends Henry James and R.L. Stevenson (whom he afterwards called the Polonius and the Osric ofnovelists) corresponded about it in this vein:

> Oh yes, dear Louis: Tess of the d'Urberville is vile. The pretence of sexuality is only equalled by the absence of sexuality is only equalled by the absence of it and the abomination of the language by the author's reputation for style.[34]

The most scathing attack appeared in the New Review from Andrew Lang. Hardy referred tartly to this review in his preface to the novel's second edition, and Lang answered at length in Longman's Magazine explaining that while he found Tess like Clarissa, or Le Pere Goriot or Madame Bovary, "forbidding in conception," his objection was that it was not like them credible and real, and that to this unreality the defects of style contributed. In the Westminister D.F. Hannigan supported Hardy against Lang's criticisms and went on to hail Tess as marking a distinct epoch in English fiction and as the greatest novel since George Eliot died. The Times riviewer began forthrightly "Mr. Hardy's latest novel is his greatest." It praised the book's tragic power, and asserted "It is well that an idealist like Mr. Hardy should every now and then remind us how terribly defective are our means of judging others."[35] In the Star Richard le Gallienne

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[34]Florence Emily Hardy: The Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840-1928, p.246.

[35]R.G. Cox: Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage, London Routledge & Kegan Paul, p.XXVIII.

described Tess as "perhaps the very best of Hardy's novels, though he criticized the style for its occasional self-consciousness and 'imperfect digestion' of scientific and philosophical ideas.

Tess perhaps his most powerful novel ironically proved to be the beginning of the end of his career as a novelist. In the 1892 preface to the novel Hardy offers a summary of the creative principle in Tess:

> Nevertheless though the novel was intended to be neither didactic nor aggressive, but in the scenic parts to be representative simply, and in the contemplative to be oftener charged with impressions than with conviction, there have been objections both to the matter and to the rendering.[36]

He quotes from Schiller's letters to Goethe to explain his own aesthetic of the novel:

> As soon as I observe that anyone, when judging of poetical representations considers anything more important than the inner necessity and truth, I have done with him.[37]

As far as he was concerned Tess was simply a story as it occured to him "An impression, not an argument."

There is no doubt that, both from its intrinsic qualities and from the stir roused by its subject, Tess did more than any other novel to Hardy's reputation. W.R. Routland records that between 1900 and 1930 it was

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[36]Quoted by Noorul Hasan: Thomas Hardy: The Sociological Imagination, Macmillan 1982, pp.130-131.

[37]Ibid., p.131.

reprinted some forty times in England alone.

To the many attacks from contemporary critics was added one more by Mrs. Hardy herself. She started a virulent attack on Hardy's novels and went to the extent of campaigning for the rejection of Jude the Obscure (1895), his last novel, though she did not succeed.

Further, the onslaught upon Jude started by the virtuperative section of the press -- unequalled in violence since the publication of Swinburae's Poem and Ballads thirty years before was taken up by the anonymous writers of "libelous letters and post cards, and other such gentry."

To mention some of the attacks, in the ATHENAEUM the reviewer called Jude the Obsecure" a titanically bad book", and its author a man who had run "mad in right royal fashion."

Hardy was in his mide-fifties, and an established writer when Jude came out. He had written two great novels and several others of some distinction. But he was more than a famous or honoured writer. For the English-speaking world he had become a moral presence genuinely affecting the lives of those who read him.

When Hardy first printed Jude the Obscure as a monthly serial in Harper's Magazine between December 1894 and November 1895, he agreed to cut some of its most vital

parts: those which showed Jude to be harried by sexual desire, others reporting that Jude and Sue Bridehead did finally go to bed together, and still others displaying Hardy's gift for a muted but humorous earthiness. Today such mutilations by a serious writer would provoke an uproar of protest; but Hardy, not being the kind of man who cared to languish in a garret, did what he had to do in order to sell the serial rights.

The book within months of publication stirred up a storm of righteousness. Many of the reviewers adopted a high moral tone, denouncing Hardy's apparent hostility to the institution of marriage while choosing to neglect the sympathy he showed toward people caught up in troublesome relationships, whether in or out of marriage. One true blooded Englishman, the Bishop of Wakefield, publicly announced that he "was so disgusted with (the book's) insolence and indecency that I threw it into the fire."[38] To which Hardy added that probably the bishop had chosen to burn the book because he could not burn the author.

Mrs. Oliphant a novelist herself in an article entitled "the Anti-Marriage League" referred to Jude as "The strongest illustration of what Art can come to when given over to the exposition of the unclean." The character of the new novel, to her, was easily summarisable:

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[38]Quoted by Irving Howe: Thomas Hardy, Masters of World Literature, Louis Kronenberger, editor 1973, p.133.

> Nothing so coarsely indecent as the whole history of Jude ...... has ever been put in English print; that is to say, from the hands of a master. There may be books more disgusting, more impious as regards human nature more foul in detail, in those dark corners where the amateurs of filth and garbage ... ... and so forth.[39]

Another woman, Miss Jeannette Gilder, wrote a scathing review, protesting that she had to open the window and "let in the fresh air"[40] after finishing the story. This reviewer so distressed Hardy and he himself thought that "it was somewhat overburdened with the interests of morality."[41]

The tone of the reviewers varied as much as their opinions. A.J. Butler, wrote in a fairly temperate and judicious way in the National Review on 'Mr. Hardy as a decadent.' He began with a general survey of his powers and with particular praise for The Woodlanders. Jude, he objected, ignored the existence of genuine reformers and people of any elevated or generous feeling. He did not want the artist to ignore sex or to limit his subject matter unduly, but he thought that Hardy at times showed signs of simply wanting to defy Mrs. Grundy. R.Y. Tyrrell adopted a rather harsher tone. The Pall Mall Gazette referred

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[39] Edmund Blunden: Thomas Hardy. London, Macmillan, 1942, reprint 1951, 1967, p.86.

[40] Ibid., p.91.

[41] Ibid., p.91.

to the novel as 'Jude the Obscene' and gave a facetious summary of the story and demanded of the author' "Give usquickly another and cleaner book to take the bad taste out of our mouths."[42]

The Saturday Review, however had more favourable accounts. It spoke of Jude, as the "last and most splendid" of Hardy's works, and likened its "foolish reception to 'the new D.P. Hannigan's review which hits out emotionally at the representations of 'Smug journalistic critics while classing Hardy with Fielding, Balzac, Flaubert, Turgenev, George Eliot and Dostoievsky. The most substantial discussion of all was Havelock Ellis's article 'Concerning Jude the Obscure.' Ellis is chiefly interested in Hardy's understanding of feminine psychology, and considers Jude the greatest novel written in England for many years. Though intellectually Hardy is a mere child compared to Meredith, he finds him the truer artist. As for the accusation of immorality, Ellis sees this as resulting from the artist's faithful portrayal of the conflict between natural instincts and secondary social expedients. The article shows evidence of wide literary experience and sophistication.

Returning to the marriage question Hardy once wrote to his friend Edmund Gosse that all he had done was:

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[42] Edmund Blunden: Op.cit., p.42.

> ... ... to deal unaffectedly with the fret and fever derision and disaster, that may press in the wake of the strongest passion known to humanity; to tell without a mincing of words, of a deadly war waged between flesh and spirit; and to point the tragedy of unfulfilled aims.[43]

What Hardy was getting at in his letter to Gosse is an idea now commonly accepted by serious writers: that while a work of fiction may frequently raise social and moral problems, the artist's main intention is to explore them freely rather than take hard and fast public positions.

Hardy believed he had suffered enough from the attacks on Jude. But attack was precisely what he had to expect. Frederic Harrison's attack on his 'monotony of gloom' in 1920 proved particularly nettling, and Hardy wrote a bitter paragraph on both Harrison and Joseph Hore that he attached to Late Lyrics and Earlier 1922,. Hardy was well aware of the mean-spirited attacks that were being made on him by George Moore and G.K. Chesterton.

Finally, to the impression produced by the general and uncritical public he replied:

> However I must put up with it, and say as Parrahasius of Ephesus said about his pictures. There is nothing that men will not find fault with.[44]

It is interesting to note that the American reception

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[43]Irving Howe: Thomas Hardy., p.133.

[44]Ibid., p.139.

of Tess and Jude the Obscure was as mixed as the British The Atlantic Monthly carried a ten-column praise of Tess as Hardy's materpeice and noted particularly its effect on human sympathy:

> It has left at least one reader believing that many of the crimes served up morning and evening inthe newspapers would seem less barbarous, less un-intelligible, if there were at hand to explain the motives them some seen of human nature, some Thomas of Hardy.[45]

The Boston Literary World dismissed it in a short paragraph lamenting its 'unpleasantness'. Thess's career ignores "the plain unwritten instincts of morbidity."[46]

Of American reviews of Jude the most notable is probably W.D. Howell's. He sees the book as a tragedy of the Greek kind. It carries conviction although we know that in ordinary life compromises would prevent the various catastrophies from happening. The unpleasant incidents are not untrue and the questionings of convention and morality are such as to make us ask the reasons of things. The New York 'Critic', after outlining the story concluded:

> There is an undercurrent of morbid animality running through the book which is sickening to an ordinarily decent mind and of these men and women and their companions in kindred fiction are to be taken as true to modern life, we may as well accept a cage full of monkeys as a microcosm of humanity.[47]

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[45]R.G. Cox: The Critical Heritage, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, p.XXXI.

[46]Ibid., p.XXXI.

[47]Ibid., p.XXXVI.

Hardy's last full-length novel, The Well-Beloved (1897) appeared in serial form simultaneously in the Illustrated London News and Harper's bazaar during 1892 and was considerably revised for book publication in 1897 It is therefore not really a later work than Jude and it had apparently been sketched much earlier. In the heated atmosphere left by the Jude scandal some reviewers managed to find it immoral. Hardy refused to answer such attacks commenting to an editor who had raised the question:

> There is more fleshliness in The Lovers of the Triangles than in this story - at least to me. To be sure, there is one explanation which should not be overlooked: a reviewer 'himself' afflicted with 'sex mania' might review so a thing terrible to think of.[48]

Britten reviewed it faintly favourably, and hoped that its publication indicated "a desire to renew those pleasant relations with his readers that should never have been interrupted."[49] In fact it marks the end of Hardy's career as a novelist.

In the next phase of the early years of the twentieth century there came several articles surveying Hardy's work as a whole. In the Quarterly for April 1904 Edmund Wright used the occasion of Macmillan's uniform edition for a twenty-four page essay. The account was chiefly

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[48] Edmund Blunden: Thomas Hardy, p.100.

[49] R.G. Cox, Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage, p.XXXIX.

concerned with Hardy's insight into country life and his peasant character. It concluded with a comparison of Hardy to Euripedes, and with the judgement that in certain of his later works he is, as a sentimental materialist, a 'misdirected force'.

Other interesting accounts appeared in the Edinburgh Review provoked by F.Hedgerock's study of Hardy in French (1911). The 1912 collected edition was the occasion of an interesting article in the Spectator 'Novels of Character and Environment' by F. Manning. Hardy's didacticism was seen as a flow in his work: considered purely as works of art, Tess and Jude are not on the height of his achievement, for all their peculiar merits. In some ways The Return of the Native is more complete as a representation of life. Blackwoods also noticed this edition in a general essay by Charles Whibley which gives a fair idea of Hardy's critical reputation at this time. It touches on his 'intense feeling of locality', both in its human associations and its natural atmosphere and his profound awareness of rural life. It says:

> "Never since the Georgics have the industries of the country side been turned to literary account with so fine a sence of their enduring importance" against the background he sets dramas 'tense and simple, like dramas of sophocles'. His blemishes of style are superficial, and he will certainly survive more as a novelist than as a poet.[50]

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[50] R.G. Cox: Op.cit., p.XLIII.

From about 1900 onward, American periodicals show a similar spate of general surveys of Hardy's work. In 1901 W.D.Howell's Heroines of Fiction included two chapters on Hardy. P.H.Fryes wrote an essay on 'Nature and Thomas Hardy' which is largely a discussion of his tragic passimism and 'comic irony'. Mary Moss wrote a commentary on all the major novels. She up Hardy's achievement as similar to Tennyson's in that "he bridges the gulf between poetry and science."[51] His intellectual irony would finally grow unbearable if it were not that "the discouragement wrought by his pitiless logic is forever cancelled by his indestructible human sympathy."[52] W.H. Phelps in his Essays on Modern Novelists gives a brief life and summary chronological survey. He distinguishes betwen the pessimism of the earlier novels, which had been 'a noble ground quality', and 'the merely hysterical and wholly unconvincing didactic pessimism of Jude the Obscure. He praises especially Hardy's uncanny intimacy with nature. The article by Harold Williams puts the stress on the greater Wessex novels, not simply as pictures of village manners, but as tragic realizations of the unity of the individual and universal life. The typical achievement of the five tragedies culminates in Tess. These are the same five that Douglas Brown was to select as central in his study some forty years later.

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[51] R.G. Cox., Op.cit., p.XLIII.

[52] Ibid., p.XLIII.

So from first to last, that is from the publication of his first novel to the last, Hardy has been subjected to several critical assessments, at times to blunt dismissal A good part of Hardy criticism during his life was, in the unhappy sense academic. Majority were treatises on his alleged Philosophy. But some of it is distinguished illuminating insights like those of Lionel Johnson, H.O. Duffin, Samuel Chew and those contained in the fierce essay by D.H. Lawrence.

Lionel Johnson's: The Art of Thomas Hardy (1894) is a major landmark in Hardy studies. It contains chapters on the country folk, Hardy's principal characters, and his idea of tragedy, especially as embodied in Tess. m Though by modern standards excessively verbose and obtrusive of the critics' own personality, it raises a number of basic critical points and was for many years the best work on its subject. Two-thirds of the book is taken up with a study of the traditional qualities of Hardy's novels. Johnson praises Hardy for bringing into his sentences the cadence of such earlier prose masters as Burton and Sir Thomas Browne. He comments favourably on Hardy's rustic characters, who he says, possess affinities with Shakespeare's. Indeed, he says, Hardy drawn them so well because he is in sympathy with their slow-moving, unchanging and traditional way of life. Reading Hardy's novels is like taking a journey back in time, for the novelist has a

sense of the links that bind the present with the past. Hardy's plots are based upon the conflict that ensues when newer waysof life come in conflict with the established ones. The conflict produces tragedy, but the novels end with the heroic failure of the protagonists to change the world, and life goes on as before even after they are no more. Indeed, the impression that Johnson gives is that though Hardy may be a modern novelist who brings into his works psychology and heredity, his greatness lies in the fact that he evokes, as few have done, the beauty of a traditional way of life:

> He (Hardy) dwells, in a dramatic meditation upon the earth's antiquity, the thought of 'the world's gray fathers, and in particular upon certain tracts of land with which he has an intimacy, upon the human traditions of old time, upon the pageant of the past, upon the relics of long gone powers and forces, genealogies, rolls tenures, heraldory, old names and old houses lingering in decay, unconscious of their age, pageant impulse, the spirit of material and natural religion, the wisdom and the simplicity, the blind and the grouping thoughts of a living peasantry still primitive; the antique works and ways of labour in woods and fields, the sense of sacred dignity inherent in such things, in that immemorial need of man to till the soil for his daily bread; meditation upon ...... the fair forms of vanished life the heroism and the ambition, the beauty and the splendour, long past away......[53]

As a humanist Johnson admires Hardy's characterisation, his sympathy with suffering mankind, and his analysis

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[53]Lionel Johnson: The Art of Thomas Hardy, London 1894, p.52.

of human problems, but as a christian and a traditionalist he cannot see the point of Hardy's questioning social coventions and religious beliefs which is precisely where Hardy's 'Modernity' lies. He is appreciative of the novelists' art, but he refuses to grant him the philosophical tenets which constitute the 'raison d'etre' of his art. It is a pity that Johnson's book was published in 1894, just a year before Hardy's last novel, Jude the Obscure. Jude is perhaps Hardy's best novel in terms of the artistry involved. It is also his most pessimistic and anti-Christian work. If Jude had preceeded Johnson's book, it would have been interesting to see what Johnson made of it.

Lascelles Abercrombie's 'Thomas Hardy : A Critical Study' (1912) typifies the critical attitude of the end of this period. Hardy at the beginning of the century was proclaimed as an established man of letters and a great tragic artist comparable with Sophocles and Aesychylus

The development of critical writing on Hardy since 1914 has been, first, a reaction against solemn academic adulation, with some tendency to turn to the poems rather than the novels and then the beginning of an attempt to make a new approach with a frank admission of faults awkwardness of style and dated elements generally. Modern criticism is marked by a strong sense that Hardy's work is very mixed in quality and that its positive merits

require careful disentangling: as yet the process can hardly be said to be complete. After the upheaval of the 1914-18 war, Hardy's work was bound to seem less subversive and starling than in the nineties. His essential Victorianism became more obvious.

One of the better-known critics that came after the war was H.C., Duffin. His book entitled Thomas Hardy was first published in 1916 and revised in 1937.

Duffin like Lionel Johnson contends that Hardy excels in characterisation. Hardy's characters though 'unnoticed, very simple, are interesting personalities in their context and quality of being.

Duffin commends Hardy for his understanding and portrayal of humanity and his evocation of nature. A critic commenting on Duffin states "Duffin writes like a teenager, but shorn of the effusions the book might offer a morsel or two worth testing." However, Duffin's criticism has more than historical interest for a student of the early period of Hardy criticism.

In his eighties Hardy returned to poetry. A visitor in 1920 was much puzzled by his asking in response to a remark about his having pulled out 'all the stops' in Jude. "Do you think so? My views on life are so extreme that I do not usually state them." What he perhaps meant

was that he had learnt since Jude, not to change his mind about the state of the world and of the universe, but to save some to the wear and tear consequent upon speaking that mind in public. At his age, and with so much work behind him, it no longer seemed necessary, profitable, or congenial to continue to testify in season and out: he had for some tiem taken the position that it was possible to be too vocal in a good cause. His sometimes discomforting facility for seeing all sides of a question had in any case obliged him to acknowledge that those who held radically different views might be perfectly sincere and honourable and, within their own terms of reference, perfectly justified.

Samuel C. Chew's Thomas Hardy: Poet and Novelist (New York 1928) is another work to be taken note of. He too like previous critics saw Hardy's art and craft as essentially "Victorian". He described Hardy as a master in his depiction of Wessex, one who was "usually sensitive of Nature."[54] In terms of style, proportion, design, finish, selection and exactitude Samuel Chew states that Hardy's study and practice of architecture stood the author of the Wessex novels in good stead. A notable feature of Hardy's writing says Samuel Chew, was his "intimate familiarity with the Bible especially with the Old Testament."55

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[54]Samuel C. Chew: Thomas Hardy, Poet and Novelist, New York, 1928, p.4.

[55]Ibid., p.9.

Chew found the dissimilarities between Hardy and George Eliot as far more marked than the resemblances. This difference was to be seen in their approach to life. With Eliot it was "desire and conscience" that was responsible for the tragic conflict and was internal. "Conscience" on the other hand, plays a small part in Hardy's books. The tragic conflict, for Hardy, was the duality of will and destiny. Man is a master of his fate in George Eliot. Fate according to Hardy is beyond human control.

A creditable feature of many of Hardy's novels is his great care in "harmonizing the setting with the event"[56] that takes place therein. Bathsheba meeting, for the first time, with each of her lovers is proof of this. Further, Chew is of the opinion, that though the rural setting of the novels greatly restricts Hardy's range of subject and character, it also possesses corresponding advantages. It is the appropriate ground for men and women yielding to the dictates of instinct, warm, elemental vigorous human beings who are close to earth. From the setting too comes the sense of detachment and separation from the outside world that makes each novel seem complete in itself...."[57]

Finally, Chew feels that Hardy's steady view of life does not embrace the whole of life. In the chapter

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[56] Samuel C. Chew, Op.cit., p.96.

[57] Ibid., p.98.

entitled 'A tentative metaphysic' he states: "Man, in Hardy's novels and poems, becomes only one of the many phenomena of interest to the imaginative interpreter of life."[58]

By this time Hardy had become a legend. He had won the admiration of contemporaries like Ezra Pound, W.B. Yeats, John Galsworthy, Bernard Shaw. A good number of novelists and poets found his doors at Max Gate always open to them. Hardy was a constant source of encouragement and inspiration to them. Other ardent disciples included E.M. Forster, Virginia Woolf, W.H. Auden, Seigfred Sassoon, T.E. Lawrence. Unfortunately, many of them shrank from publicly claiming for Hardy the greatness of which they had all had a personal expeerience.

There were others who dismissed Hardy rashly as an unrewarding and sentimental writer. Some of these included Henry James and even Robert Louis Stevenson. George Moore spent his harshest invective on Tess and its author. T.S. Eliot in After Strange Gods, had set Hardy down as a "symptom of decadence" a victim of emotion run morbid, "a minor poet" whose matter of communication is not "Particularly wholesome or edifying." F.R. Leavis excluded Hardy from his great tradition. Both Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson had exchanged views on what they considered

[58] Samuel C. Chew, Op.cit., p.174.

the abominable style and the pretence of sexuality in <u>Tess of the d'Urbervilles</u>. Henry James wrote to Stevenson:

> The good title Thomas Hardy has scored a great success with <u>Tess</u> which is chock-full of faults and falsity and yet has a singular beauty and charm.[59]

And a year later he wrote to Stevenson:

> I am meek and shamed where the public clatter is deafening - so I bowed my head and let Tess of the d'Urberbille's pass. But oh yes, dear Louis, she is vile. The pretence of 'sexuality' is only equalled by the absence of it, and the abomination of the language by the author's reputation for style. There are indeed some pretty smells and sights and sounds. But you qhave better ones in Polynesia.[60]

Hardy, on hearing of these views, called them the Polonius and Osric of novelists. He exclaimed:

> How indecent of those two virtuous females to expose their mental nakedness in such a manner.[61]

T.S. Eliot made a notorious attack upon Hardy. The work of the late Thomas Hardy wrote Eliot:

> Represents an interesting example of a powerful personality uncurbed by any institutional attachment or even by submission to any objective beliefs unhampered by ideas even by what sometimes acts as a partial retraint upon inferior writers, the desire to please a large public. He seems to me to have written as nearly

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[59] Edmund Blunden : <u>Thomas Hardy</u>, p.75.

[60] <u>Ibid.</u>, p.75.

[61] Florence E. Hardy: <u>The Life of Thomas Hardy</u>, p.246.

> for the sake of "self-expression" as a man well can, and the self which he had to express does not strike me as particularly wholesome or edifying matter of communication.[62]

This is wrong, through and through, and small-spirited as well. Hardy's "powerful personality" was precisely curbed by an institutional attachment. He called himself a churchy man and lived by the imperatives of Christian morality. Irwing Howe rightly argues that some rehearse the letter of dogma but are unable to bend to the spirit of charity. Hardy was admirably free from hauteur and snobbism and he had an enormous sympathy for human beings.

F.R. Leavis denegrated Hardy in much the same manner as Henry James and T.S. Eliot. He excluded Hardy from his great tradition and refused to consider him a good novelist. Like some of the earlier critics he did not see the pessimism of Hardy as being absolutely thorough and absolutely candid, a splendid contribution to modern fiction. He spoke about and compared Hardy to dark philosophers like Nietzsche and Schopenhauer. When we hear a condescending remark about Hardy: "the good little Thomas Hardy" it shows how reputations are maimed and marred - a phrase which Leavis described as "appropriately sympathetic". Leavis failed to understand what Hardy was writing about.

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[62]Quoted by Irving Howe: Thomas Hardy, pp.26-27.

However, inspite of the adverse criticism Hardy had admirers who thought him their greatest writer since Shakespeare. Others, who lacked the courage for so large an estimate, admitted that he stands alone working out a philosophy (although he never called it that) which seemed revolutionary to the man of his time. But if we survey his life-work he shows himself perennially vital, inventive, and responsive to new experience.

A fine tribute by J.E. Barton appeared in The Bristol Times and Mirror, January 14, 1928:

> Thomas Hardy is in a category by himself. He is not the obvious representative of his period nor the conscious critic of it. He is the deeply imaginative artist of his own time who catches and suggests the large underflowing current, which men of science and men of affairs only perceive dimly, by fragments of floating matter.[63]

This leads us to a group of critics who termed Hardy "a good novelist". They are D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf and E.M. Foster who were all drawn to Hardy's work. Lawrence saw in Hardy's novels, a kinship with his own. Each of these novelists agreed that Hardy was an irresistably great novelist.

D.H. Lawrence's highly personal and idiosyncratic study was actually began in 1914, though not published until after his death (in PHOENIX, 1936). In July of

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[63]Quoted by Irving Howe: Thomas Hardy, pp. 43--44

the same year Lawrence asked Edward Marsh to lend him some Hardy novels for a book he was about to write on Hardy. In September he wrote to J.B. Pinker that 'out of sheer rage about the 'idiocy' of the war he had begun the book on Hardy. By December the Study of Thomas Hardy, 1936 was finished and Lawrence had begun to write the final version of The Rainbow.

Hardy's novels were known to Lawrence in his youth, and their presence can be felt in his work even as late as Sons and Lovers. But then, during the writing of The Rainbow. Lawrence turned aside from his work to re-read Hardy's work and to produce a long critical study of the Wossex novels. The different phases of Lawrence's engagement with Hardy have to be understood as a sequence, because then it becomes apparent how far Lawrence's creative needs preceded his formation of critical attitudes. He could not have become a penetrating critic of Hardy without having first grappled as a novelist with the full significance of the Wessex novels. He recognized Hardy as one of the first great English novelists to treat the relationship between the sexes with the seriousness it deserved. The extent to which Lawrence's critical discoveries issue from his awareness of the substance and grain of Hardy's work has never been sufficiently recognized.

In his Study of Thomas Hardy he dealt with most of the Wessex novels, but save his main attention to

three - The Return of the Nature Tess of the d'Urbeville's and Jude the Obscure. Much in the Study leads one away from Hardy in order to be able to return to him with enlarged understanding. But even when Lawrence is not discussing Hardy explicitly, Hardy is there as a constant, implicit presence, providing points of suggestivity which prompted D.H. Lawrence to say about Hardy that:

> His feeling, his instinct, his understanding is ...... apart from his metaphysic, very great and deep, deeper than that, perhaps of any other English novelist. Putting aside his metaphysic, which must always obtrude when he thinks of people, and turning to the earth, to landscape, then he is true to himself.[64]

Lawrence, like his predecessor, had come from a quite ordinary family and begun his career by writing about a class and a region (in his case, Nottinghamshire and its miners) which had scarcely been mentioned in literature before. Lawrence's public was only a few degrees more emancipated than that which had abused Hardy; his work too was widely misunderstood and his novels went as far as being banned entirely. He must therefore have had personal reasons for sympathising with what Hardy wrote in 'Candour in English Fiction'. It is fascinating, further, to see how he virtually rewrote the plot of Jude in Lawrention terms and how it ended up as something

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[64] D.H. Lawrence: Study of Thomas Hardy Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D.H. Lawrence, ed., Edward D. McDonald, London: Heinemann, 1936, p.19.

completely different.

Lawrence points out that the most crucial crisis in the Wessex Novels is "the struggle into love and the struggle with love ...... meaning the love of a man for a woman and of a woman for a man."[65] The people of Wessex writes D.H. LAWRENCE:

> are always bursting suddenly out of bud and taking a wild flight into flower always shooting suddenly out of a tight convention a tight hide-bound cabbage start into something quite madly personal .... it is all explosive ..... This is the tragedy of Hardy. This is the theme of novel after novel : remain quite with the convention and you are good, safe and happy, in the long run, though you never have the vivid pang of sympathy on your side; or on the other hand be passionate, individual, wilful, you will find the security of the convention a walled prison, you will escape and you will die, either of your own lack of strength to bear the isolation and the exposure, or by direct revenge from the community or both.[66]

The central matter in these novels therefore is a conflict between figures of convention and figures of rebellion. So the tragedy in The Return is the waste of Eustacia, through the 'subtle cowardice' and ultimate conventionality of Clym, who has original force of life but chooses "to improve mankind rather than to struggle at the quick of himself into being" and is consequently reduced to half-blindness and half-life, while Thomasin

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[65] D.H. Lawrence: Op.cit., p.410.

[66] Ibid., p.410.

and Venn get the prize within the walls. But the second contention, which Lawrence urges more cogently than any other critic, is that Egdon Heath is the great power in the book:

> This is a constant revelation in Hardy's novels: that there exists a great background, vital and vivid, which matters more than the people who move upon it ... The vast, unexplored morality of life itself what we call the immorality of nature, surrounds us in its eternal incomprehensibility and in its midst goes on the little human morality play.[67]

Hardy shares this quality with the great writers, Shakespeare, Sophocles, Tolstoy. But, finally, Hardy and Tolstoy are smaller because their tragedy lies not in the transgression of nature, but merely that of society, which for Lawrence is not necessarily tragic.

Lawrence's dialogue with Hardy finally brought about the revolutionary change, which in his own fiction, he had struggled so hard to achieve. By exploring Hardy's people he had found a language in which to articulate his own vision. The Study showed him how to begin, how to divide The Rainbow into its three 'testaments', and where to end in near-tragedy, but with a vision of reconciliation to be achieved in the second novel. It also awakened images which his novelist's imagination could explore in terms of human relationship, with marvellous sensitivity

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[67] D.H. Lawrence: *Op.cit.*, p.419.

and insight. But above all, his experience of Hardy must have been the greatest possible authentication and encouragement of his own vision. As he pondered more deeply he had come to see how, as Hardy's fiction developed, the great background had become internalized in the conflict of universal forces within the characters themselves. Yet he must have felt - the most liberating perception of affinity - that Hardy had neither seen clearly where he was going nor gone far enough, that there was room to move beyond him and, above all, to move beyond his passimism. What Tess and Jude, began, The Rainbow could complete.

In an account entitled "The Novels of Thomas Hardy" which appeared in The Common Reader, Second Series (1932) Virginia Woolf paid glowing tributes to Hardy. In Far From the Madding Crowd, he finds a fusion of subject and method, form and content, which is a main point in her criticism. Hardy's poetry and tragic vision, which are the main qualities of his novels, relate him to the modern sensibility. With the earnestness of a true admirer Woolf writes:

> In short, nobody can deny Hardy's power - the true novelist's power - to make us believe that his characters are fellow-beings driven by their passions and in-idiosyncracies while they have - and this is the poet's gift - some thing symbolical about them which is common to us all.[68]

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[68]The Novels of Thomas Hardy': The Common Reader Second series, (London, Hogarth Press, 1965, p.251).

Her applause of Hardy reaches its climax when she calls him "the greatest tragic writer among the English novelists."[69] She was always impressed with the novelist who proved himself a minute and skilled observer of nature. Nature for Hardy was more than a backdrop. He seems to be saying how people can develop a deeply intuitive relationship with their surroundings which can give meaning and purpose to their lives. E.M. Forster, the artist turned critic was another writer who contributed very positively to the development of Hardy criticism. In Aspects of the Novel (1927), Forster found a dichotomy betwen the poet and novelist in Hardy. Forster admired Hardy because he is "essentially a poet, who conceives of his novels from an enormous height."[70] Hardy arranges events with emphasis on causality and the characters are required to acquicec in the requirements of the plot. There is ceaseless emphasis on fate. "The fate above us, not the fate working through us - that is what is eminent andmemorable in Wessex novels."[71] But what makes Hardy admirable is that the machine that works in his novels "never catches humanity in its teeth." It is true that the characters are drained of their vitality; they are required to contribute much to the plot. Hardy's flaw lies in the fact that "he has emphasized casuality more strongly than his medium permits."[72] But he is great

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[69] The Novels of Thomas Hardy: Op.cit., p.254.

[70] E.M. Forster: Aspects of the Novel, London: E.Arnold, 1927, rpt. 1963, p.92.

[71] Ibid., p.93.

[72] Ibid., p.93.

because there is an element of mystery in his novels. Inspite of the cause and effect chain which connects the characters to the plot "there is some vital problem that has not been answered or even posed ....."[73] Here Forster makes a comparison between Meredith and Hardy in their construction of plots. Meredith was a great plot maker and he knew where it could stand, but Forster prefers Hardy to Meredith, nevertheless because the work of Thomas Hardy is my home and that of Meredith cannot be."[74]

Despite their awareness of Hardy's greatness and all let the scathing attacks of Henry James, T.S. Eliot, and F.R. Leavis go unchallenged. Forster stood up on behalf of Lawrence, but about Hardy he remained relatively unprovoked Virginia Woolf, to whom an acknowledgement of Hardy's greatness "was true but sounded wrong", was cryptically eloquent. The propaganda against Hardy's novels was the result of an unexplainable treachery of Hardy's famous friends and admirers.

However, whatever might have been the early approach to the Wessex Novels the final outcome was that each of the early studies kept up the critical concern with Hardy. They led to the awareness to establish another background to Hardy's work, agricultural rather than intellectual the need to see the convergence of traditional and modern

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[73] E.M. Forster: Op.cit., p.94.

[74] Ibid., p.94.

as equally strong impulses in a fruitful entanglement. The weight of the past looms large in Hardy's experience, and so too does the weariness of the modern world as he begins to glimpse it.

It is no wonder that later Hardy critics began to recognise how much he had to say to the modern world. He was and is beginning to be seen less and less as a traditional Victorian novelist and more as a pioneer of a new fictional sensibility. His affinities with twentieth century novelists are beginning to be examined.

With the 1940 Hardy centennial number of The Southern Review came fresh and serious explorations of the making and meaning of Hardy's fiction by several highly intelligent and honest critics. These critics were no longer limited by preconceptions about fatalism and pessimism, for instance - they no longer condemned books that were once opposed by nearly all reviewers and critics at first. They realised that the meaning and interest of a novel lay in what the novel says, not in what it was intended to say. There were concerned with what the novelist did, not with deciding whether he did what he set out to do. The critical consensus was that whatever he is never trivial or debasing. Differences of opinion must naturally be held of Hardy as a critic of life; but as an artist - as a painter of certain concrete aspects of that life, he is among the greatest in English Literature. It was left to later critics to acknowledge

and revaluate Hardy's greatness - of "a man who knows, who has seen and felt."

A fitting conclusion to a close of this phase of critical development in Hardy's fiction is what Havelock Ellis said about the novelist:

> Hardy was without training as a literary artist: it is genius that carries him through.[75]

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[75] Quoted by Albert J. Guerand: Thomas Hardy: A New Directions Paperbook, p.192.

C H A P T E R - I I

THE HARDY REVIVAL, 1940-'50

> 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.[1]

As far back as 1892 Hardy had recorded these words in his notebook after reading the attacks meted out to him in the reviews of Tess. A similar reception given to Jude so disgusted Hardy that he wrote no more novels, henceforth devoting his energies to poetry, which he had always regarded as far more important than fiction.

The period during which Hardy wrote his novels covers a stretch of nearly twenty-five years. Throughout this time and well after his last novel in 1897 numerous criticisms appeared in reviews, magazines and newspapers. But in spite of the numerous slating remarks and distressing accounts by critics from all quarters, the interest in the reading of Hardy's novels never waned.

Hardy was consistently undervalued by his contemporaries and even abused for writing books which did not fit in with their ideas. The main stumbling block for the victorians was his 'pessimism', or rejection of the idea of providence. Unfortunately, this has remained an obstacle for some modern critics and readers as well

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[1] Florence Emily: The Life of Thomas Hardy 1840-1928, London, 1962, p.244.

because it is generally assumed that Hardy is a writer who invariably looks at the darker side of life.

Despite the general clamour against Hardy, came some very positive reviews after the publication of Far From the Madding Crowd. Interest in Hardy was evident in France, Germany and America. A French reviewer praised the presentation of rural life, the rustic chorus, and the reality of the descriptions of nature, and predicted that Hardy will continue to command the respect of serious readers.

In England numerous honours came to Hardy in his late years and he accepted them with easy pleasure and grace. He began to be called "The Grand Old Man of English Letters."

The critical consensus, however, was that Hardy remained an 'essential victorian'. With others he was a traditional writer of tales while some declared him to be a modern. However, in spite of these conflicting approaches, one thing is certain - he had a large reading public.

Most victorian novelists first published their work as a weekly or monthly serial. After serialization their novels apeared in book form and found their way to the public libraries, where they reached another vast

group of readers. Quite often the final version was very different from the serial one; Hardy himself had tomake several changes in his novels before they came out in book form. The advantage of this way of publishing books was that they reached a much wider public than the novels of Scott or Jane Austen had done. More readers meant more reviews and criticisms.

Hardy responded to many reviews by writing letters to editors defending or explaining his intensions, but on occasions he widely kept quiet, knowing that against gratuitous malice he had no defence. In the midst of these attacks together with his illness which was slow and painful, and the strained relations that existed between himself and his wife he tried to console himself with the reflection that "there is mercy in troubles coming in battalions" - "they neutralize each other"?[2]

The best criticism however, came only in 1940 with the publication of the Hardy Centennial number of The Southern Review. The reviewers and contributors of this number of the Southern Review paid intelligent tributes to a man who had suffered much neglect during his life time. The articles were written by select band of highly intelligent men who took Hardy with utmost seriousness and came forward with new insights into his works. In

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[2]Florence Emily, Op.cit., p.70.

short, the new insights were modern, illuminating and proved a turning point in Hardy criticism. The finest accounts came from critics like Donald Davidson, Morton Dauwen Zabel, W.H. Auden and Katherine Anne Porter. These essays set the pace for later accounts which helped to place Hardy amaong the very best of English novelists. The importance of this event in the development of Hardy criticism is great. It was in this decade that critics began to recognize how much Hardy had to say to the modern world. The contributorsof The Souther Review began to move away from the usual assessment given him during his life. This chapter attempts an assessment of Hardy's importance in the 1940's beginning with the valuable insights that came with the Centennial number of The Southern Review (1940).

One of the first concerns here is whether Thomas Hardy was a traditionalist or modernist. Is it the supposedly changeless, traditional characters or the changeful, Promethean ones who constitute the norms in "Wessex"? The terminology, as most scholars will recognize, is that of Donald Davidson - from his 1940 essay "The Traditional Basis of Thomas Hardy's Fiction" which appeared in The Souther Review.

Donald Davidson firmly establishes Hardy as a traditionalist and an almost timeless teller of tales,

and remarks that the most "literary" of the novel meaning the early novels are the weakest. Davidson in his essay further says:

> He wrote as a ballad maker would write if a ballad maker were to have to write novels, or as a bardic or epic poet would write if faced with the necessity of performing in the quasi-lyrical but nonsignable strains of the nineteenth century and later.[3]

Many of the peculiarities of the novels, perhaps even the fatalistic or pessimistic "meanings" so overstressed by academic critics, are also peculiarities of the old popular ballads. Davidson's argument is highly persuasive.

Davidson was against the opinion of earlier critics that Hardy was a 'folk author'. Although there are eccentricities of language in his poetry and prose, and a habitual reliance on tradition, nowhere, says Davidson, is there "the affection of archaism or the deliberate exploitation of archaism."[4] The old fashioned quality in Hardy is not in the obvious places, but lies deeper. It is in the habit of Hardy's mind rather than in "folklore" or the phenomena of language and style.

Therefore, Hardy wrote or tried to write, says Davidson, more or less as a modern - modern, for him

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[3]Donald Davidson: The Traditional Basis of Thomas Hardy's Fiction Hardy Centennial Number (VI 1940). The Southern Review, Reprinted in Hardy, A Collection of Critical Essays 20th Century Views, Prentice-Hall, Inc.1963, p.12.

[4]*Donald Davidson, Op.cit., p.12.*

being late nineteenth century. The central theme of Davidson's thesis lies in the fact that the characteristic Hardy novel is conceived as a "told (or sung) story, or at least not as a literary story; that it is an extension in the form of a modern prose fiction, of a traditional ballad or an oral tale - a tale of the kind which Hardy reproduces with great skill in A Few Crusted Characters and less successfully in A Group of Noble Dames; but furthermore that this habit of mind is a rather unconscious art.[5] The conscious side of his art manifests itself in two ways: first, he "works up" his Core of traditional or nonliterary narrative into a literary form; but, second he labours to establish, in his "Wessex" the kind of artistic climate and environment which will enable him to handle his traditional story with conviction - a world in which typical ballad heroes and heroines can flourish with a thoroughly rationalized "mythology" to sustain them.

Therefore says Davidson, Hardy's intricate plot and treatment of characters are associated with traditional fiction from ancient times. Action not description is always foremost; the event dominates, rather than motive, or psychology, or comment. There is absolutely no doubt, says Davidson, that Hardy has an evident fondness for

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[5] Donald Davidson, Op.cit., p.15.

what might be called the "country story". They are essentially "balladistic" in nature.

Davidson points out in his essay some of the traditional 'ballad' qualities in Hardy's stories. There is the "faithful lover" of many a ballad in Gabriel Oak. He endures a kind of "testing" not far from the testings that ladies subjected their lovers to in romances and ballads; and he is also obviously the excellent lover of "low degree" whose affections are finally rewarded. Fanny, in the same novel, is a typical deserted maiden and her lover, Sergeant Troy, is the soldier of any number of later ballads.

About coincidence in the typical Hardy narrative Davidson says that the 'traditional story' has not the logic of modern literary fiction. He says: "the traditional story admits, and even cherishes, the improbable and unpredictable. The miraculous, or nearly miraculous, is what makes a story a story, in the old way."[6] Unless a story has some strong and unusual features, he argues, it will hardly be told and will not be remembered. This approach is radically different from the earlier approaches which looked upon the improbable with absolute disfavour.

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[6]Donald Davidson, Op.cit., p.17.

Coincidence in Hardy's narratives says Davidson, "represents a conviction about the nature of story as such." What Davidson means is that with the writer striking a balance "between the uncommon and the ordinary"[7] that which is uncommon or improbable is rationalized in terms of an unlikely but not impossible accident. Hardy's coincidences, with the absence of devils, demons, fairies and mermaids is a kind of substitution for supernaturalisms. So superstitions are used in the background of his narrative; coincidence, in the actual mechanics. Davidson finally concludes:

> The supernatural, in Hardy, is allowed in the narrative, but in a subordinate position; the quasi-miraculous takes its place in the main position.[8]

To the charge of pessimism by most of the insensitive and obtuse critics Davidson replied:

> The charge of pessimism has about the same relevance as the charge of indelicacy which Hardy encountered when he first began to publish. An age of polite literature which had lost touch with the oral arts - except so far as they might survive in chit-chat, gossip and rèsque stories could not believe that an author who embodied in his serious stories the typical seductions, rapes, murders and lusty love-makings of the old tradition intended anything but a breach of decorum. Even today, I suppose, a group gathered for tea might be a little astonished if a respectable odl gentleman in spats

[7]Donald Davidson, Op.cit., p.18.

[8]Ibid., p.18.

> suddenly began to warble the outrageous ballad of Little Musgrave. But Hardy did not know he was being rough, and had no more notion than a ballad-maker of turning out a story to be either pessimistic or optimistic.[9]

About the characters, Davidson states: "The most striking feature of Hardy's habit of mind, as traditional narrator, is in his creation of characters."[10] The characters are fixed or "non-developing, that is, their fortunes may change, but they do not change with their fortunes. They have been modelled and have all the characteristics of all the "changelessness" of the figures of traditional narrative from-epic, saga, and romance to broadside balladry and its prose parallels. Hardy realized the value of the changeless character for as Davidson states "it has as much aesthetic richness as the changeful character."[11] Hardy made great use of the changeless character but in doing so, says Davidson, he did not exploit "folk material" with the shallow assumption that the "folklishness" of the material is alone enough to dignify it. Therefore Hardy's stories are stories of human beings, not of peasants or moor dwellers as such. They are placed in a natural environment:

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[9]Donald Davidson, Op.cit., p.19.

[10]Ibid., p.19.

[11]Ibid., p.20.

> -- a nature not very much despoiled or exploited, a town life neither wholly antique nor wholly modern, and the whole removed a little in time from the strictly contemporary, but not so far removed as to seem like a historical reconstruction. The antiquities the local colour, the folk customs are not decorative or merely picturesque; they are organic with the total scheme. They are no less essential and no more decorative than the occupations, ambitious and inter-relationships of the changeless characters. He accepts the assumptions of the society that he depicts, and neither apologizes for it more condescends to it.[12]

Davidson sees nature itself as being "unchangeable and inscrutable."[13] Nearest to nature, and therefore most changeless, are the rustics. They have accepted nature as unchangeable and passively accomodate themselves to nature in the ordered ritual of their lives. But Davidson adds that there are a few deracinated rustics - Sergeant Troy for one - who do not conform, who have diverged "extravagantly" from the "changeless pattern." Such characters have taken on a vulgar form, they are nontraditional, they are aliens as they cannot conform to an age old tradition and this leads them away from Wessex. Says Davidson about these characters, "their rebellion is great enough to render their life courses inconstant and tragic."[14] Davidson concludes:

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[12]Donald Davidson: Op.cit., pp.20-21.

[13]Ibid., p.21.

[14]Ibid., p.22.

> In Hardy, tragedy does not arrive until changeless and changeful are engaged in bitter conflict.[15]

In the same way Morton Dauwen Zabel argues that Hardy's modern tensions and ambiguities make his fiction a contemporary document. Zabel says:

> He now appears to us as a realist developing toward allegory -- as an imaginative artist who brought the nineteenth century novel out of its slavery to fact and its dangerous reaction against popularity, and so prepared the way for some of the most original talents of a new time. He stands in a succession of novelists that include Melville, Emily Bronte and Hawthorne, that takes in James and Flaubert in the wider reach of their faculties, and that has arrived at the achievements of Joyce, Proust, Gide and Kafka.[16]

The above extract appeared in an essay entitled "Hardy in Defense of His Art: The Aesthetic of Incongruity." Earlier critics had deep reservations about his integrity as a writer. There were scandalous protests "of press and pulpit" to be conflicting elements that such prejudiced critics salvaged from his works. But Zabel cogently argues:

> That Hardy's was a native and persistent order of genius, that he expressed it in style and drama which he made unmistakably his own; that his work carries the stamp of a theme and vision which have impressed a large area of art and experience in the last eighty years.[17]

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[15] Donald Davidson, Op.cit., p.21.

[16] Morton Dauwen Zabel: Hardy in Defense of His Art: Hardy Centennal No.(VI, 1940), The Southern Review, Reprinted in 20th Century Views: Hardy. Edited by Albert J. Guerard p. 43.

[17] Ibid., p.24.

The central theme of Zabel's essay is "the radical quality" which Hardy insisted on disclaiming as a "philosophy" that is present in his prose and verse as in his personality and thought. It has been the subject of much debate and controversy, an impediment to critical thinking and because ofthe "discordince" that exists in his temperament, in his humanism and his response to human character. Yet Morton Zabel saysthat this is "the basic clue to his talent."[18] Such contrasts and anthitheses were present throughout modern fiction where:

> Moral earnestness is scoffed by the scurrilities of cynicism, and where a sense of responsibility to the traditional dignities of the human spirit became so violently reproached by the squalor of modern society.[19]

Satirists like Laforgue and Corbiere wrought these jarring collisions into a critical medium that had descended to Pound, Eliot, Joyce, Auden, and the modern satarists and realists.

Hardy, says Zabel, didnot participate in these developments but must have inherited the "aesthetic disorder of the age, its unresolved antipathies, its sprawling appetite for life, and the instability that reflected the surrounding distraction."[20] Hardy was aware throughout

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[18] Morton Dauwen Zabel: Op.cit., p.25.

[19] Ibid., p.26.

[20] Ibid., p.26.

his life of the struggle in himself of a distressing opposition of faculties -of immediate personal sympathies and large intellectual ambitions. Further in the face of the critical hostility that surrounded him he struggled to formulate a defense of his talent and method. Thus he shaped a personal aesthetic for himself which contributed to the artistic progress of the modern novel and to the inter-relations of modern fiction and poetry. The craft of fiction said Zabel had not come to Hardy quickly for he took pains tocome into some kind of conscious knowledge of his "aesthetic purposes". It is no wonder that critics of Hardy's day considered him an outsider to "art's higher mysteries". He refused to bow down to the critical faculty and based his faith "on a magical conception of man and nature." So says Morton Dawen Zabel:

> Hardy's own anti-aesthetic committed him to a search for the timeless qualities of life and destiny, to a sense of history that shares little of the critical scrutiny oftime and experience that was soon to become a major prepossession of the modern artist.[21]

Finally,

> He divided his life between Wessex and the realities of his age. The two worlds gave him a dramatic stage on which to meet the conflicts of modern thought, to witness the tragic hostilities of life, to study the discord that marks the divided nature of man. But he mastered the "keeping" of

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[21] Norton Dauwen Zabel: Op.cit., p.30.

> his art and brought to it the force of his long intellectual and moral struggle.[22]

In another account in the Hardy Centennial Number of The Souther Review, W.H. Auden stated, "I cannot write objectively about Thomas Hardy because I was once in love with him."[23]

What Auden valued most in the novelist was his "hawk's vision", his way of looking to Audan had comforted him as an adolescent, and educated his vision as a human being. Auden writes:

> To see the individual life related not only to the local social life of its time but to the whole of human history life on the earth, the stars, gives one both humility and self-confidence. Far from such perspective thedifference between the individual and society is so slight since both are so insignificant, that the latter ceases to appear as a formidable god with absolute rights, but rather as an equal, subject to the same laws of growth and decay and therefore one with whom reconciliation is possible.[24]

In a final tribute to Hardy, Auden states:

> He is dead, the world he knew has died too, and we have other roads to build, but his humility before nature, his sympathy for the suffering and the blind, and his sense of proportion are as necessary now as they ever were.[25]

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22 Norton Dauwen Zabel: Op.cit., pp.44-45.

23 W.H.Auden: A Literary Transference.Hardy Centennial Number The Southern Review (VI, 1940).Reprinted in Hardy: Twentieth Century Views, ed.by A.J.Guerard, p.135.

24 Ibid., p.140.

25 Ibid., p.142.

Hardy's works in his life time had been criticised particularly for their "incongruity". He was conscious of this hostility among critics, he never became thick-skinned even in his final apotheosis, to disregard it.

In the 1940 Centennial issue of The Southern Review appeared yet another of those merciless reports from a contributor. It read:

> Only the disenchanted sophomore can be deeply impressed by Hardy's view of life. Although it was an outcome of the new scientific views, it now seems like a simple variant of super-naturalism ...... And although Hardy properly objected to treating his fiction as a "scientific system of philosophy" the trouble is that he often wrote as if it were. The scheme of his novels is typically all too rigid and diagrammatic, their argument all too formal and explicit .... . The serious objection, at any rate is not to his philosophy 'per se' the dismal generalizations he illogically induces from the extraordinary actions he invents. It is to his artistry, the inventions themselves.[26]

This however is a most uncharacteristic response in this period of Hardy criticism. It is rather an absolute lack of response. Mr. E.Z. Woodward the Oxford historian is more representative in his interesting biography Short Journey (Faber, 1942) where he writes:

> During my last year at school and my first two years at Oxford, the poems and novels of Thomas Hardy influenced my mind far more than the work any other English writer

[26]Quoted by Q.D. Leavis: Hardy and Criticism, Scrutiny II, 1943, pp.233-234.

> .... The book Tess moved me so deeply that I could not read more than a chapter at a time .... So I read on until I had come to the end of everything which Hardy had published, I have read these novels and poems over and over again. They are part of my life.[27]

Another great writer that contributed to the 1940 Thomas Hardy Centennial Issue of The Southern Review was Katherine Anne Porter. George Moore once said that Thomas Hardy wrote the worst prose of the nineteenth century. His temperament generally gets into and compensates for the doggedness of Hardy's prose structure and the heaviness with which he plans a major effect. The judgement of Katherine Anne Porter seems to be a fair one:

> Who does not remember it? And in actual re-reading, what could be duller? What could be more labored than his introduction of the widow Yeobright at the heath fire among the dancers or more unconvincing than the fears of the timid boy that the assembly are literally raising the Devil? Except for this in my memory of that episode as in dozens of others in many of Hardy's novels, I have seen it, I was there. When I read it, it almost disappears from view and afterwards comes back phraseless, living in its sombre clearness, as Hardy meant it to do, I feel certain.[28]

It is here that we recall Havelock Ellis's remark that Hardy was without training as a literary artists: "It is genius that carries him through."

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[27] Quoted by Q.D. Leavis: Op.cit., p.235.

[28] Quoted by Albert J Guerard: Thomas Hardy, A New Directions Paper-Back, New York, p.192.

Following the essays that came in The Southern Review was another valuable study: Hardy the Novelist by David Cecil (1943). This study originated from Clark lectures at Cambridge.

The first thing that David Cecil reflects on is Hardy's range. It was conditioned by the circumstances of his early life. It was an agricultural life where everyone, except the clergyman and the school master lived by the land. Says David Cecil:

> It was a life that had stability and dignity. It had its light relief too, home made traditional pleasures such as harvest celebrations, Christmas gaieties, parties where people danced and sang ballads and told stories. There was also the tragic aspects of life where lovers parted, a young man, in need of a livelihood, would leave the place to seek his fortune. Years later he would return to find his sweet heart married to another. In such a world confined and elemental, passions grew to obsessions.[29]

Being a very sensitive boy Hardy responded precociously to experience and the life in which he grew up stamped itself deeply on his imagination. When in his forties had reached the peak of his creative development. In this way says David Cecil: "Nature, first of all, played a larger part in his books than in thos of any other English novelist."[30]

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[29] David Cecil: Hardy the Novelist, London, Published by Constable and Co. Ltd., 1943, p.16.

[30] Ibid., p.16.

Further Cecil points out that the plots of Hardy's books were as much conditioned by his upbringing as were his setting and characters. His comedy, says Cecil is based on the genial, farcical, humorous aspects of village life. His tragedy depicts village tragedy composed "of the drama of broken love and wronged girls, the feuds and the hangings which filled his early memories."[31]

Local history extended the range of Hardy's vision of life. Around Dorchester he could not escape prehistoric burial mounds and fortifications; Maumbury Ring and the discoveries of excavators reminded him of the power, the pride, the reach of perished Rome; and aged country people still remembered defensive preparations against Napoleonic invasion. It is no wonder, said David Cecil, that Hardy's environment turned his imagination to the past. His books are resonant with echoes of an earlier age dealing with the contemporary world of his life as a child and in <u>Tess</u> and <u>Jude</u> the world of his mature years.

This world in its turn was closely linked with a more ancient history. And <u>Wessex</u> had played a large part in history. Cecil points out that Hardy was acutely sensitive to the picturesque appeal of the past. He was determined to preserve in his pages the memories of some

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[3]David Cecil: <u>Op.cit</u>., p.17.

traditional occupation now growing obsolete, like that of the reddleman in The Return of the Native.

Cecil observes that if Hardy's range "is limited" in the first place this was due to the circumstances of his upbringing. It was further defined by his angle of vision. David Cecil continues, "Hardy's subject is human life ... He sees human beings less as individuals than as representatives of species, and in relation to the ultimate conditioning forces of their existence. His subject is not men but man. His theme is man's predicament in the universe."[32]

Hardy's theme, says David Cecil, was a tragic one because tragic circumstances or rather man's helplessness is what struck his imagination most. The world as Hardy saw it was full of pain and disappointment and so he depicted pain and disappointment as outstanding characteristics of human existence. This disposition, says David Cecil of a "melancholy view" was confirmed and increased by the age in which Hardy lived.

Hardy's interpretation of the human situation says Cecil was one of a struggle between man and "an omnipotent and indifferent Fate." Man in Hardy's books ranged against "impersonal forces", the forces conditioning

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[32] David Cecil: Op.cit., p.19.

his fate. His characters are "puppets in the hands of Fate. Fate, not them, is ultimately responsible for their quarrels."[33] It is no wonder that Hardy, as a rule, emphasises he fact that even those characters the world would call wicked are so much the creatures of circumstances that "they are far more to be pitied than to be blamed."[34]

David Cecil further points out that Hardy's greatest strength lay in his ability to make us "see". For "it is largely by his visualising power that he communicates his vision of experience."[35] His vision of nature, for instance, is the most characteristic manifestation of his creative power, and it dominates his scene. Says Cecil:

> Nature was to him the emblem of those impersonal forces of Fate with whom he presents mankind as in conflict.[36]

Hardy's creative power showed itself in his characters. According to David Cecil "Hardy's range of character is limited."[37] Cecil believed this because he felt that Hardy always conceived man in relation to ultimate human

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[33]Quoted by Rosemary Somner: Thomas Hardy, Psychological Novelist, First Pub. 1981, Macmillan Press, London, p.9.

[34]David Cecil: Hardy the Novelist, p.62.

[35]Ibid., p.65.

[36]Ibid., p.66.

[37]Ibid., p.88.

destiny, and in such a relation only certain qualities strike him as significant. Further, Cecil felt that Hardy did not have the power to conceive character very seriously. He points out that Hardy's memorable characters "have a family likeness." For example, there is the staunch self-less, tender-hearted hero - Gabriel Oak, Giles Winter-borne, Diggory Venn. There is the dashing, fickle breaker of hearts - Troy, Wildeve; there is the patient, devoted, forgiving woman - Tess and Elizabeth-Jane to mention just two. However, we recognize them because we get to know their voices and tricks of speech. Their inner life is left to our imagination, so that if their speech does not reveal their individuality, "We never get to it". Cecil concludes that even though Hardy's range of character was limited he was a master when portraying a Wessex nature. Such figures, Cecil says, are no "wax dolls" but figures of solid flesh and blood. Giles and Fancy, Gabriel and Bathsheba, "are recognizable human English people, who can eat and drink and take their clothes off, and be irritable and foolish and excited."[38]

This essay in criticism is significant. Though it might be thought that nothing new was to be said about Hardy's genius, Lord David Cecil has said much that is memorable, much that has not hitherto been said so well. It was a notable tribute to a novelist whose genius still

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[38]David Cecil: Op.cit., p.109.

remains the subject of critical speculation.

Hardy criticism since 1934 has passed through several phases. To his contemporaries, as Edmund Blunden ably demonstrates in his book on Hardy in the English Men of Letters Series. He was just another Victorian novelist. They were insensitive to the glimpses of pastoral England his novels afford, and they had enough good models current in fiction to recognize how awkward his style was how limited his range of characterization. One can sympathize with the Saturday Review which complained of Tess that "Few people would deny the terrible dreariness of this tale, which, except during a few hours spent with the cows, has not a gleam of sunshine anywhere."[39] One sees what is meant about the gratuitous nature of the tragic action, and feels sorry for the simplification of the dairy-idyll passages to "a few hours spent among the cows," when so much since has been written rapturously about the novel largely on the strength of those descriptions.

Our next critic is Edmund Blunden whose study is an index of the 1940's judgement. He is extremely cautious about making high claims, confines himself to countering adverse criticism of the less radical kind, and devotee a large proportion of his book to extracts

[39] Q.D. Leavis: Hardy and Criticism, Scrutiny II, 1943, p.236.

from the contemporary views. While conveying the peculiarities of Hardy's character as it appeared in old age, with some interesting reminiscences by men of letters of the impression his personality made on them, he does not give us the essential anecdotes and reminiscences about Hardy's youth which provide a clue in his morbid sensitiveness to suffering or even the appearance of it in nature (such as his weeping at seeing the leaves fall). Perhaps he wished to avoid overlapping with Mrs. Hardy's Early Life and Later life of Thomas Hardy, which remains indispensable, although written as Q.D. Leavis states 'in the most unfortunate style of standard biography.' Nobody tells us the facts which are only vaguely known, about his emotional history and its reactions on his writings - for instance the estrangement from his first wife which produced the atacks on marriage, and the marriage laws in his writings at that time - Jude, The Woodlanders. The really useful critical biography of Hardy had not yet been written. But in a quiet way and leaving the reader to read between the lines, Blunden did go som way towards producing it.

Blunden had the same view as David Cecil that "Hardy' country world was by far his greatest education."[40] When at school, he was a solitary and youthful boy, who enjoyed taking the daily walk from Bockhampton to Dorchester alone. These interesting walks both by daylight and darkness,

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[40]Edmund Blunden: Thomas Hardy, London, Macmillan and Co., 1942, p.11.

left him with a store of memories. During these years, his attachment to his native surroundings grew deep. Blunden puts the point eloquently when he says that Hardy felt and reasoned about man-kind by a particular apprehension of "local hearts and heads."[41] His absolutes were conjectured first and last from a profound submission to the diurinal visible microcosm of Wessex.

Blunden points out in his account that even though Hardy had given up architecture as a profession it stayed with him, in another way for life. The training he had undergone meant:

> An additional rightness in his observation as a general habit which was so valuable a resource in his novels and his other writings; the singularities and visible strange histories of ancient buildings impressed on him still young, the analogous unexpectedness and incongruity of the fabric of human affairs.[42]

In short, his historical sense was assisted by his architectural knowledge.

Blundeh emphasises the fact that Hardy took great pleasure in writing The Trumpet Major, for it originated in local history and topography which he cherished. The novel pleased most of the reviewers, and drew from the Athenaeum the compliment, "Mr Hardy seems to be in the

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[41] Edmund Blunden: Op.cit., p.12.

[42] Ibid., p.35.

way to do for rural life what Dickens did for that of the town." This remarkable interest in rural affairs and village communities says Blunden was stirring in England at the time when Hardy was forming his series of Wessex novels, and it touched him deeply.

One of the finest tributes made to Hardy during the war years was this;

> Amidst all the tempest and upheaval, the appearances of doom and things past prophecy, Hardy's works had set up a steady rule or inviolable standard of English qualities not unworthy of the comparison with Shakespearean embodyings of those which had been made often enough in spite of all the attacks on Tess or Jude.[43]

Blunden points out that the use of "odd vocabulary" "unhappy construction," long and ingenious passages given to characters in their conversation accounts for some of the faults in Hardy's novels. Further, he adds, that the adorning of pages with scriptural references was of no particular help to any reader.

I think Hardy's familiarity with the Bible probably did more to enlarge his historical sense than any other literature. Biblical echoes are legion in Hardy's fiction, and where they refer to well-known events and figures (Cain and Job, for example) they still have a universalising effect.

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[43] Edmund Blunden: Op.cit., pp. 149-150.

Hardy achieved a considerable degree of universality through his use of classical references from literature as well. He drew Wessex parallels from the old Testament stories. Hardy's works are strewn with literary quotations and allusions from many sources, ancient and contemporary, English and foreign, as for example, those from Shakespeare; the "Anguish that is sharper than a serpent's tooth" links the Marchioness of Stonehenge with Lear; "his nature to extenuate nothing", Henchard with the noble bearing of Othello in adversity; "the serpent hisses where the sweet birds sing", Tess and The Rape of Lucrece. A similar but more extended universalising effect is obtained by Hardy's association of his tempters with Goethe's Mephistopheles or Milton's Satan.

Therefore, Blunden's assessment of Hardy that his classical references were out of place is the only weakness in what may be called a very successful analysis. Edmund Blunden is one of the earliest critics to see the value of Hardy and the important contribution made to the literary world by a man who had been considered for over half a century as one of the moving forces of his age. He adds, "It is hard to imagine a time when no one will be wanting to meet Tess, there where she stands not so much for her personal tragedy as for the English country girl."[44] Then again he says,

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[44]Edmund Blunden: Op.cit., p.211.

> As readers move away from their own affairs they will not help but admire Hardy ...... His witness is true, but such truth is difficult and unusual. Then besides these intensely patient and strongly living studies in the open (the novels abound in them) Hardy in his right road brings us those portraits of human worth and integrity which cannot soon fail to inspite the thoughtful.[45]

Albert J. Guerard is the next important critic of this period. In a book entitled <u>Thomas Hardy</u>, we come across a brilliant critical study where the author breaks sharply with the traditional approach to Hardy and sees him, not as a ponderous old-school philosopher, but as a great storyteller who dramatized the destructiveness, the drift, and the absurdity of life.

At the very start of his essay, Guerard refuses to accept the view of critics like Lascelles Abercrombie that Hardy was a great "craftsman." Rather he says:

> We must begin by recognizing that Hardy was pre-eminently a traditional teller of tales, and a great poet who stumbled upon the art of fiction and practised it very waywardly.[46]

Guerard called for a revaluation of Hardy's works because he believed that critics from Lionel Johnson (1895) to Lord Cecil (1946) belonged to a "generation" which was essentially victorian. Guerard saw as totally absurd the "realist" concept of fiction and the over-rated "Franciscan

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[45] Edmund Blunden: <u>Op.cit.</u>, p.212.

[46] Albert J. Guerard: <u>Thomas Hardy</u> - A New Directions Paper Book 1949, p.1.

tenderness in regard to children, animals, labourers, the poor, the mad, the insulted and injured." Guerard on the other hand affirmed that the critics of his "generation" were in fact attracted by much that made the post-Victorian realist uneasy:

> The inventiveness and improbability, the symbolic use of reappearance and coincidence, thewanderings of a macabre imagination the suggestions of supernatural agency; the frank acknowledgement that love is basically sexual and marriage usually unhappy the demons of plot irony and myth. And we are repelled or left indifferent by what charmed that earlier generation the regionalists ear for dialect, the botanist's eye for the minutiae of field and tree, the architect's eye for ancient mansions, and the farmer's eye for sheepshearings; the pretentions meditation on Egdon Heath; the discernible architecture of the novels and the paraphrasable metaphysic the Franciscan tenderness and sympathy - and, I'm afraid, the finally unqualified faith in the goodness of a humanity more sinned against than sinning.[47]

Guerard further explains that Hardy was "no spiritual historian of the nature of Arnold trying to reconcile both the spiritual and scientific attitudes towards life." Hardy did not keep a careful finger on the changing pulse of his age. He was essentially "a story-teller", and his attitude toward many problems was aesthetic, that is "his pessimism was genuine enough, of course, but it was to a degree cultivated as artistically useful.

Guerard sums up Hardy's attitudes thus:

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[47] Albert J. Guerard: Op.cit., p.6.

> One of Hardy's great "subjects" was of course the sad passing of the stable rural life, the decay of old customs and of local traditions, he death of ghost stories and the death of village choirs.[48]

As "novelist and poet of Wessex", the decay of old customs was more significant to Hardy than the amelioration of the labourers lot; the changes were the ones which concerned him. Hardy thus looked on the problems of Dorset and Wessex "as new material for his vision and drama, he distorted actuality to achieve a kind of truth."[49] He was a realist within a world he had reshaped to his vision and whose joys and sorrows he had quite deliberately hightened. Therefore, the dialogue of his characters was no more realistic than that of Shakespeare's. It was Hardy who spoke rather than the free citizen of Dorcester. Hardy's ideal society would be accessible to new ideas and would permit freedom to live and love, but it would simultaneously resist the passing of old customs and memories. In short, Hardy reshaped Dorset to his vision of Wessex. By the time he wrote Jude the Obscure, "Hardy left his idealized Wessex for the Harsh realities and moral confusion of the modern world. Curiously enough, Hardy began and ended his career as a novelist with what were frankly problem novels."[50] Albert J Guerard gives us Hardy's attitude as a "thinker" in the change over to Jude:

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[48]Alberrt J. Guerard: Op.cit., p.17.

[49]Ibid., p.19.

[50]Ibid., p.31.

> Just as the Wessex novels leave an idealized impression of an ancient and stable world rather than an accurate almanac of Dorset so Jude the Obscure leaves a dominant and in a sense truthful impression of the world in which we live.[51]

The most important factor that helped Hardy to develop a style was the "conflicting impulses" that prompted and impelled the novelist as a "story teller" and "conscious artist" to develop a fairly coherent body of work. Guerard talks about the realist and anti-realist impulses in Hardy and says:

> Hardy was primarily a teller of tales longing both to create life rather than merely record it and to hold the reader enthralled. He was also to some degree a psychologist, though impelled less by curiosity than sympathy. He was certainly at times a realist in the several senses of the word. He wanted to describe ordinary human beings. He wanted to speculate on their dilemmas rationally and even schematically, and he wanted to record his pious memory of the material universe, of 'things' touched and tasted and seen. As an artist he wanted to construct shapely forms which had their own intrinsic beauty ...... Finally he wanted to be more than a realist. He wanted to escape the banalty of exact observation and to express his particular awareness of the grotesque, the occult and the strange. He was determined to see a ghost.[52]

Albert Guerard refers to his account of Thomas Hardy as a "revaluation" of the approach of "the earlier generation" of critics whom he called "post-Victorian." The

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[51] Albert J. Guerard: Op.cit., p.33.

[52] Ibid., pp.47-48.

earlier generation assumed that the novel should provide an accurate reflection of every-day experience. Guerard said "It assumed that realism was the proper medium of fiction - and that to see a preponderance of evil and brute chance in life was to be unrealistic."[53] Hardy, says Guerard, had always wanted toi be a realist, he wanted to remain faithful to reason, to ordinary experience, to things. But on the other hand he wanted to see and create beyond them. His determination to transcend ordinary realism is the one thing that interested him.

In short, it was Hardy's realism which appealed to the "post-Victorian" critics whereas his anti-realism was what caught Guerard's attention. Guerard explained Hardy's anti-realism as an attempt to avoid the sterility of mere observation. Hardy was an anti-realist "on aesthetic grounds."[54] As an anti-realist, Hardy had all those romantic qualities of a "a popular teller of tales." His anti-realism was more often the natural expression of a particular temperament and a great dramatic gift. His anti-realistic attitude shows Hardy not as a ponderous old-school philosopher, but as a great story teller who recognized only the natural."[55]

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[53] Albert J. Guerard: Op.cit., p.2.

[54] Ibid., p.84.

[55] Ibid., p.99.

Further Albert J. Guerard suggests that much is lost through excessive interest in Hardy's philosophy. "Academic schematizing ..... has...... fastened on certain structural and didactic aspects of the major Wessex novels to the neglect of much else which remains readable and can even be useful to the novelist writing today." One should not, Guerard continues, "reduce ..... a novel's meaning to some philosophy of life ..... theorize oneself quite away from the living complex of the work of art, and the impression it actually makes."[56] "Hardy would have welcomed Guerard's approach. Several times Hardy denied that he was advancing any general theory of things, and the word "impression" was his own favourite term for whatever sense of life his novels convey.

About Hardy's characterisation, Guerard says that "Hardy still seems a very gifted creator of personality, an *occasionally gifted creator of character -- and*, as a rule, a singularly successful analyst of "subtleties."[57] In "The Science of Fiction", Hardy says that what a novelist requires above all is :

> A quick perception of the more ethereal characteristics of humanity, a sympathetic appreciation of life in all its manifestations and an accurate delineation of human nature.[58]

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[56]John Holloway: The Victorian Sage, The Norton Library, New York, 1965, p.246.

[57]A.J. Guerard: Thomas Hardy, p.100.

[58]Harold 'Orel: Hardy's Personal Writings, Univ. of Kanas, 1966, p.137.

Until the time Guerard came forward with his criticism, critics had not acknowledged that Hardy's psychological insight, subtlety and complexity was much greater, and closer to twentieth century psychological apprehensions. But though critics have paid passing tribute to this aspect of his fiction, sometimes even using the term "Freudian", no one had sufficiently examined this in detail. This is rather surprising in view of the central importance of character in novels and of Hardy's own emphasis on this "centrality" as cited above.

It is not altogether surprising that throughout his novels there is much that is closer to Freud and later psychological discoveries. But asks Guerard, "Has the critic any right to expect Freudian subtleties from a novelist writing between 1868 and 1894?" Hardy's characterisation is based on the principle of "instinctive understanding", a term used by psychologists when they speak of literary characterization. It further refers to findings conscious or subconscious not based oan formal experiment and analysis Guerard sums up Hardy's approach thus, "His psychological curiosity was melodramatic, the curiosity of a teller of tales."[59]

Guerard believes that Hardy's power to dramatize the personality and temperament of women was indeed extraordinary, but about his men "he presents fewer interesting

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[59] A.J. Guerard: Thomas Hardy, p.106.

men than almost any important novelist."[60] Guerard divides Hardy's men into two groups. There seems to be, says Guerard a rarity of fairly normal men. The second category comprises those who do seem normally aggressive, or of normal sexuality. They are "either grotesquely unreal in other respects, or are broadly conceived as selfish rakes."[61] as are Sergeant Troy, Wildeve, Bob Loveday and Dr. Fitzpiers. Guerard points out the fact that Hardy's men are inadequate as human beings and even more inadequate as fictional creations. However, he believes that Hardy's great gift for conveying living personality reveals itself rather in his portraits of rustics and of women.

Guerard speaks of Hardy's rustics thus:

> The true Hardy rustic is of 'personality' all compact of gestures, turns of phrase, humors and deformities. They are the backbone of the community in and about Weatherbury and Egdon. Self-depreciation - frank obstinate, humorous, and sometimes proud -- is the great distinguishing characteristic of Hardy's rustics.[62]

It is perhaps significant that the women in particular are seen as objects - fascinating, incomprehensible strange. Guerard says:

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[60] A.J. Guerard: Thomas Hardy, p.157.

[61] Ibid., p.114.

[62] Ibid., p.122.

> Few novelists English or Continental have such a gallery of charming impulsive and dangerously contradictory women to their credit. Hardy was certainly the greatest dramatist of female character and temperament in a half century almost monopolized by female novelists. He was the recorder of such psychic difficulties as Sue's, the creator of rounded characters as different as Eustacia Vye and Tess - and cynical theoriest 'de nature feminae'.[63]

The women, inspite of their perverse absurdities, are always, says Guerard, "more plausible than the men." Hardy's was a world of young women and girls, but even the elder women hovering in the background of his fiction are convincing and individualized. Hardy's women alive and very few of them are wholly uninteresting. Perhaps, says, Guerard: "Hardy offers only two men of more than average interest and vitality: Michael Henchard and Jude Fawley.

Guerard concludes that Hardy was a great popular novelist and not a great artist. The flaws and weaknesses in Hardy he attributes to the novelists' tendency to schematize and oversimplify dilemmas. Although he showed an aesthetic understanding of agricultural Dorset, he showed prior to Jude the Obscure, little understanding of the moral and social condition of the late nineteenth century. His power to dramatize the personality and temperament of women was indeed extraordinary, but he presented fewer

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[63] A. J. Guerard, Op.cit., pp.128-129.

interesting men than almost any important novelist. Guerard's final comments on his style is that he "is abnormally relaxed and diffused."

Guerard says that his appeal rests on the fact that:

> Hardy was a great story teller. He excelled in the understanding of the plight of ordinary, simple and well-meaning persons, subjected to the extraordinary complex, and seemingly malign circumstances of life. Hardy was given to a certinly excessive charity in dealing with his villains. Sergeant Troy, Wildeve, Alec D'Urbèrville benefit from this universal sympathy. Hardy wanted people to be happy and so Good andEvil seemed irrelevant in such an indifferent universe.

This then was the one important approach to Thomas Hardy, the poet and novelist. Contemporary critics during the life of Hardy had received rather coolly what they saw as the first experiments of a young writer under the influence now of Wilkie Collins, now of George Eliot. As Hardy developed his characteristic rural themes, George Eliot increasingly appeared the obvious comparison, and a standard by which to judge him. Points about which the critics had misgivings wefe sensationalism in the development of plot, clumsiness, and pedantry in the style where the author was speaking in his own person, and an unreal heightening of the wit and humour, as well as the general level of speech, of the rustic chorus. As George Eliot's reputation declined soon after her death, she was less

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[64] A.J. Guerard: Op.cit., pp.157-158.

often invoked as a standard of comparison, and critics even began to blame her influence for the pedantic element in Hardy's style. Meanwhile appreciation was growing of his feeling for the rural tradition, his description of nature, and his creation of atmosphere. Havelock Elli's 1883 appraisal marks a further stage with its claims for psychological insight in the portrayal of women. In time, Hardy's strength was seen resting in rural tragedy. Occasionally, the critics of the eighties would touch on his pessimism or, as with The Wood-landers, point to a disagreeable handling of sexual morality. The blunting of critical sensitiveness appears in the more extreme views of both sides in the debate. Hardy's most perceptive critics were not always those who spoke most loudly in defense of him as progressive and advanced. By the time the storm had died down, his work as a novelist was finished and could be surveyed as a whole in an increasingly detached perspective. His thought was analysed and his tragic fictions classified and fitted into academic categories. The tendency to work out parallels with the classical tragedians was increased by the vast epic scale of The Dynasts: W.L. Courtney contributed a significant two-part essay to Fortnightly on "Mr. Hardy and Aeschylus." But now the qualities of style and narrative technique which had provoked criticism earlier were less often remarked on, or tended to be played down.

The worst attacks against Hardy came from a band of critics under the leadership of T.S. Eliot. The most arrogant statement of Eliot's disapproval is in After Strange Gods. It has set Hardy down as a "symptom of decadence", a victim of emotion run morbid, "a minor poet" whose matter of communication is not "particularly wholesome or edifying."[65] This is in line with the invective and scathing attacks by F.R. Leavis, Henry James and R.L. Stevenson.

The 1940 Hardy centennial number of The Southern Review contains several explorations of Hardy's fiction by several highly inteligent and honest critics. The love of the macabre coincidence and grotesque mischance, the cruel imaginings and manipulations, all the bad luck and all the mismatched destinies, the darkness of the physical and moral landscapes, the awareness of dwindling energies, and the sense of man's appalling limitations - all these are highlighted in the 40s by many resourceful critics.

The critics of this phase began to see that Hardy was not a "typical Victorian". To many of them he seemed to exemplify the more modern, adventurous, questioning spirit which came into literature about the turn of the century and led on directly to the world of D.H. Lawrence.

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[65]Albert J. Guerard: Thomas Hardy, p.30.

To Donald Davidson must be given the credit of approaching Hardy as a novelist who brought his tradition with him. The old fashioned quality in Hardy was in his mind rather than in "folk-lore." Davidson pointed out with distinction that in view of this habit of mind, Hardy's stories were an extension, in the form of a modern prose fiction, of a traditional ballad or an oral tale. He saw that Hardy's purpose as a writer seems to have been to unravel human lots in terms that would present it as most recognizably, and validly, and completely human. To Davidson goes the credit of giving us a better understanding of the meanings, pessimistic or otherwise in Hardy's mature fiction.

Both Morton Dawen Zabel and Katherine Anne Porter described Hardy's modern tensions and ambiguities and his role in freeing the novel from an unenergized realism. But Davidson understood the milieu in which Hardy wrote. One is glad to have a spirited, able and critically demolishing essay by Katherine Anne Porter, Alan Dent commenting on Lord David Cecil's account on Thomas Hardy said that it was:

> A superb and penetrating piece of criticism .... what nobility of praise, shrewdness of assessment, and sharpness of critical perception.[66]

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[66] Albert J. Guerard: Op.cit., p.34.

Cecil's book on Hardy was easily the finest piece of literary criticism which had come since 1934. Early Victorian Novelists by the same author appeared in the same year. David Cecil in his account avoided any form of whim and pedantry, his concentration on his subject and his willto discern what Hardy was driving at rather than to say what he ought to have done distinguishes the work. These qualities alone made his book valuable as important criticism.

What really attracts one in our reading of the stimulating and constructive essays in the Hardy centenary issue is the complete absence of the stale, conventional approach or of any aesthetic posturing, in this colective enterprise. Q.D. Leavis in her review of The Southern Review, Thomas Hardy Centennial Issue said about the articles:

> It is certainly the most helpful critical work on Hardy I know, and since the best essays in it are by tough-minded critics with a corresponding tightness of argument and idiom, who raise many debatable critical problems, it could be recommended for teaching purposes at the university.[67]

Albert J. Guerard's account of the novelist was in the words of a reviewer in the New York Herald Tribune; "Crisp, challenging, informative, highly intelligent .... He has crammed into this little book more vital comment

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[67] Q.D. Leavis: Scrutiny II, 1943, pp.236-237.

on his author than can be found in a whole shelf of ordinary criticism." Guerard's critical study broke sharply with the traditional view of the novelist. No longer does Guerard describe Hardy as "a ponderous old school philosopher" but a great story teller. Though Guerard's critical study had little to say about Hardy's life and reading or about the London and Dorset of Hardy's day, his pessimism or fatalism, yet he was in now way perverse in his evaluations and above all in his descriptions.

One of the great "subjects" of Hardy was, of course, the sad passing of the stable rural life, the decay of old customs and of local traditions. Guerard did acknowledge that though the decay of old customs was more significant to Hardy the aesthetic changes were the ones which concerned him more.

It is from this group of critics that we get few of the meanings, pessimistic or otherwise, that we commonly ascribe to him. Their purpose seems to have been to decipher the central quality of Hardy's vision. That Hardy succeeded best when he wrote of rural Wessex is significant;. It was left to the next group of critics to carry on their findings and to relate his novels to the condition of rural England in the latter half of the nineteenth century as acknowledged not only by some of Hardy's famous critics but by Hardy himself.

With Donald Davidson, Katherine Anne Porter, Morton Dauwen Zabel, W.H. Auden, David Cecil, Edmund Blunden and Albert J. Guerard we have critics who were no longer vitiated by hardened preoccupations about fatalism and pessimism. They no longer condemned books that were once opposed by nearly all reviewers and critics at first. They realised that the meaning and interest of a novel lay in what the novel says, not in what it was intended to say. They were concerned with what the novelist did, not with deciding whether he did what he set out to do. They were pioneers of a new and modern approach. The most impressive result of such a study is that Hardy emerges as being more important than is commonly supposed. The critical accounts that were yet to come surveyed the multiple facets of Thomas Hardy's talent shedding new light on the works of "the grand old man of English Letters." Modern Hardy criticism owes an immense debt to the critics of the 40's in particular to those who wrote for the Southern Review. Hardy remains a novelist of unusual power and integrity, who gave an epic dimension to the familiar realism of the Victorian novel.

CHAPTER-III

EMERGENCE OF NEW CRITICAL PROCESSES - 1950-1960

> The five great novels have a common pattern. Lionel Johnson first suggested it and illuminated by commentary. Hardy presents his conception through the play of life in a tract of the countryside. His protagonists are strong-natured countrymen, disciplined by the necessities of agricultural life. He brings into relation with them men and women from outside the rural world better educated superior in status, yet inferior in human worth. The contact ocasions a sense of invasion, of disturbance. The story unfolds slowly and the theme of urban invasion declare itself more clearly as the presence of the country its labour and its past, make themselves felt. Then the story assumes some qform of dramatic conflict strong and unsubtle and the invasion wreaks its havoc. Human relations and human persons are represented less for their own sakes than for the clearer focussing of the invasion and the havoc. A period of ominous waiting may follow. What the situation means becomes more evident: it is a clash between agricultural and urban modes of life. From that point the story moves to its conclusion.[1]

This statement is taken from Douglas Brown's significant study of Hardy first published in 1954. Together with this critic there are those who may be termed thematic critics whose purpose was to relate Hardy's novels to the great events which were transforming English rural society during his life. Among the critics who placed Hardy's novels in a historical context we have Raymund Williams, Irwing Howe, Arnold Kettle, and Philip Larkin to mention a few.

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[1]Douglas Brown: Thomas Hardy, London: Longman, 1954; p.30.

Such critics saw the central theme of Hardy's novels as "the tension between the old rural worldand the new urban one."[2] Brown and Kettle are the two best critics of this period because they relate Hardy to the society he lived in instead of studying him in isolation as most critics do.

The standard image of Hardy which became established now saw him as the novelist of a vanishing way of life, with a nostalgic yearning for old-fashioned rural simplicity and a deep hostility to the disrupting forces of urbanism, industrialism, even education. Rural society up to about 1870 is seen as essentially good in Hardy in this view.

However, a few critics in the fiftys and sixtys questioned this view, for example John Holloway, Tony Tanner Dorothy Vanghent, J.C. Maxwell to mention a few. They did not see the novels as "just a growing preoccupation with the rural problem nor even a growing sense that an earlier way of life was inevitably vanishing."[3] They offered some brilliant analyses of the pattern of imagery and symbol in the novels as constituting their essential core of meaning, their reality. These critics strongly reacted against the thematic approach, they counter-balanced this approach

[2]Douglas Brown, Op.cit., p.89.

[3]John Holloway: The Chartered Mirror, London, 1950, pp.95-96.

and looked into Hardy's novels as basically conveying meaning through a play of symbol and word. They saw the movement and organism of Hardy's novels as poetical and imaginative expressed in metaphorical terms.

This rivalry between the thematic/and metaphorical approaches which was so evident in Hardy criticism in the fiftys and sixtys will form the major theme of my study in this chapter. It is a story of reaction by the Second group of critics to the historicism of the first group.

Richard Jefferies, a remarkable and unjustly neglected writer has often been compared with Hardy as a novelist who was a great observer of country life. The essays Jefferies wrote in the early eighteen seventies gave a clear picture of his growing dissatisfaction with the conditions of village life. He made several suggestions in these early essays for improving things. In 1888 appeared his most solid work to date, "Hodge and his Masters." 'Hodge' was the popular name for the whole body of agricultural labourers in England. It was Hardy who criticised this concept - 'the pitiable dummy known as Hodge' - because he felt that it lumped together many thousands of human beings who were actually very different. In his later essays he became more and more radical and his conception of history revealed by these essays, is quite complex and shows how completely he had changed in the long years of struggle

and suffering since he wrote the Coate letters to 'The Times' :

> The History of the last hundred years not the mere base chronicle of the movements of kings and queens of armies, but the cause of the heavings and throbbings of the nations, has been written in blood by the workman's tool. The future growing as inevitably out of the present as the tree from the acorn, will be shaped by the voices sounding from the bench, the mine and the plough.[4]

It was Douglas Brown's '<u>Thomas Hardy</u>' published in 1954 which called attention in a major way to the traditionalist basis of Hardy's novels. It appeared to Brown that it was necessary to establish an agricultural rather than intellectual background to Hardy's works.

Brown in his brief biographical sketch speaks of Hardy's formative years as happy ones. "He combined, he would say later, in the twenty-four hours of a day, "the professional life, the scholar's life,and the rustic life.[5] Brown saw the central theme of Hardy's novels as a clash between the old rural world and the new urban one. This pattern reveals Hardy's dismay at the predicament of the agricultural community in the south of England during the last part of the nineteenth century and at the precarious hold of the agricultural way of life. This situation forms the substance of Hardy's important fiction and illustrates

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[4]Douglas Brown: <u>Thomas Hardy</u>, p.3.

[5]<u>Ibid.</u>, p.3.

his response to history. The twenty-five years of rural collapse and dismay, says Brown, were the years of the compo-sition of his novels. The details of each work refer directly or by implication to the contemporary environment, and the story of each makes imaginative comment upon the contemporary catastrophe.

Brown insists that Hardy is in no way "a philosophical novelist, he disclaimed the pretension."[6] He argues that Hardy's narrative art "takes both its material and its vitality from the agricultural, rather than from the philosophical context."[7]

In Brown's treatment of the novels he says "Not only 'Tess' and 'Jude' but each of the great Wessex novels treats in imaginative form of the defeat of our peasantry and the collapse of our agriculture."[8] The causes for the collapse concern us little, here. But brown was deeply concerned with the human consequences and so under two headings emerged Hardy's major themes according to him.

> The tragedy of the exodus of the agricultural workers from the villages and the countryside, and what the tragedy represents, forms one of Hardy's continual themes. Secondly, behind the exodus, the desertion of the countryside and the decline of husbandry, we should perceive a more fundamental issue.[9]

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[6] Douglas Brown: <u>Op.cit.</u>, p.32.

[7] <u>Ibid.</u>, p.32.

[8] <u>Ibid.</u>, p.36.

[9] <u>Ibid.</u>, pp.37-38.

It was Richard Haggard who suggested a modest solution to the problem of the progressive deterioration of the race: "England's greatest safeguard lies in the recreation of a yeomen class rooted in the soil and supported by the soil."[10]

Brown therefore sees Hardy's narrative impulse as positively nostalgic. One can detect a disturbed and uneasy memory working like a catalyst upon the substance of the past, and therefore the country natures Hardy drew so memorably - Oak's, Herchard's, Marty South's - impinge upon the reader's consciousness from time to time with a certain urgency. They are creations, says Brown, who answered to a deep need in their creator for reassurance for solidarity with a more secure, more limited, more fortifying past. They are personalities mentioned "by the trditional agricultural society. There is a blend of nostalgia and imaginative vision."[11] Through Oak, Winterbourne, Henchard and Tess, Hardy seeks to express his understanding of the potential value of agricultural life and to celebrate the naturalness of men and women engaged in the skills and necessities of agriculture.

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[10]Douglas Brown: Op.cit, p.38.

[11]Ibid.,

In dealing with Hardy's first important novel Under the Greenwood Tree, brown states that "productive agricultural life provides the essential material."[12] Hardy originally meant to call it ('more appropriately', he said in the 1912 preface) 'The Mellstock Quire' instead of the romantic title he gave it later. It is as much the choir's story as 'the attractive tale of Fancy and her three lovers'. The old, stable order is passing from agricultural life: this is the impression made so vivid by the fate of the choir. The daily labour and the crafts and the music-making of these men and women are bound up with their traditional beliefs and customs. When the urban invader, Maybold, dismisses the choir, they are helpless and inarticulate before him. Says Brown, "for a moment or two the scene stirs the depths. Hardy has contrived a felicitious image for his feeling, and he develops it reticently."[13] The old order passes and against the tale of Fancy and her three lovers. In her choice between Maybold and Dick, Hardy nowhere elaborates what is at stake while the girl delays. The whole narrative folds gently into an incident rich with metaphorical suggestion: the moment of hesitation, during the wedding festivities, between

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[12] Douglas Brown: Op.cit., p.45.

[13] Ibid.,

the old and the new fashion of bridal walk. The old is chosen. A similar suggestion hovers about the tree which presides over the opening and closing scenes. The latter standing for continuity, for countless generations of animals and birds. With all this one thing is suggested says Brown "that although the old, stable order is passing, the sounds for restoration may still be tapped. The loss, the dismay, is not yet tragic, and the deliberate framing of the tale to suggest hope balances the insistence upon dying traditions."[14]

Once again in Far From the Madding Crowd, Brown praises Hardy's "grasp of village psychology", and illuminate the limits within which his narrative art functions most happily. Brown sees Hardy's skill as conventional. The account uses and blends the conventions both of the ballad and the Victorian novel. Bathsheba, he says dominates the novel, not as a human personality created and explored with the searching art of the classical novelist, but as someone "present to a balladist's imagination, confidently taken for granted as what she seems to be, recognized by the gesture of the hand, the inflexion of the voice; even the gradual transformation of her nature under the impress of suffering reveals itself

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[14]Douglas Brown: Op.cit., pp.47-48.

in dramatic strokes."[15]

The agricultural context controls the force of the tale. The choral interludes of the fields and the malthouse, of calves and lambs, the seasons of the fair, of the harvest, the sheepwashing, the grinding, the shearing, the hiving all depict. Hardy's sense of the facts of village life. These in turn point out the wider implications of the agricultural skills and traditions in the moment of the precipitate decline of the agricultural society.

Brown sees in the novel one essential factor and that is whatever be the forces of antagonism, the thatching and the binding, the reaping and the stacking, go on. The old values persist, Oak embodies that persistence. Oak becomes the strongest, clearest image for the steadfastness that, in his own person, he continually represents through the novel by his role in agricultural life."[16]

Douglas Brown is perhaps wrong in seeing Troy as a destructive urban figure invading a peaceful agricultural community. for one thing he is not the only destructive

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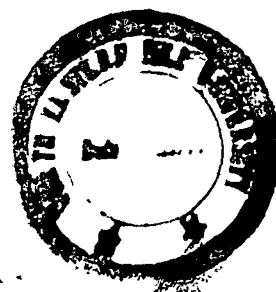
[15] Douglas Brown: Op.cit., p.49

[16] Ibid.,



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force in the community. Boldwood is in many ways equally negative. Troy's links are not so much with cities - he has grown up in Casterbridge as with the army and the aristocracy. He is an earl's illegitimate son, in many ways a preliminary sketch for Alec d'Urverville and his treatment of Fanny is much the same as Alec's of Tess. Moreover, he represents none of the qaualities of education and modernisation which Brown associates with urban influence. But nevertheless, Troy is one of the destructive forces which shatter the peace of the community. The Return of the Native, Brown sees Egdon Heath performing a constructive function. The Heath it appeas nourishes the very vitality and stability it would threaten to destroy; and the vitality and the stability together penetrate the interchange of voices from which the tale emerges.

Venn, Brown says, is a character deeply loved by Hardy and connected with the intimacies and the routines of agricultural life. Hardy represents him with detached accuracy as a particular practioner of a particular trade. Hardy is emphasising the positive values of a disappearing way of life.

> He was one of a class rapidly becoming extinct in Wessex, filling at present in the rural world the place which, during the last century the dodo occupied in the world of animals. He is a curious, interesting, and nearly perished link between obsolete forms of life and those which generally prevail.[17]

Clym according to Brown is a key figure,. He is the most direct representative of the novelist's strongest impulse in its simplest form: 'the return from town to country, and the rejection of urban life.'[18] The wholeheartedness of the native's return home is clear. Clym had been so inwoven with the heath in his boyhood. Finally, his readjustment includes a period of working on the heath as a furze-cutter, which Douglas Brown sees as 'the end of Clym's pilgrimate.'[19]

Clym's blindness, which is never completely cured, is an emblem of his spiritual condition and of the images of light and darkness which keep recurring throughout the book. 'you are blinded, Clym,' his mother tells him when he falls in love with Eustacia, the representative of darkness who nearly frustrates his best aims. Although he is the most enlightened character in the novel, he is intellectually blind in some respects right to the

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[17]Douglas Brown: Op.cit., p.58.

[18]Ibid., p.59.

[19]Ibid., p.61.

end. Yet ultimately Clym is seen as the noblest character in the book and as a genuine popular teacher, speaking 'in simple language' about 'the opinions and actions common to all good men.' Brown calls this teching 'the traditional morality of Egdon.'[20]

There are other instances of the deeply rooted communal life expresed in the bon-fire ritual and the wedding rejoicings, in the mumming, and the fair, and the effigy. And it is this life, says Brown, that will persist, 'through whatever catastrophe, numbed, but strong.'[21]

The mayor of Casterbridge says Brown acknowledges the bitter situation of agriculture in contemporary England. Casterbridge has often been somewhat idealised, which is all the easier to do as it is in many ways only a glorified village — 'the pole, focus, or nerve centre of the surrounding country life.' According to Brown:

> Casterbridge is an image of Dorchester, the town of Hardy's youth, and his presentation of it derives from local recollection, a turning from the precarious present back to a stable past.[22]

[20]Douglas Brown: Op.cit., p.60

[21]Ibid., p.63.

[22]Ibid., p.64.

Hardy's initial theme as depicted in The Mayor and as explained by Brown "is the tale of the struggle between the native countryman and the alien invader, of the defeat of dull courage and traditional attitudes by insight, craft, and the vicissitudes of nature, and of the persistence through that defeat of some deep layer of vitality in the country protagonist."[23]

Casterbridge and its folk and the feeling for the community's life come first. The market town of the past has its origin in the needs of agriculture. 'Casterbridge was the complement of the rural life around; not its urban opposite.'[24] The common folk of Casterbridge make another great contribution. Men going about their daily affairs, the flurry, the chatter, the sights and sounds will be remembered. The vigour and colloquial strength of this little community of coices becomes personal in the speech of figures such as Mrs. Cuxsom, Abel Whittle, and the furmity woman, and more personal still in Henchard himself.

In The Woodlanders "the tale tells of the choice between agricultural life and the lure of the town, the lure of 'rising in the world', confronting a country

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[23]Douglas Brown: Op.cit., pp.65-66.

[24]Ibid., p.65.

girl; and the outcome of the story embodies imaginatively the implications of the choice made."[25]

Brown describes Hardy's treatment of earlier Novels of Character and Environment as dealing extensively with past times. But _The woodlanders_ and _Tess_ have for their setting "the years of the contemporary agricultural tragedy."[26] The simplicity and force of its conception has given _Tess_ "a legendary quality." The tragedy described is the tragedy of a proud community baffled and defeated by processes beyond its understanding or control. The resonance of the tale, says Brown, "makes itself felt over and over again."[27] The superb opening, the death of Prince the lovely elegiac scene of the harvesting, the sequence in the dairy farm, the scene of the sleep-walking, the episodes of agricultural life at Flintcomb Ash, are powerful and original imaginative inventions.

The opening of _Tess_ which is entirely his own inventions is "at once substantial with social and historical perceptions, and quick with metaphorical life."[28] There is the legendary quality in the May Dance. It evokes country mirth springing from traditional ways and reliance upon cultural processes. The three ominous

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[25] Douglas Brown: _Op.cit._, p.~~89~~ 71.

[26] _Ibid._, 89.

[27] _Ibid._, p.90.

[28] _Ibid._, 91.

visitors, the appearance of the spurious country squire, the masquerader, the economic intruder are all immages destroying the basis of agricultural security. Alongside this image Brown writes:

> There unfolds that of the old father's discovery of his ancient but unavailing ancestry: a disclosure of the community's past which helps to define what Tess represents in the ensuing tale, at the same time as it sharpens the intrusive and invading quality in Alec d'Urberville.[29]

Brown sees that the novel centres on the significance of Tess's d'Urbervilles blood. It is assumed that her tragedy consists in her family's loss of its ancestral inheritance: that her being a real d'Urberville and Alec a fake one symbolises the ruin and betrayal of the old aristrocracy by a new urban class, bent on exploiting the land. Irving Howe, a critic belonging to this era holds a similar view for he sees a deep significance in Alec's unauthorised use of the d'Urberville name.

Finally, Brown sees the erasure of long local life by the contemporary migrants "as a grave social and spiritual loss."[30]

Hardy's last and most abused novel is even today, one of the most undervalued. The contemporary critics

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[29] Douglas Brown: Op.cit., p.91.

[30] Ibid., p.97.

hated it. Douglas Brown speaks of its failure of total imaginative organisation and sums up:

> Jude the Obscure has deflected attention away from Hardy's most distinguished and personal contribution to the English novel and towards a small part of his achievement . . . that part, however serious is less distinguished, and it cannot be comparison with the achievements of his greatest contemporaries.[31]

It seems a failure to Brown because it is not, like the earlier novels, based on rural society but begins with the flight from it.

This is the way in which Brown sees the central theme of Hardy's novels as 'the tension between the old rural world and the new urban one.' Merryn Williams in Thomas Hardy and Rural England (1972) challenged this view. But, Douglas Brown convincingly sees Hardy as a novelist of a vanishing way of life, with a nostalgic yearning for old fashioned rural simplicity and a deep hostility to the distruptive forces of urbanism. So the novels are placed in a given historical context. Douglas Brown calls this "the contemporary agricultural tragedy," and there are other critics who betray a romantic view of the old rural England. Irving Howe esablishes this most clearly:

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[31] Quoted by Merryn Williams: A Preface to Hardy. Preface books, Longmans 1976.

> The world of Thomas Hardy's youth . . . . . was another world, an earlier England. It was rural, traditional, fixed in old country ways, rituals and speech. England was then deep into the convulsive transformations of the Industrial Revolution, the reform movement known as Chartism was stirring many people and frightening many more; but in the Dorset country side ..... one might almost have supposed that human nature was changeless, unaffected by history of technology, flowing through the centuries like stately procession of verwies and recurrences.[32]

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It is true, changes did come of course - the first railroad, new machines, new methods, new men would be reaching into the countryside. The slow incursion of such novelties and threats forms a major theme in Hardy's fiction. It was necessary for a man who was steeped in country tradition to "recall the earlier days as a time of charm, peace and social unity."[33] HJe remembers and releases his nostalgia of this historical change with pathos and unrivalled knowledge. For:

> Growing older into his late adolescence he found himself gradually moving away from that culture: not at all what we might today call "alienated" but aware that he was marked by some personal social differences.[34]

It was the world of his youth that Hardy always

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[32]Irving Howe: Thomas Hardy. Masters of World Literature Series, Louis Kronenberger, General editor, Collier books, New York, 1966, p.1

[33]Ibid., p.2

[34]Ibid., p.3

wanted to be with. Irving Howe explains it thus "Hardy's most gratifying memories, vividly preserved into old age, were of the customs, work and pleasures of this country world."[35]

Irving Howe traces the source of that darkness of spirit, that near sense of cosmic desolation that encloses Hardy's work. His two strongest influences - his formative years in Dorset in an atmosphre of traditional rural life as yet untouched by reform and modernism, and the pressures of the philosophical skepticism of the nineteenth century - converge in Hardy's writing, and in Professor Howe's view, it is this strange union that partly explains his appeal to the modern reader.

Wessex as Professor Howe explains:

> Represented for him the seemliness of an ordered existence, of all that is natural rooted and tried .... a traditionalist writer whose deepest affinities are with farmlands, animals, rocks, hills and simple people who live among them ..... In the world of Wessex there survives the memory of a life in which nature and society are at peace. A sense of the past, like a heavy aroma lingers over this land — since stretches out as a vast gray coridor into the beyond the historical past ..... The past lives on, a repository of history but also something else, something not always to be grasped through the categories

[35] Irwing Howe: Op.cit., p.3

> of history. For here in Wessex long stretches of the past can be seen as embodying the sameness and continuity, the unifying rhythms, of a human existence that extends beneath or beyond the agitation of the historical processes.[36]

In short, as Professor Howe puts it, Hardy's novels are autonomous (symbolical), not historical, *recalling what is gone. so the past lives on as a repository of history, but also something else, something* not always to be grapsed through the categories of history. "For Hardy, what is essential in life is that which is repeated."[37] So memory is the most important faculty in his fiction, "past never seems pasting." He makes people of the past more immediate than those of the present.

Hardy was a reluctant witness to the gradual dissolution of "dear delightful Wessex" under the assaults of commerce and industrialism. It is no wonder says Howe:

> The more Hardy became aware of the thrust of social change, the more he felt a need to turn back to those memories of the past which could yield him a fund of stories, legends, superstitions, folk sayings and fragments of wisdom.[38]

It is in Jude the Obscure that Hardy leaves behind

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[36] Irving Howe: Op.cit., 17-18.

[37] Ibid., p.18.

[38] Ibid., p.19.

the rural world, in a desperate realization that he has lost his "homeland" to the machine, commerce and functional reality. The loss is a deep one "for it is a loss that represents radical estrangement, the death of a culture."[39]

It is no wonder the Wessex novels take the form not of historical fiction, but of fiction as research into the history of rural culture — not to be seen in a given historical context. What Hardy according to Professor Howe, gained was:

> A fictional world sharply contoured and superbly known, so that the very setting of his novels and poems seems a force making for dramatic control and personality ..... the fate of Wessex — as it came welling up in memory ..... Wessex was his fixed principle .... the constant about which he could manouver the modernist variables of rebellion and doubt — until by Jude the Obscure, Wessex too began to crumble in his imagination and the further writing of fiction became, for him, impossible.[40]

Perhaps, it was Irving Howe who gave a fresh impetus to future approaches to Hardy. For later critics were more aware of the fact that nineteenth century rural li:erature, therefore is not a pastoral survival, but a response to

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[39] Irving Howe: Op.cit., p.22.

[40] Ibid., p.24

a real situation. 'It is the product of perceived experience.'

Hardy knew the torments of doubt, the pain of discovering "that no idea can ever satisfy the desires that have given birth, the whole exhausting and draining effort of the intellectual life."[41] Such references, for example "the ache of modernism" (reference to Clym Yeobright's and Jude Fawley's troubles), "the chronic melancholy which is taking hold of the civilised races with the decline of belief in a beneficient power," and in Jude the Obscure that of the hero that a new breed of boys "unknown to the last generation" is springing up: "They seem to see all (of life's) terrors before they are old enough to resist them .... It is the beginning of the universal wish not to live."[42] Such insights led to a development of a philosophic structure which was far more striking than Hard's formal ideas. All this displays, says Professor Howe, "the presence of a writer who brings to bear upon his wnrk an enormous reserve of experience and reflection."[43]

Irving Howe sees Hardy's writing as a convergence of the "traditional and modern." This according to him is the most distinguishing trait of Hardy's fiction.

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[41] Irving Howe: Op.cit., p.60

[42] Ibid., p.30.

[43] Ibid., p.61.

Professor Howe states:

> The weight of the past looms large in Hardy's experience, and so too does the uncertainly of the modern world as he begins to glimpse it.[44]

As a result Hardy continues to live for he achieves a rare inclusiveness:

> The natural together with the historical the timeless with the time-bound, the inescapable limitations of all existence with the particular troubles of the moment.[45]

Referring to **Under the Greenwood Tree** Professor Howe states:

> Simply as a picture of a fading style of life, Hardy's book is superior to both: a masterpiece in miniature. This is Hardy in his happiest, if not greatest voice, the Hardy who writes with complete assurance about people and places he knows completely; and who writes unburdened by the obligation to be prophetic secrets or depths of character — not very concerned with the secrets or depths of anything - he is content to record the appearances of the natural world and the surfaces of human foible.[46]

Irving Howe declares **Far from the Madding Crowd**

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[44] Irving Howe: Op.cit., p.30

[45] Ibid., p.31.

[46] Ibid., p.46.

as being one of the novels which depicts the writers potentiality indicating how lively and various this book is. **Far From the Madding Crowd** displays Hardy's great gift as a writer of fiction — "his gift for those compressed incidents or miniature dramas, sometimes spoken and sometimes mere dumb show, which in a page or two illuminate whole stretches of experience."[47] Later, Hardy would speak of these as "moment of vision."

Virginia Woolf was the only other critic along with Irving Howe who praised the book for what it really is, a spectacle of country life brimming with a special energy and charm. Irving Home states that there is barely visible in the pages (of the novel) "the novelist of lassitude and despair" that one encounters in the later books.

The author here is completely absorbed with a flourishing rural community which is vigorous, rooted and productive. The maturity of the central characters is achieved through learning to live with the learning to modify the accepted social norms.

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[47] Irving Howe: Op.cit., p.52.

The Return of the Native is the first book says Howe, "in which Hardy reaches towards grandiose "literary" effects. Apart from the novelist serving as chronicler of Wessex, Hardy now brings to bear upon his little world an array of intellectual and historical pressures that were not to be seen in his earlier books. All that was stable and consolidated in the coiuntry is "shaken by voices of discontent, the bonds of social solidarity begin to loosen, the characters are overcome by feelings of boredom and estrangement and a new kind of sexuality, neurotically wilful but also perversely enticing, makes its appearance."[48] At no time says Howe does Hardy appear as a moralist. He watches over the men and women of Wessex with an almost maternal sympathy watching the endless alternation of effort and collapse, desire and denial, rebellion and defeat. The impulse to moral judgement is of no consequence to Hardy and matters very little. What matters in Hardy's world says Howe is "the large and recurrent rhythms of life, the rhythms of happiness and suffering" and then the fusion with the smaller incidents into which there are dramatically compressed. When Eustacia's hand quivered on tying her bonnet as the result of a quarrel with Clym, no amount of

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[48]Irving Howe: Op.cit., p.58.

effort could tie the strings but Clym came to her rescue and said, "Let me tie them." In that one fragment, as it displays the force of habit in marriage at the very moment of its dissolution, Hardy caught the essence of human pain. Says Howe: "Only a great novelist can fully apprehend such a moment, and only a great novelist can make it seem emblematic of our life."[49]

Irving Howe complements Hardy for his masterly portrayal of women. In dealing with them he was seldom inclined to plunge into the analytic depths which mark the treatment of feminine character in George Eliot's later novels. Throughout Hardy's fiction says Professor Howe "there is a curious power of sexual insinuation, almost as if he were not locked into the limits of masculine perception but could shuttle between, or for moments yoke together, the responses of the two sexes."[50] In the deepest level of his imagination, Hardy held to a vision of the feminine that was thoroughly traditional in celebrating" "the maternal, the protective, the tender, the life-giving." Professor Howe states that **Tess of the d'Urberville** comes through with the most striking vitality for the book "stands

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[49]Irving Howe: Op.cit., p.66.

[50]Ibid., p.109.

at the centre of Hardy's achievement."[51] It is because here the novelist stakes everything of his sensuous apprehension of a young woman's life. She is a girl who is at once a simple milkmaid and an archetype of feminine strength.

According to Professor Howe, Tess is a warm-hearted and unpretentions country girl barely troubled by intellectual ambition. She represents something more deeply rooted in the substance of instinctual life. She is the typical sentative of the Victorian cult of chastity. She is an absolute victim of her circumstances when she falls. But through a dialectic of negation, Tess reaches a purity of spirit even as she fails to satisfy the standards of the world. In conclusion Howe states: "Tess is one of the greatest examples we have in English literature of how a writer can take hold of a cultural stereotype and through the sheer intensity of his affection, pave and purify it into something that is morally ennobling."[52]

Irving Howe sees in the ciriticisms of Douglas Brown and Arnold Kettle and to a certain extent in

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[51] Irving Howe: Op.cit., p.109

[52] Ibid., p.110.

that of Dorothy Vanghent a "thematic overload". The first two critics, Brown with more subtlely than Kettle, approached Tess in a purely social context in which she acts out her ordeal. She is a victim of social disintegration and the book was looked upon as a social fable - that is a narrative in which attention is steadily being directed to a scheme of social relations behind the foreground events. But Irving Howe believes that central to the book is the figure of Tess herself for he states that she is one of the greatest triumphs of civilization. "A natural girl," Howe expatiates on the centrality of the girl:

> Tess is that rare creature in literature; goodness made interesting. She is human life stretched and racked yet forever springing back to renewal, and what must never be forgotten in thinking about her is that she is a pure woman.[53]

From **Far from the madding Crowd,** or even earlier, to **Jude the Obscure,** we can see Hardy's interest in complex, tormented, maladjusted being often set alongside comparatively stable and uncomplicated characters. In his book on Hardy, Howe suggests that in **The Return of the Native,** "a new kind of sexuality neurotically wilful but also perversely exciting makes its appearance.[54]

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[53]Irving Howe: Op.cit., p.130.

[54]Irving Howe: Thomas Hardy (Masters of Literature Series, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1968), p.58.

This vividly describes the quality of Eustacia's passions but it is not true to say that such passions appear here for the first time. It is there in Boldwood, and even in Miss Aldclyfee's brief Lesbian encounters in **Desperate Remedies**. In this respect, **The Return of the Native** is not a departure, but a continuation in the line of Hardy's development which was to culminate in **Jude and Obscure**. Howe continues: "a thick cloud - the cloud of modern, inherently problematic consciousness - falls across the horizon of Wessex."[55] It is certainly true that Hardy sees Clym as "a modern problematic consciousness."

In his treatment of **Jude the Obscure,** Howe explains that even though the account has mostly to do with the difficulty of human beings living elbow to elbow and heart to heart; the difficulty of being unable to bear prolonged isolation or prolonged closeness; and the difficulty for thinking men of getting through the unspoken miseries of daily life, the book must be viewed in the context of a historical background.

Wessex had always been for Hardy a sufficient moral and emotional support. Jude was the representative

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[55] Irving Howe: Thomas Hardy, p.58.

[56] Ibid., p.136.

of those 'working men' who began to train their minds after the Industrial Revolution. He is as Howe states "a sort of rural cousin of the self-educated workers."[56] It pained Hardy that Wessex and all it stood for was slipping out of his fingers for no longer did it seem to provide him something equivalent to a moral absolute. It now kept at a distance those of his character trouble by unrest. The intellectual disturbance of modern life is what roused Jude to excitement. So as Professor Howe states:

> Jude is Hardy's equivalent of the self-educated worker: the self-educated worker transplanted into the Wessex World.[57]

In his depiction of Jude's predicament, Hardy was foreshadowing not merely one man's deprivation but the turmoil of an entire social group. Howe goes on to state that: "Jude's personal drama is woven from the materials of historical change, the transformation and uprooting of traditional English life."[58]

The same holds true of Sue Bridehead. Professor Irving Howe views Sue as characteristic of a moment

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[57] Irving Howe: Op.cit. p.137.

[58] Ibid.,p.138.

in history. She is alive and is an intensely individualized figure because Hardy has placed her in a new historical situation. She is a woman who has changed radically from subordinate domesticity and Victorian repression Girl.

Between Jude and Sue, says Howe, there is a special closeness, and this too has been historically conditioned. Irving Howe believes that both are lost souls for they have no place in the world which they can cherish or from which they can retreat. The human character was being regarded as problematic, "open to far-reaching speculative inquiry, and perhaps beyond certain knowledge, that the character of someone like Sue Bridehead must be seen not as a coherent force realizing itself in self-consistent public action,but as an amorphous aid ill-charted arena in which irrational impulses conflict with one another, and that behind the interplay of events occupying the foreground of the novel there is a series of distorted psychic shadows which, with some wrenching, can be taken to provide the true'action' of the book."[59]

Hardy might have been thinking on these lines-his

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[59]Irving Howe: Op.cit. p.141.

new characters were persons who felt more estranged from society. Professor Howe explains, "Hardy comes at the end of one tradition . . . . but he also comes at the beginning of another tradition, that of the literary 'modernism' which would dominate the twentieth country."[60] In personal background, novelistic technique choice of locale and characters Hardy remains mostly of the past; but in his distinctive sensibility,he is partly of the future.

Irving Howe sees Hardy as a man who "seemed like the very embodiment of traditional verities and styles."[61] Professor Howe in his critical examination of Hardy sees both his formative years in Dorset in an atmosphere of traditional rural life, and the pressures of the philosophical skepticism of the Nineteenth Century converging in the Wessex Novels. Howe's study of Hardy is a strongly compassionate and knowledgeable reading of the novelist.

The next thematic critic was Arnold Kettle. He saw that Hardy at least did have a philosophy and that there was a basis for his pessimism — the pessimism of the Wessex peasant who sees his world and his values being destroyed.

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[60]Irving Howe: Op.cit. p.139.
[61]Ibid., p.190.

Arnold Kettle's asessment of Hardy came in an essay entitled: Thomas Hardy: Tess of the d'Urbervilles (1953). At the very outset of this study Kettle sees the central theme of **Tess** as "The destruction of the English peasantry."[62]

Arnold Kettle reads **Tess** as a novel with a thesis. The thesis is that:

> In the course of the nineteenth century the disintegration of the peasantry — a process which had its roots deep in the past — had reached its final and treagic stage. With the extension of capitalist farming the old yeoman class of small holders or peasants, with their traditions of independence and their own native culture, was bound to disappear. The developing forces of history were too strong for them and their way of life. And because that way of life had been proud and deep-rooted its destruction was necessarily painful and tragic. **Tess** is the story and they symbol of that destruction.[63]

Throughout **Tess** there is an immediate and insistent emphasis on historical process so that Kettle says, "from the start the characters are not seen merely as individuals."[64] Therefore, Arnold Kettle emphasises the fact that the novel is not the story of any personal tragedy but is "the expression of a generalized ~~hx~~ human situation in history."[65] Tess's parents belong

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[62] Arnold Kettle: Thomas Hardy: Tess of the d'Urbervilles, An Introduction to the English Novel: Vols. 2, London, Autchinsow, 1953, p.50.

[63] Ibid., p.51.

[64] Ibid., p.52.

to a class ranking above the farm-labourers, a set of people who owed a certain stability of aim and conduct have fallen on hard times. Their difficulty and hardship is made worse by the accident in which their horse is skilled. This very accident says Kettle "is a striking symbol of the struggles of the peasantry."[66] The discovery by John Durbeyfield of his ancestry is not just an introductory comic scene. It states says Kettle "the basic theme of the novel - what the Durbeyfields have been and what they become."[67] Such instances in Kettle's account like the "club walking" scene contrasted with the May Day dances of the past and early pagan rites are all given significance almost wholly in terms of history.

Great significance is given to the comparison between Tess and her mother. Joan Durbeyfield lives in the peasant folk-lore of the past, Tess has been to a National School, says Hardy "When they were together the Jacobean and the Victorian ages were juxtaposed."[68] Another situation that is symbolic of the historical process at work in the sacrifice of Tess to d'Urberville.

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[65] Arnold Kettle: Op.cit., p.52.
[66] Ibid., p.51.
[67] Ibid., p.52.
[67] Ibid., p.52.
[68] Ibid., p.52.

From the moment of her seduction by d'Urberville, Tess's story becomes a hopeless struggle, against overwhelming odds. Tess's cry when she sees the d'Urberville is "I thought we were all an old family; but this is all new."[69] It carries a world of irony. Her going over to the d'Urberville's is symbolic. Says Arnold Kettle:

> Tess prepared to become, since change she must a worker handed over by her mother to the life and the mercies of the ruling class.[70]

Finally, the treatment she succumbs to at the hands of Angel Clare, turns out to be more cruel than that of d'Urberville the aggressor. Says Arnold Kettle, that the function of all these situations in the novel "is to stress the social nature of Tess's destiny and its typicality."[71] Even after Angel has left her the social degradation of Tess continues. The threshing scene, for example, says Kettle, is "a symbol of the dehumanized relationships of the new capitalist forms."[72]

The final blow to Tess's attempt to maintain her self-respect comes with the death of her father

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[69]Arnold Kettle: Op.cit., p.53.
[70]Ibid., p.53.
[71]Ibid., p.54.
[72]Ibid., p.54.

and the consequent expulsion of the Durbeyfield family from their cottage. This is symbolic, for Hardy explains the significance of a life-holder losing his holders:

> But as the long holdings fell in they were seldom again let to similar tenants and were mostly pulled down, if not absolutely required by the farmer for his lands. . . . . These families, who had formed the backbone of the village life in the past, who were the depositories of the village traditions, had to seek refuge in the large centres; the process humorously designated by statisticians as "the tendency of the rural population towards the large towns," being really the tendency of water to flow uphill where forced by machinery.[73]

Further, the style of this novel catches Kettle's attention. He praises Hardy's "understanding, his deep instinctive comprehension of the fate of the Wessex peasants."[74] But coupled with his profound instinctive "understanding" is the inclusion of his philosophic comment on life in general. This 'loading of the dice' with philosophy affects the book, in general for the worse. As a result says Kettle, Hardy's 'conscious philosophy', accounts for the "unduly long arm of coincidence and the inclusion of half-digested classical allusion's tend towards the psychological weaknesses."[75] But Arnold Kettle concludes:

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[73]Arnold Kettle: Op.cit., p.55.

[74]Ibid., p.63-64.

[75]Ibid., p.64.

> From the social understanding emerges the strength of the novel, the superb revelation of the relation of men to nature, the haunting evocation of the Wessex landscape not as a blackcloth but as the living challenging material of human existence and the profoundly moving story of the peasant Tess.[76]

Arnold Kettle sees Tess emerging as a fine novel, a moral fable, the most moving expression in English literature - of the destruction of the peasant world.

Raymond William came forward with his assessment of the novelist in an essay, Thomas Hardy (1964), published in the Critical Quarterly. He saw Hardy as being an observer and chronicler of "landowners, tenat farmers, dealers, craftsmen and labourers."[77] He was not writing for them, but about them, to a mainly metropolitan and unconnected literary public. Raymond Williams admits that in the period from George Eliiot to Hardy the English countryside underwent radical changes, but he seems most concerned with the economics of the change. William says:

> The profound disturbances that Hardy records cannot then be seen in the sentimental terms of a pastoral: the contrast between country and town.

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[76] Arnold Kettle: Op.cit., p.64.

[77] Raymund Williams: Thomas Hardy. Critical Quarterly, Vol. 6, No.4, 1964. p.342.

> The exposed and separated individuals, whom Hardy puts at the centre of his fiction, are only the most developed cases of a general exposure and separation. Yet they are never merely illustrations of this change in a way of life. Each has a dominant personal history, which in psychological terms bears a direct relation to the social character of the change.[78]

William's thesis is rather lop-sided as pointed out by later Hardy critics. He ignores the special quality of Hardy's idiom and the meaning of his dramatic setting which symbolise Hardy's interest in the enduring structures of rural life. The Roman ruins and burrows, the pre-historic monuments in Hardy's landscape are symbolic of his sense of the contemporareity of the past.

Philip Larkin in his essay: "Wanted: Good Hardy Critic (1966); has declared that though the principal post-Eliot poets (Auden, Betjeman, Dylan Thomas) have acknowledged Hardy's power, the century's principal critics have really shown little interest in him."[79] He declares Eliot to be hostile, Leavis patronising, Wilson, Empson, Blackmur, Trilling — none has been other than neglectful. Larkin adds:

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[78]Raymund Williams: Op.cit., p.350.

[79]Philip Larkin: Wanted Good Hardy Critic. Critical Quarterly, Vol. 8, No.2. Summer 1966, p.174.

> And the roll-call on the other side - Lord David Cecil, Edmund Blunden, Lascelles Abercrombie, Webster, Guerard, Hawkins - does not on the whole have the penetration of intelligence and sensibility that would command confidence.[80]

Philip Larkin has criticised a good deal of modern Hardy criticism because of its tendency to thrive on the difficult. Most often Larkin points out that the typical role of the modern critic "is to demonstrate that the author has said something other than he intended."[81]

Larkin does not agree with Frank Morrell'sd argument that "the characteristic" trail present in Hardy's works in his "gaiety". But Larkin replies:

> In my view it is suffering or sadness, and extended consideration of the centrality of suffering in Hardy's work should be the first duty of the true critic, for which the work is still waiting.[82]

Larkin felt that Hardy was peculiarly well equipped to perceive the melancholy, the misfortunate, the frustrating, the failing elements of life. Therefore Larkin makes a suggestion to future critics that in their assessment of the novelist, they must seek first

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[80] Philip Larkin: Op.cit., p.174.

[81] Ibi., p.174.

[82] Ibid., p.177.

of all the determine what element is perculiarly his. Further, which imaginative note he strikes most effectively.

> It would follow that the presence of pain in Hardy's novel is a positive, not a negative quality - not the mechanical working out of some pre-determined allegiance to permission or any other concept but the continual imaginative celebration of what is both the truest and the most important element in life, most important in the sense of most necessary to spiritual development.[83]

Therefore, Philip Larkin calls for a better and more positive approach to Hardy and so the title "Wanted: Good Hardy Critic."

Quite contrary to the view held by Douglas Brown, Irwing Howe, Arnold Kettle and Philip Larkin we have another approach that helped in the progress of Hardy criticism. To this group belong John Holloway, Dorothy Van Ghent and Tony Tanner.

John Holloway the first of this group of critics came forward with his new approach to Hardy in a book entitled **The Victorian Sage** (1953). The book was part of the critic's attempt to analyze the philosophy and the rhetoric in the works of six great Victorians

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[83]Philip Larkin: Op.cit., p.178.

— Carlyle, Disraeli, George Eliot, Newman, Arnold and Thomas Hardy. John Holloway's attempts to combine a study of ideas with a study of rhetorical devices, of the ways in which certain kinds of writers put across their view of life with a wholeness and an immediacy not available to the mere logician and philosopher.

The thematic critics tried to approach Hardy as one "who registered the impact upon rural England of a great historical change, which went to the very roots of life."[84] Their significant emphasis was on the decline of British agriculture, which brought about a radical change in rural life. The majority of Hardy's novels were seen in the context of history. However, this view of the clash between the old rural world and the new urban one of the destruction of peasantry was soon questioned by critics like John Holloway, Dorothy Van Ghent and Tony Tanner who thought this was overplayed. John Holloway best introduces the new approach:

> They (the novels) suggest not just a growing pre-occupation with the rural problem, nor even a growing sense that an earlier way of life was inevitably

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[84]John Holloway: Hardy's Major Fiction. From the Austen to Joseph Conrad (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1959) edited by Robert Rathburn and Martin Steimann, Jr., copyright 1958. Reprinted in Hardy: Twentieth Century Views, edited by Albert J. Guerard, p.52.

> vanishing. A gathering realization that the earlier may did not possess the inner resources upon which to make a real right for its existence. The old order was not just a less powerful mode of life than the new, but ultimately helpless before it through inner defect.[85]

John Holloway's discussion of the novels in another account entitled "Hardy's Major Fiction" (1959), virtually ignores Hardy's rich and intimate contact with the rural tradition and his profound dependence upon, and loyalty to, its characteristic virtues. Hardy's 'View of Life' has been expounded, re-interpreted, and attacked many times over, often so fully that a good deal has also been said of how plot, character, dialogue or setting enrich expression. In short, in the past says Holloway:

> Hardy is familiar in two quite different roles as chronicling a ghastly world of planless and ironic Fate, and as recording all the interest and variety even charm of rustic life.[86]

Holloway believes that something more important was yet to be said "about the quality of events, the feel of them, than about their course."[87]

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[85]John Holloway: Op.cit., p.53.

[86]John Holloway, Hardy, The Victorian Sage : Studies in Argument, London: Macmillan, 1953, p.245.

[87]Ibid., p.245.

One of the first things that Holloway states "is that Hardy is both a philosopher and a moralist[88] "a good number of critics ignored this aspect because they felt that Hardy could never have deep and arnest convictions. They thought him "irreligious or scandalous".[89]

Holloway agrees with Albert J. Guerand that much of what Hardy has written is lost through excessive interest in Hardy's philosophy. Several times Hardy deviced that he was advancing any general theory of things. Holloway agrees that balance should be struck between Hardy's desire not to be seen as a theorizing philosopher, and his clear conception of himself as somehow giving expression to a "philosophy" all the same. This can be done. Holloway concludes here that:

> A Hardy novel is not an argument because it is an impression. Not idle nonsense but the work in all sincerity of purpose of one who though modestly 'a mere tale-teller' is nevertheless a thinker and a realist, and writes down how the things of the world strike him.[90]

The essence of John Holloway's approach to Hardy rests on the assumption that his novels convey immense meaning through play, symbol and words. An understanding of the real significance of any novel will be understood

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[88] Ibid., p.245.
[89] Ibid., p.245.
[90] Quoted by John Holloway: The Victorian Sage, p.246.

in terms of its theme. Only within the frame work of this central desire can the real significance of the detail (incident imagery, metaphor, local contrast) be grasped at all.

Critics in the past noted that a major flow in Hardy's Novels was in the numerous unexpected or apparently unlikely incidents Holloway justified the inclusion of such incidents. At first he said "they may seem improbable," but these symbolic incidents not to seem vain and artificial. Hardy must in some way persuade his readers that his wider range of observation is not fanciful but justified seriously. Thus the cock-crow Tess leaves the dairy with her husband after the wedding although it is afternoon and a heron flying above Mrs. Yeobright just when she is exhausted and at the point of death symbolises the happy release from earth to heaven that she has began to long for. Holloway says:

> Hardy's success or failure in these incidents can only be judged against his whole view of the quality of human life and the human environment. Our response to the detail must be coloured by our enduring sense of what is meditated all in all.[92]

Further, John Holloway reports that in Hardy's novels nature is not a mere backdrop, a contrivance

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[91] *Ibid.*, p.251.

we are invited to admire for its pictures queness. Nor is nature a mere cluster of inert objects, something "out there", to be apprehended as a pleasing but mute surface. In the best of Hardy's novels, John Holloway observes that nature emerges as:

> An organic living whole, and its constituent parts, even the inanimate parts have a life and personality of their own. Secondly, it is unified on a great scale through both time and space. Thirdly, it is exceedingly complex and varied, full of unexpected details of many different kinds - details that are sometimes even quaint on bizarre. Fourthly, for all that, these hetrogeneous things are integrated, however obscurely, into a system of rigid and undeviating law.[92]

In short, Holloway stresses the "incessant animation of nature" and this makes Hardy's work quite distinctive. All the details given "accumulate imperceptibly; and little by little creates in the readers mind a sense of the system of Nature which no general description could conceivably evoke."[93]

John Holloway describes Hardy's brilliant method of illustrating how nature is more animated. This he does by the use of "figurative language". It is common and varied and very important in Hardy's work. The use of metaphors says Holloway "do something to reinforce

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[92] Ibid., p.252.

[93] Ibid., p.255.

the impression that Nature has a quasi-human life".[94] Most often Hardy's use of figurative language are all variations on one theme.

Hardy's similes and metaphors not only spread through space, but also vast in time. Egdon Heath and the landscape says Holloway "seems to belong to the world of the carbonieferous period".[95] The Earthwork of Casterbridge, Founways the ancient cross roads in Jude the Obscure, Bathsheba's medieval barn are all examples "of this age long permanence and continuity of things."[96]

In terms of the individual, he is part of the landscape and is subject to the system and operations of nature. John Holloway did not fail to see "how Hardy suggests the intimacy of the link between man and his environment by apparently quite trivial details which rely for effect on synobolism."[97] In Hardy's use of symbols and images, figurative language like the 'man-and-tree comparison (Grace and Fitzpiers), the man river comparison (Tess and Clare), and comparison with birds and animals. All have been given to reinforce one impression of Hardy's sense of man set in nature. More often

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[94] Ibid.p.257.
[95] Ibid., p.241.
[96] Ibid., p.261.
[97] Ibid., p.267.

such comparisons confirm that sense of the unexpected and bizarre. For Holloway says: "If Nature's life is half-human life for Hardy is half like that of birds and animals."[98]

Holloway believes that the Mayor of Casterbridge is Hardy's best work. It is distinctive says Holloway because "it certainly creates and sustains Hardy's picture of nature, and especially man in nature."[99] Casterbridge further has all the qualitaties most prominent in Hardy's notion of Nature itself. Holloway says that, "it is easily the most comprehensive portrait of a human society in his work. The whole town is "rooted in a tract of countryside."[100] There is organic interfusion between the town and its surroundings Casterbridge was the complement of the rural life around; not its urban opposite. Ultimately, that is, says Holloway "Hardy shows us South Wessex in this novel as from the standpoint of human society, a single organism."[101]

John Holloway sums up Hardy's trend of one novel after another as they portray the same scale of values.

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[98] Ibid., p.269.
[99] Ibid., p.288.
[100] Ibid., p.272.
[101] Ibid., p.275.

> To adapt one's life to ones traditional situation is good, to reproot ('deracine') oneself for material ends is bad, to do so for romantic passion or any abstract ideal is of anything worse.[102]

Dorothy Vanghent was another outstanding critic of Hardy's novels. She treats Hardy's novels as a tissue of symbolic or imagistric constituents forming a pattern "deeper than lines of national cause and effect."[103] But unlike so many other symbol hunting critics, she did not regards symbolism in Tess as mere literary expediency but saw it arising out of the cultural compulsions behind the tale. Dorothy Venghent states:-

> It is Hardy's incorruptible feeling for the actual that allows his symbolism its amazingly blunt privileges and that at the same time subdues it to and absorbs it into the concrete circumstance of experience, real as touch."[104]

Dorothy in her brilliant analysis of the pattern of imagery and symbol in the novel shares a certain uneasiness with her predecessors about the philosophical voice in on over the narrative. A voice which Willian R. Rutland described as "augumentative" theological dogmatic, philosophical or what you will, but which

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[102]Ibid., p.286.

[103]Dorothy Vanghent: Tess of the d'Urbervilles. From the English Novel: Form and Function 1953. Reprinted in Hardy: Twentieth Century Views, edited by Albert J. Guernard, f.84.

[104]Ibid., p.8.

is not intrinsic to the picture"[105] has repeatedly come under fire even in the most sympathetic criticism of the novels. Bits of 'Philosophical adhesive tape' have been contrasted with "the deeply animated vision of experience"[106] in the narrative.

However, she devotes a major section of her account to Hardy's use of symbols. For example, Vanghent's account throws light on the metaphorical function of "the heath" in The Return and the Roman ruins round about the town of Casterbridge. In the first case she says:

> The heath exists peripherally and gratuitously in relation to the action, on the one hand as the place where the action happens to happen and on the other as a metaphor - a metaphorical reflection of the loneliness of human motive of the inertia of unconscious life, of the mystery of the unfolding darkness; but it is not a dramatically causative agent and its particular quality is not "dramatically" necessary.[107]

Dorothy Vanghent explains the more complicated metaphor of the Roman Ruins as being:

Works of man that have fallen into earth they

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[105]Ibid., p.78.

[106]Ibid., p.78.

[107]Ibid., p.83.

speak mutely of the anonymity of human effort in historical as well as in geological time; their presence suggests also the classic pattern of the Mayor's tragedy the ancient repetitiveness of self-destruction; and they provide thus a kind of guarantee or confirming signature of the heroism of the doomed human enterprise.[108]

When she comes to the earth in Tess she says that it is "primarily" not a metaphor but a real thing.[109] It serves its purpose in being real and actual that is, as a factor of causation. Where it has to be trudged in order that a person may get from one place to another. It is always present in person as it were to "encounter, to herass them, detour them, seduce them, defeat them."[110]

The dramatic motivation provided by natural earth is actual to every aspect of the look. It is all that is on the earth that is the setting and atmosphere is what provided Hardy with symbols. Obvious as other symbolisms are, their deep stress is maintained by Hardy's naturalistic premise. Everything around excited Hardy's eye and so the earth, says Dorothy Vanghent "exists here" as a Final Cause. The symbolic value of setting

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[108] Ibid., p.83.
[109] Ibid., p.83.
[110] Ibid., p.83.

are constituted in long part by the responses required of the characters themselves in their relation with the earth. Vanghent explains these symbols for she says:

> The green vale of Blackmoor, fertile small, enclosed by hills lying under a blue haze - the vale of birth, the cradle of innocence. The wide misty setting of Talbothay's dairy, "oozing fatness and warm ferments", where the rush of juices could almost be heard below the hiss of fertilization - the sensual dream, the lost Paradise."[111]

In a section of the account of Tess, Dorothy Vanghent devotes some time to Hardy's excessive reliance upon accidents and coincidences in the management of his narratives. Critics in the past had condemned Hardy for realising events conform to his "pessimistic" and "fatalistic" ideas. She agrees and does admit that it is not easy to say that there is a certain justification for his large use of the accidental. But then she says the purpose of art is to create order out of disorder by finding causation in it. Says says:-

> In the accidentalism of Hardy's universe we can recognise the profound truth of the darkness in which life is a cast darkness both within the soul and without the soul and without, only in-so-far as his accidentalism is not itself accide-ntal nor yet an ideology - obsessed puppeteer's manipulation of character

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[111]<u>Ibid</u>., p.84.

> and event which is to say, only in so far as the universe he creates has aesthetic integrity, the flesh and bones and organic development of a concrete world.[112]

Dorothy Vanghent further explains that this is not always true of even the best of Hardy's novel; but it is generally true of the construction of Tess - a novel in which the accidental is perhaps more preponderant than in any other Hardy. Vanghent fully justifies accidents and coincidences in the narrative pattern of Tess but has "with very great cunning, reinforced the necessity of this particular kind of narrative pattern by giving to it the background of the folk instinctivism, folk fatalism, and folk magic."[113] In turn we see the earth as mysterious, supernatural, "for it is only thus that earth can seem to have intentions."[114] Thus though the strong is grounded deeply in a naturalistic premise, Dorothy Vanghent says, "Hardy's use of one of the commonest tools of novelists - symbolism - enforces a magical view of life."[115]

In short, Vanghent's inner accounts has made a definite departure of looking at Hardy in the context of history symbolism, metaphor and imagery from the

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[112] Ibid., p.85.

[113] Ibid., p.86.

[114] Ibid., p.86.

[115] Ibid., p.89

major portion and its application in her treatment of Hardy's novels.

Coupled with Dorothy Vanghent and John Holloway we have Tony Tanner whose approach to Hardy bore affinities and was a stern departure from the thematic approach of Douglas Brown and Irwing Howe Tanner's account appeared as an essay "Colour and Movement in Hardy's Tess of the d'Urberbilles (1968) Tanner states, if we can think of a novelist as creating, among other things, a particular linguistic world by a series of selective intensifications of our shared vocabulary, then we can way that Hardy's world is usually easy to read."[116] Tanner did not see Hardy's works soly in the context of a largely acquiltheral region steeped in history and slow to emerge from the other rhythem of rural life and labour into the modern industrial world. But he saw Hardy essentially as an artist who made great use of metaphor, imagery and symbolism.

Tanner cites examples from Tess and says "For an Artist as usually sensitive as Hardy, colour is of the first importance and significance, and there is one colour which literally catches the eye, and is meant

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[116]Tony Tanner: Colour and Movement in Hardy's Tess of the d'Urberville, Critical Quarterly, Vol.10, No.3, Automn 1968, p.210.

to catch it, throughout the book."[117] This colour is red, the colour of the blood, which is associated with Tess from first to last. It dogs her, disturbs her, destroys her. She is full of it she spills it, she loses it, says Tanner, "watching Tess's life we begin to see that her destiny is nothing more or less than the colour red."[118] The colour red symbolises so many omens. Throughout the book and to the end Hardy continues to bring the colour red in front of our eyes.

Tanner has been one of the many lust critics in interpreting the different occasions when the colour time and again makes its appearance. He pointed highlighted the importance and significance of its presence. For example the time when Tess was splashed with prince's blood from face to skirt. First, he explained Prince's death as being a reminder that the family is destitute. But far more graphic, more disturbing and memorable, is the image of the sleeping girl on the darkened road, brutally awakened and desperately trying to stounch a fatal puncture, trying to stop the blood which cannot be stopped and only being drenched in its powerful spurts says Tanner.

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[117] Ibid., p.220.

[118] Ibid., p.220

> It adumbrates the loss of her virginity for she, too will be brutally pierced on a darkened road far from home and once the blood of her innocence has been released she too, like the stoical prince will stay upright as long as she can until all blood being out, she will sink down suddenly in a heap. Comprised in that one imponderable scene we can see her whole life.[119]

Throughout the novel and in the light of Tanner's interpretation of the text, he has suggested that the destiny of Tess comes to us as a cumulation of visible omens. Tanner sees the part played by the sun, altars and tombs, and finally walking and travelling in the life of Tess.

Hardy, even conscious of effects of light on various occasions displays his skill in the inter play of such phenomena. The dancing girls being warmed without by the sun symbolises syas Tanner that "each of them had a private little sun, for her soul to bask in"[120] The sun is their source of heat and life. Tess starts "sun-blessed". Tess further blooms into full female ripeness and Tanner through his symbol of the sun describes this growth. In another place as so after when Tess is getting involved with the superior power of man,

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[119] Ibid., pp.221-222.

[120] Ibid., p.227.

the atmosphere is misty but this time it is cold mist, the sunless fogs which precede the dawn says Tanner:

> In this particular light of a cool watery whiteness, Tess appears to Angel as a visionary essence of woman. Something ghostly, merely a soul at large. He calls her among other things, Artemis (who lived of course in perpetual celibacy). In this sunless light Tess appears to angel as unsexed, sexless, the sort of non-physical spritualised esence he in his impotent spirituality wants. But Tess is inescapably flesh and blood. And when the sun does come up she reverts from divine essence to physical milkmaid her teeth, lips and eyes scientillate in the sunbeams, and she was again the dazzlingly fair dairymaid only ......[121]

The account here is carried on by the dairyman who tells of his story of the seduction of a young girl; none of them but herself seemed to see the sorrow of it. Immediately we read, "the evening sun was now ugly to her, like a great inflamed wound in the sky" says Tanner counting on this: "Sir is a natural instinct which however can lead to lives of utter misery. The same sun that blesses can curse."[122]

To the convergence of redness and the sun is added the great final fact of the altar syas Tanner, it is an altar which Tess approaches almost gratefully, and on which she takes up her sacrificial position with

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[121] Ibid., p.227.
[122] Ibid., p.227.

exhausted relief."[123] She is very much 'at home' on the alter of sacrifice Tanner adds, "fully to be human is partly to be heathen, as the figure of Tess on the altar makes clear."[124] The term "heathen" is fully appropriate for it as for it originally meant someone who lived on the heath and as for a Pagan someone who lived in a remote village.

In another place angel takes Tess and lays her in an 'empty coffin' in the ruined choir', says Tanner in interpreting the action:

> In Angel's life of suppressed spontaneity and the Negation of passioned feeling, this is the most significant thing that he does. He encoffins the sexual instinct then lies down beside Tess. The deepest inclinations of his psyche, his very being, have been revealed.[125]

Later on when things are utterly desperate for Tess's family and they literally have no roofover their heads, they take refuge by the church in which the family vaults are kept. In their exhaustion they erect an old 'four-post bedstead' over the vaults Tanner at once sees again the intimate proximity of the bed and the grave. This sombre contiguity also adumbrates the ambiguous

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[123] _Ibid_., p.229.

[124] _Ibid_, p.229.

[125] _Ibid_., p.229.

relief which Tess later finds in here crinison four-post-bed which is also very close to death. On this occasion Tess enters the church and pauses by the tombs of the family and the door of her ancestral sepulchre. 'It is here when Alex worries and pensures her at the very door of her ancestors' vault, she bends down and whispers that line of terrible simplicity - "Why am I on the wrong side of this door? adds Tanner, that Tess in her increasingly vulnerable, weary and helpless state, her only solution is:

> To break through that "all delivering door" the door from life to death which opens on the only home left to her. This she does, by stabbing Alex and then taking her place on the ritual altar she has finally spilled all the blood that tormented her. She can then abandon the torments of animateness and seek out the lasting repose she has earned.[126]

Another, most searching of all Hardy's preoccupations - walking, travelling, movement of all kinds. Says Tanner, about Hardy, "somewhere at heart of his vision is a profound sense of what we may call the mystry of motion."[127] Such visualised passages of walking "says Tanner, carry the meaning of the novel. Tanner adds

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[126]*Ibid.*, p.231.

[127]*Ibid.*, p.231.

through the novel, "we see Tess as a moving spot on a white vacinity. And this extreme pictorical reduction seems to me to be night at the heart of Hardy's vision."[128]

Tanner goes on to explain what he means about Hardy's mystery of motion" and preoccupation with it. He says:

> To be human is to be animated, is to move Hardy's novels are about 'the discontinuance of immobility'. All the confusions that make up his plots are the result of people who perceptibly give up their fixity. To say that this is the very condition of life itself is only to point to the elemental nature of Hardy's art.[129]

And further in terms of the inert heath in The Return of the Native he says:

> The tragic tension between human and earth, between motion and repose, between the organic drive away from the inorganic and, what turns out to be the same thing, the drive to return to the inorganic, provides Hardy with the radical structure of his finest work. The human struggle against - and temporary departure from - the level stillness of the heath, is part of that struggle between the vertical and horizontal, which is a crucial part of Hardy's vision.[130]

Tess, as Tanner describes it is a tale of suffering.

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[128] Ibid., p.232.

[129] Ibid., p.233.

[130] Ibid., p.234.

Tanner adds, "We see Tess suffering, apparently doomed to suffer; destroyed by two men, by Society, by the sun outside her and the blood inside her."[131] Hardy is a master at depicting this tragic vision. The vision is tragic because Hardy shows an ordering of existence in which nature turns against itself, in which the sun blasts what it blesses, in which all the hopeful explorations of life turn out to have been a circuitious peregrination towards death. "All things are born to be diminished" said Pericles at the time of Sophocles; and Hardy's comparable feeling that all things are tended to be obliterated, revels a Sophoclean grasp of the bed-rock ironics of existence.

Says Tanner, "Tess is the living demonstration of these tragic ironics. That is why she who is raped lives to be hanged; why she who is so physically beautiful feels guilt at inhabiting the fleshly tabernacle with which Nature had endowed her; why she who is a fertile source of life comes to feel that 'birth itself was an ordeal of degrading personal compulsion, whose gratuitious nothing in the result seemed to justify."[132] One could in the circumstances of Tess's life and ask why should it all happen to her? Some people in the book

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[131] Ibid., p.236.
[132] Ibid., p.237.

say fatalistically, "It was to be". But Tanner adds, "Hardy does not work in this way, more than make us judge. Hardy makes us see, and in looking for some explanation of why all this should happen to Tess, our eyes finally settle on that red ribbon marking out the little girl in the white dress, which already foreshadows the red blood stain on the white ceiling. In her beginning is her end. It is the oldest of truths, but it takes a great writer to make us experience it again in all its awesome mystery."[133]

Criticism that came during this phase is distinctly marked by two schools of thought. One school the thematic critics have given Hardy's novels a precise definition by relating it to the great events which were transforming English rural Society during his life. Douglas Brown calls this 'the contemporary agricultural tragedy' and a critic like Irwing Howe betrays a romantic view of the old rural England which is equally distorting.

Such an approach where Hardy's great 'subjects' is essentially thought of as the sad passing of the stable rural life the decay of old customs and of local traditions, the death of ghost stories and the death of village choirs appears in most accounts. It is no

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[133] _Ibid_., p.232.

wonder that Meirryn William comes later and challenges such views of Brown and Arnold Kettle. For one, the central theme of Hardy's novels is seen as 'the tension between the old rural world and the new urban one,' and for Kettle as he sees it in Tess it is the destruction of peasantry. The novels of Thomas Hardy do relate to the condition of rural England in the latter half of the nineteenth century as acknowledged by some of Hardy's famous critics and by Hardy himself. The version of Hardy which has become established sees him as the novelist of a vanishing way of life. But history, truth, fiction are problematical concepts and much of the wonder of Hardy's enduring fictions depends on the way in which they extend, complicate and wrestle with the meaning of these concepts. Therefore, the thematic critics of this phase should have taken the Wessex novels as research into the history of rural culture and not looked upon such fiction solely in the context of history. Critical accounts which proceed from such an historical context miss out on the obliquity of Hardy's historical imagination. In making local history their primary focus Hardy's historical critics for this phase have misjudged the creative centre of his fiction. They have paid insufficient attention to Hardy's metaphor-making powers and his

astute understanding of the inheritance of metaphors in the workings of folk consciousness. It is no wonder came Philip Larken with his plea: "wanted good Hardy critic."

Critics like Dorothy Vanghent, John Holloway and Tony Tanner to mention a few belong to the other school of thought. They failed to see Hardy's novels solely in the context of history and its effect on society. So the critical confusion about Hardy's intentions still persists and needs to be examined and refuted in further detail.

In general such critics tried to probe into the realm of Hardy's aesthetic nature. They noted that the essential pleasure derived from Hardy's novels was in his ability to create images of life and was a counter-balance to the thematic approach of Raymund Williams, Douglas Brown, Irwing Howe and Arnold Kettle.

Vanghent, Holloway and Tony Tanner were more liberal in their outlook and though the dynamicm of Hardy's novels they were able to explain his greatness through play, symbol and words. Every great writer has his own kind of legibility, his own way of turning life into a language of particular sabincies, and, in Hardy this legibility is of a singularly stark onder. No other

novelist in Hardy's day had created among other things, a linguistic world by a series of selective intensifications of our shared vocabulary. It is this that makes Hardy's world easy to read. The key words in his dialect to continue the image, "stand out like braille. It is as though some impersonal process of erosion had worn away much of the dense circumstantial texture of his tales, revealing the basic resistant contours of a sequence of events which Hardy only has to point to make us all - like ancient marks a barren landscape. And through his use of metaphor and symbol, Hardy above all does make us see just as he himself could not bear to be touched, so he does not 'touch' the people and things in his tales, does not interfere with them or absorb them into his own sensibility. Hardy's famous or notorious, philosophic broodings and asides are part of his reactions as a watcher, but they never give the impression of violating the people and objects of which has late is composed reflection and perception are kept separate (in Lawrence they often tend to merge) and those who complain about the turgidity of his thoughts may be overlooking the incomparable clarity of his eyes.

In the light of what has been said, through Hardy's use of language, imagery and metaphor art aims

to become a "total experience", soliciting total attention. This is what Hardy's novels do to his readers.

In terms of history, Hardy's interest in local history cannot be denied. One has to see his Common place Books to believe how assiduous a student of local history and culture Hardy was. His fiction was a quest for the inherent but undiscovered forms of this history and culture. Wessex was a fictional world, no doubt, but a fictional world informed by Hardy's awareness of the fictional form of apprehended social reality. A true historian; Hardy 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 discover and communication of forms of social reality which are seldom acknowledged or felt by factful historians.

Both Schools of criticism for this phase in spite of shortcomings have helped in the further development of Hardy criticism. Their thoughts and ideas have helped towards a more modern approach. Today there are almost and even more critical works on his novels as on his poetry. His reputation stands higher than it has ever done; it is even possible for a modern critic,

Donald Davie, to argue in a recent work that Hardy has been the greatest single influence on English Novels in this century (although I do not think this has been proved.) The editor of the 1960 Penguin Poet Edition writes:

> There have been relatively few poet-novelists in English Literature..... the only authentic double - firsts in this field are, I believe, Hardy and D.H. Lawrence.

CHAPTER - IV

MODERN APPROACHES TO HARDY's FICTION

It is nearly sixty years since his death in 1928 and today, Hardy seems more important, bot as poet and novelist than ever before. All his novels are now available in paperback as well as hardcover editions. Moreover, there are several editions of his poetry. For all his popularity, however, Hardy continues to provoke critical debate as a novelist and has often been strangely neglected as a poet.

The number of articles, reviews and critical studies that came in the 70's have shown vigorous and original approaches to Hardy. There is no longer any danger that Hardy will 'go out of fashion' but there is certainly a need for his readers to come to terms with his uniqueness and with the exact nature of his position as a major writer. By looking at him in a variety of fresh ways modern critics have provided a range of new ideas and interpretations that help to identify what is important in Hardy for us today. It is hoped that after looking at the accounts of some of these writers, an assessment of their contribution

to Hardy is arrived at.

The critics of the 70's have all attempted an assessment of Hardy's importance largely by indirect means. Each contribution proposes a thesis or a number of ideas that take advantage of hindsight. For example, in a book, **Thomas Hardy After Fifty Years** (1977) edited by Lance St. John Butler we have some of the most modern approaches by writers, to a man who has grown and changed since his death. The obvious advantage of hindsight is seen in this case: serious appreciation of the cinema is a post-war phenomenon and David Lodge looks at Hardy through the modern glasses this medium provides. The study and editing of Hardy texts has progressed steadily in the last half-century and R.C. Schweik summarises the results of this work and points out the areas in which it is not yet complete. We have Robert Rehder's study of 'form'. In another case a most instructive use of hindsight is made by John Foules who offers a most interesting reading of the little known **The Well Beloved.**

Modern criticism since the '70's has been highly resourceful. It is my purpose to show how the

new approaches to Hardy contribute towards a modern tradition in Hardy criticism.

For a start I have selected three critics: Ian Gregor, **The Great Web: The Form of Hardy's Major Fiction** (1974), Penelope Vigar: **The Novels of Thomas Hardy: Illusion and Reality** (1974), and Michael Squires, **The Pastoral Novel: Studies in George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, and D.H. Lawrence.**

The spirit of Henry James haunts the pages of these first two books on Hardy. James appears on the first page of both books. The issue that immediately faces one in these books is the sense of anxiety in Hardy's critics: both Gregor and Vigar are writing for an audience which, as they see it, is dominated by the influence of James. Immediately on the defensive, Vigar quickly remarks, "Lovers of Henry James frequently consider him (Hardy) boring or inadequate, and point out the obviousness of his symbolism and the simplicity of his characterization."[1] Gregor, more sedately, explains that James' "art has, of course, been a pervasive presence in the general criticism of fiction

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[1]Penelope Vigar: The Novels of Thomas Hardy: Illusion and Reality. Atlantic Highlands, N.J. : Humanities Press, 1974, p.1.

in recent decades, even when it is not being consciously advented advented to."[2] It is the ghost of James, then, that Gregor and Vigar must bury once and for all, at least for those of us who want to understand and appreciate Hardy: "Those who attempt to judge and analyse Hardy's works by Henry James' standards are doomed to the failure of misrepresentation."[3] Again, concidentally, both critics quote the same threatening passage from James **Letters:** "Form alone takes, and holds, and preserves, substance."[4]

Gregor and Vigar agree that form, as it is understood by James, plays a small role in Hardy, and both insist that "plot" — of which Hardy has so much, and James so little — is the central clue to understanding his novels. With no clear definition of plot in mind, Gregor begins his description of the characteristic form of Hardy's novels. What Gregor brings to the criticism of Hardy is his sense of the novel as "an unfolding process"[5], and it is this which

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[2]Ian Gregor: The Great Web: The Form of Hardy's Major Fiction, London: Faber and Faber, 1974, p.24.

[3]Penelope Vigar: The Novels of Thomas Hardy: Illusion and Reality, pp. 6-7.

[4]Ian Gregor: The Great Web, p.23. Penelope Vigar: The Novels of Thomas Hardy, p.6.

[5]Ian Gregor: The Great Web. p.26.

he in part means by plot. Despite the few allusions to James, Gregor's discussion unfortunately takes place in a vacuum: he fails to take into account the term "plot" as it is traditionally defined, either simply by Forster or more elaborately, by Ronald Crane in his classic essay on the subject. Gregor ignores that it is Forster, for example, who in fact tells us that "Hardy arranges events with emphasis on casuality the ground plan is a plot, and the characters are ordered to acquiesce in its requirements."[6] Gregor might have used this to give us his own definition of plot and its role in Hardy. Forster's book on the novel, Gregor seems to forget, is one of the earliest and most articulate attempts to liberate all aspects of the novel. Right down to Gregor's claims that Hardy's endings are uneasy because he sought plurality rather than unity, continuity rather than finality, we are reminded of Forster's famous claim for "Expansion —— —— Not completion".[7]

What Gregor is finally after is not the story, but what James called the study of the story:

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[6]E.M. Forster: Aspects of the Novel, p.5.

[7]Ibid., p.8.

> "The novel as an unfolding process, which I described earlier in terms of story, can in this way be seen to extend into its metaphysical structuring, so that the implied author exists neither as a mediator between his characters and the readers, nor as a dramatized consciousness taking a place with other characters, but as a distinctive presence existing alongside the characters, undergoing the same experiences as they undergo, reflecting upon them as they do."[8]

Gregor, however has the uncarry ability to take the opening and closing of two chapters of a novel (as he does with **The Mayor**) and generates a compelling discussion of its entire pattern; or in the case of **Jude** to reveal a novel's internal shifts and turns, the inner stitchings of its "great web", its rhythm. All the interpretive chapters make lively reading, particularly because Gregor, through a careful and restrained selection of material, is able to go to the heart of the novel and its major issues without travelling the overworked paths of other critics.

Gregor views within **Far From the Madding Crowd**, a pastoral perspective. Many of the earlier critics judged the novel in terms of historical accuracy. Andrew Long and R.H. Hutton failed to see the book

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[8] Ian Gregor: The Great Web, pp.31.32.

in the context of history. Many of the contemporary novelists tried to solve the problem by taking the novel as simply an idyll, although some did not fail to notice that idyllicism could not account for the novel in its enteriety. Hardy himself described the book as "a pastoral tale." Michael Squires in, **The Pastoral Novel: Studies in George Eliot Thomas Hardy and D.H. Lawrence** (1974) notes the pastoral **Far From the Madding Crowd** is fruitfully adjusted to the realistic and dramatic conventions of the Mid-Victorian Novel. While it may be called a novel deeply pastoral in feeling, there is little doubt that "the falsification and artificiality of traditional pastoral have been rigorously excluded from Hardy's account".[9] These critics have agreed with the view that Hardy is a celebcrant of the rural way of life and that its detailed perception is the life-giving force of Hardy's great fiction. But they fail to see the operation of the typical pastoral in Hardy. It is no wonder that Ian Gregor came forward with his challenging words:

If Hardy is celebrating pastoral life in his novel, it must surely be in the spirit of Samuel Beckett.[10]

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[9]Quoted by Noorul Hasan: Thomas Hardy: The Sociological Imagination, 1982, p.14.

[10]Ian Gregor: The Great Web, p.47.

Ian Gregor agrees that the opposition between 'the natural' and the civilised, between nature and nature is crucial to the concept of pastoral. But in this novel he felt that both these concepts were remote from Hardy's purpose. Gregor points out that the dominant impression which the novel makes on the reader is one of "passion". He quotes utterances like, "I shall do one thing in this life — one thing certain - that is love you, and long for you, and keep wanting you till I die."[11] In another place, Bathsheba about Troy, 'O, I love him to very distraction and misery and agony. Don't be frightened at me, though perhaps I am enough to frighten any innocent woman.' Says Gregor:

> These are the tones which sound throughout this novel and if the total impression made by the novel is not quite of this kind the intensity of feeling which these assertions and pleadings expose is an integral of the experience which Hardy is concerned to communicate: an experience of intense human vulnerability.[12]

Gregor further adds:

> An overwhelming desire to fill an unsuspencted void within, unsought in origin, capricious and obsessive in its demands, unpredictable in its consequences —

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[11]Quoted by Ian Gregor: The Great Web, p.12.

[12]Ibid., p.51.

> this is the kind of feeling which Hardy writes about, and it is there at the centre of **Far From the Madding Crowd.** It is not a feeling which offers itself for moral judgement, so that we think of it in terms of excess, reckless self-abandon. For Hardy, it is an escapable part of what it is to be human, as likely to strike an oak as a Troy, a Bathsheba as a Boldwood.[13]

This intense projection of feeling, is central to the experience of the novel "Work", is the next element which plays a vital role in the action of the novel. Raymond Williams had earlier pointed out:

> Work enters Hardy's novels more decisively than in any English novelist of comparable importance. And it is not merely illustrtive; it is seen as it is, as a central kind of learning.[14]

Gregor says that work as learning "is a counterpoise that Hardy offers to the demands of passion."

Finally, the third element Gregor "emphasises in Hardy's vision of the 'pastoral tale' is "the sense of community" which comes home to us. But the effect of community is perhaps best established by their (Coggan, Joseph Poongrass, Cainy Ball) talk in the Malthouse and in Buck's Head. Says Gregor:

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[13]Quoted by Ian Gregor: The Great Web, p.52.

[14]Ibid., p.55.

> What we get from the apparently random collection of stories above love and deception and old age and change and superstition — stories which often act like distorting mirrors on the main themes of the novel — is the sense of a continuum of human experience which nothing can alter or shock. Like the element of work which is present in the novel this affects out apprehension of the passion that exists among the main characters, softening it, unobtrusively distancing it.[15]

Gregor details the working of the three essential elements:

> Passion, work and the pastoral tale all these elements are vividly put to work in this sequence, continually modifying and commenting on each other, the work of the farm providing the dramatic correlative for the emotional tensions generated between the characters.[16]

His introduction to **Jude** through the boy's oversimplification of the method of learning the classics is brilliant:

> The language in which men seek to make clear to themselves their metaphysical questions, their educational needs, their emotional longings, is in constant need of interpretation. To feel as Jude does that here is some "secret cipher, which once known, would enable him, by merely applying it" to master his problem, is a dangerous illusion — whether that illusion finds expression in the prophesyings of Aunt Drusilla,

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[15] <u>Ibid</u>., p.57.

[16] <u>Ibid</u>., p.59.

> the cynical pragmatism of Arabella, or the fervent idealism of Sue. The incident of the grammars initiates Jude into a life-long education in which he is to learn that there is no single law of transmutation by which one kind of experience can be simply translated into another.[17]

Finally, while the characteristic form of Hardy's and Jame's novels is different, we must admit that Jame's emphasis on the art of fiction has not disabled Hardy's novels or the readers of them, but helped us take a significant step forward in understanding what the art of the novel is for Hardy. Gregor's book is an example of critical progress.

Penelope Vigar defines Hardy's plots as a series of pictures: Hardy viewed "the plot as a thread on which to display his pictures of life."[18] Her central thesis, which she exaggerates at times, is that "Hardy's approach to fiction is essentially that of a painter."[20] Her description of her recollection of his novels is one that is in direct disagreement with Gregor's understanding of them: "In **Tess of the d'Urbervilles** there are perhaps thirty clearly remembered visual anecdotes; in **A Loodician or The Well-Beloved** only six or seven. Gregor's fluid process of plot is frozen

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[17] Ibid., p.62.

[18] Penelope Vigar: The Novels of Thomas Hardy: Illusion and Reality, p.15.

[19] Ibid., p.20.

by Vigar: "He sees not real people so much as a picture of those people, and our most vivid apprehension of his characters is usually taken at second hand, as he 'freezes' them for us in characteristic poses."[20]

Upto this point Vigor's thesis is clear if occasionally overstated and long-winded. Vigor is close to identifying an important complex of styles and intentions in Hardy, but her argument often lapses into a terminology which is not subtle enough to describe it, and her summary statements often ring untrue to the complicated material she has presented. To say finally that "the imperfect childish point of view contrasts with the external and uncompromising truth of the real world, as shown objectively by the author himself",[21] is to deny what she has convincingly said earlier - namely, that impression played a significant part in Hardy's theory of fiction and that it is objective.

The best section of Vigor's introductory remarks — a brief discussion of **The Woodlanders** — looks forward to some of the highlights of her interpretations of the other novels. She successfully shows how in this novel: the total structure of the story rests

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[20]Penelope Vigar: Op.cit., pp.37-38.

[21]Ibid., p.53.

on his manipulation of general effects of light and shade brightness and dimness, night and day, and all the shades of mistiness and partial light in between and, too, how these effects relate to the concurrent themes of deception and artificiality.[22]

Her chapter on **The Mayor**, the best in the book, makes excellent use of her notion of appearances:

> In all respect Lucetta is, as Herchand fondly remarks before she rejects him, 'an artful little woman.'[23]

Hardy emphasizes that the image she portrays is a studied piece of contrivance, the adoption of a personality which is as spurious as the name behind which she disguises her real identity. Her chief fear is that she may be 'seen through', her masquerade pierced. Her query, 'How do I appear to people?' is a telling one. This line of analysis flowers brilliantly in a final description of Lucetta's death:

> Lucetta is killed by the power of her own imagination by the ribald exaggeration of an image of herself which she has kept carefully hidden, but which is more essentially 'she' than the other successful and sophisticated person which she has so painstakingly tried to create.[24]

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[22]Penelope Vigar: Op.cit., p.26.

[23]Ibid., p.45.

[24]Ibid., p.163.

For Vigar the characters become "part of the structural argument, a pair of puppets acting out their roles for the conclusion."[25] She has little sympathy with the novel, and the chapter is hard going in more than one way. In the end, Vigar's book is an uneven production. If many of the chapters are slow and labored, occasionally they are lit up with fine insights; and a chapter like the one on **The Mayor** is a complete success.

Ian Gregor had an equal capacity for making excellent points about appearance. For example in **The Review of the Native** he depicts the tensions between 'land' and 'character' at the out set of the novel as something "physically seen and felt".[26] For he says, "It is through the primal contrast of light and darkness that the novel begins to take shape."[28] The contrast is present throughout the opening chapters. The first one begins:

> Moreover to light a fire is the instinctive and resistant act of man when, at the winter ingress the curfew is sounded throughout Nature.[28]

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[25]Penelope Vigar: Op.cit., p.207.

[26]Ian Gregor: The Great Web, p.82.

[27]Ibid., p.82.

[28]Ibid., p.82.

Gregor argues that in this description, the tone is epic - "we are recalled to the primal opposition between 'black chaos' and Promethean rebellionsness' - and in the first assertion the epic tone becomes biblical. Gregor that such descriptions leave one in no doubt that Hardy conceived the opening chapters "on the grandest scale."[29]

The next critic I propose to take up is R.A. White. He had been a lifelong admirer of Hardy's work, and at the time of his death was writing a book which was to be the fruit of his deep interest in Hardy and in hardy's use of history. The author in his book: **Thomas Hardy and History** (1974) describes the special circumstances which went into the making of Hardy's temperament and shows how he was born into a culture which had changed little since Shakespeare's time and which Hardy shared with D.H. Lawrence. He inherited his grandmother's memories of the Napoleonic wars, his father's feeling for the countryside, and his mother's reverence for education. Hardy brings to his writing the craftsmanship of his ancestors in such a way that the poet and seer join the plain-spoken man of country honesty and simple life, and the resulting

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[29]Ian Gregor: Op.cit., p.82.

complexity is unique. With such a temperament and such an environment his vision has to be a historical one. Hardy says White, looks at history for a purpose, and it is that purpose expressed through his unique temperament which makes him a great writer.

Hardy was putting on record a history which "he had lived on his pulses". This is White's central thesis. White at the very start of his essay indicates clearly that Hardy was not trying to suggest that one kind of life was better than the other or even made an attempt to recall 'the good old days' in his pictures of the changing world. Hardy left it to his critics in the twentieth century to indulge in jargon about the decline of the organic community and its replacement by a situation which D.H. Lawrence was to name 'anti-life'. What Hardy recorded, says White, "was a history more real than anything he could turn out in a 'historical novel' properly so called".[30]

White does agree that Hardy was certainly well aware that his novel recorded "the graveward descent of a civilization or of an ancient way of life."[31] But that was not only what he wrote. White

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[30] R.J. White: Thomas Hardy and History, Macmillan, 1974, p.5.

[31] Ibid., p.5.

is emphatic that "he rarely spoke, or wrote, didactically of what was happening, and least of all did he sing swan-songs."[32] Hardy had no moral response to history but was extremely sensitive and an accurate observer and incapable "of keeping his eyes closed sufficiently to the heights or the depths of human experience for the fulfilment of the historian's subaltern tasks."[33] White was not prepared to accept that Hardy had any nostalgia of the past.

White highlights the point however that Hardy had imbided to a great extent "the indigenous culture of the England he loved". He says:

> Generation after generation the men and women of this ancient soil had met life and death in the presence of the immensities of sky and sea, moon and hill. Myth had decended upon them from pulpit and alter, and they had employed their symbolism as a vestment, rough and after ill-fitting for the deepest feelings engendered in their hearts by their experience of human destiny upon the earth. They made songs and dances, tales and mumming-plays, to shadow forth ancestral wisdom. Living her nature and its unchanging rhythm and its senseless house-play, they came to a grave irony and a monumental patience. Their most cherished virtue was endurance, their most abhorred sin was breach of faith between man and man in face of the everlasting enemy - earth and the elements and

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[32] R.J. White: Op.cit., p.5.

[33] Ibid., p.10.

> fate. They knew nothing of 'Art' but everything of life, the life which persists beneath and beyond the little luxuries of Christian piety and consolation. Generations who knew not Adam have collected and appraised the work of their hands and named it 'Folk' but the folk themselves called it quite other names - pots and pans, butts and byres, bartons and cottages 'The New Rigged Ship' and 'The Western Tragedy' and 'Haste to the Wedding'.[34]

All this Hardy had imbibed, a culture he loved so well "flowered from morality whose roots lay at Stratford, Ottery St. Mary, Cockermouth and a thousand small country towns and villages like Higher Bockhampton."[35] This was ancient Wessex absorbing 'culture'.

This 'culture' meant so much to Hardy. It is through him as it were that the dwellers in these solitary places had gathered together the near-spent forces of their ancient life in order to utter a strange half-articulate cry before the tide of a later age should submerge them for ever. This is precisely what Hardy did in his works. What Hardy thought and felt and said was near enough "to how they thought and felt and would have said."[36] His roots lay deep into an ancient society which had never lost touch with

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[34]R.J. White: Op.cit., pp.14-15.

[35]Ibid., p.14.

[36]Ibid., p.16.

its intellectual ancestry. His temperament had the immutable quality of the folk of the fiels who were either spectacles or blinkers, yet he grew up to employ the lingo of a pseudo-scientific age.

So living between two worlds, the rural world of his fathers and the up and coming world of the universal bourgeoisie, he uttered the last judgement of his kind upon the dilemma of modern man. For it was the dilemma of Thomas Hardy. He, too, had outgrown the myth of Eden, the proposition that the world must somehow have been intended to be a comfortable place for man. It was a proposition that ancient Wessex had never possessed, but there was a time when the young Hardy for a brief moment succumbed to it. The moment soon passed.[37]

Hardy noted when he was twenty-seven: "Had the teachings of experience grown cummulatively with the age of the world, we should have been cry now as great as God."[38] But they hadn't and, says White, Hardy had known it all the time in his heart. He went on saying so for the rests of his life.

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[37] R.J. White: Op.cit., pp. 17-18.
[38] Ibid., p.19.

There are the main points in White's **Thomas Hardy and History**. Hardy was born and grew up in 'The Age of History'. That is to say "he belonged to a time and place which regarded everything in its historical bearings and thought everything was to be understood in historical terms."[39] Further, the annhilation of time with its unflinching vigour was a pre-occupation of his very long life.

On the whole says White, "he had no taste for historical recurrence."[40] One of his major themes in his poems is "the end of dreams or visioning."[41] White says Hardy disliked 'messages'. Finally, in a fitting conclusion, White says:

> The dominating impression left with us by a reading of his work is that men are indeed nobler than the 'unconscious cosmos which crushes them', and that loving-kindness - his favourite word - will prevail. And at the same time as man is made more tragic he is made more noble by Hardy's vision of him against the black-cloth of history.[42]

The next work which was quite different from the usual personal observations made by critics of the past came in the form of an analysis of the texts of Hardy. The papers in the invaluable Thomas Hardy

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[39] R.J. White: <u>Op.cit</u>., p.131.

[40] <u>Ibid</u>., p.132.

[41] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 132.

[42] <u>Ibid.</u>, p.140.

collection of the Dorset Country Museum have already been studied and quoted by a number of scholars, and now Lennant A. Bjork has made a significant portion of them, "Literary Notes I" and the "1867 Notebook", available in a useful edition. Readers will be disappointed if they expect these notes to contain the kinds of personal observations quoted in Mrs. Hardy's Life and Evelyn Hardy's **Thomas Hardy's Notebooks**, for the format is that of a common place book, a series of quotations and paraphrases, almost without comment, from readings done by the writer. Yet for an understanding of Hardy, who saw to it that most of his papers were destroyed, these prosaic materials are of substantial value. They provide conclusive evidence of what he read, and of what he noted and understood from his readings, from the mid-1870's to 1888, a period in which he wrote three of his greatest novels.

Bjork's transcription testified to the diligent, comprehensive, and useful attention to detail in the footnotes. These notes which appear conveniently in a second volume, Literary Notes II, so that one can have both the text and the notes open side by side for ease of reference, are in themselves an extensive commentary on Hardy's readings and the use he made

of them. Bjork identifies the hand writing of each entry (after it is the first Mrs. Hardy's). He specifies as nearly as he can the source of the quotation — the issue of the magazine, the edition of the book, occasionally even the copy that Hardy read — and wherever possible he refers the reader also to a conveniently available text. Where there is evidence, he infers the approximate date of the transcription. He identifies obscure proper names. He refers to places in Hardy's writings where the quotation on the idea expressed by it appears directly, in paraphrase, or in echo, and where relevant, he notes Hardy's revisions of the novels. Some of the footnotes are brief factual accounts of Hardy's knowledge of and response to individual authors, ranging from Carlyle to Spinoza to Plato. Throughout, Bjork keeps the direct expression of his own critical judgement to a minimum and takes care to distinguish between facts, inference and speculation.

Bjork's work, in my judgement, appeared at a timely moment in the history of Hardy scholarship. There is a great deal to be learned from explication and analysis of literary texts, and each generation will reinterpret for itself a writer as great as Hardy

on the basis of close readings.

Much progress has been made and writers have seen the need for scholarly editions of those works of Hardy's which he published during his lifetime. I have cited the example of just one model in Lennart Bjork's **The Literary Notes of Thomas Hardy** (1974) Bjork's work, together with the other publications and editions are potentially of great value for what they can reveal about Hardy's thought and art. Hardy's personal notebooks and scrapbooks deserve editing.

In short, although an account of the study of Hardy's texts over the last few years must he largely a history of preliminary work and disappointingly fragmented scholarship, much of it of very limited value. The time is now at hand when that history of neglect is finally being remedied. With the on-going publication of practical editions of good quality, including the extensive 'New Wessex' edition by Macmillan, there are signs that what has been sown during the first fifty years of textual scholarship on Hardy is finally bearing fruit.

Finally, **The Literary Notes** support a more

complex view of Hardy by documenting the scope, variety, and attentiveness of his reading and offer a host of clues, hints, and starting places for a renewed study of his literary and intellectual backgrounds. The complex fabric of his intellectual life, the workings of his imagination on materials that he actually read and noted, the extent to which his so-called modernism has its origins in the advanced social thought of the sixties and seventies - these are among the fruitful subjects that might well be explored on the basis of the **Literary Notes**. Knowledge of a writer's intellectual life has nevertheless always been one aid towards interpretation, and one must be grateful that in Bjork's edition of the **Literary Notes** a basis for fuller knowledge of backgrounds is now widely available.

The "New Wessex Edition" first published in 1974 has been since the development of the history of critical editions of Hardy texts, the most important critical edition of Hardy's work ever undertaken. The introductions included in the **New Wessex Edition** have greatly advanced Hardy criticism. The introductions contain very scholarly critical discussions on the texts. Most of these introductions are written by great modern critics of the 70's. They include: John

John Bayley, Robert Gittings, Terry Eagleton, Ian Gregor, F.B. Pimon, J. Hills Miller and one of the finest accounts has appeared in the introduction to **Tess** by P.N. Furbank. Furbank is the general editor of the **New Wessex Edition** and his introduction to **Tess** has been widely acclaimed as a masterpiece.

P.N. Furbank does not think of Hardy as belonging to the humanistic and moralistic tradition of George Eliot and Dickens. After all, the basic enterprise of these two novelists is "to teach us how to live."[43] They are always passing moral judgement on all aspects of life. Somewhere unstated within their novels lies the assumption that life in society can be lived successfully, and that moral judgement is a guide to this. Hardy did not belong to this didactic tradition for he was not in this sense a teacher. Says Furbank, "he did not believe that life in society 'could' be mlived successfully".[44] Thus, an important factor about Hardy says Furbank is that the attempt to find some consistent moral attitudes in his novels is largely wasted. Therefore, Hardy's impressions

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[43]Thomas Hardy: Tess of the d'Urbervilles, The New Wessex Edition, Introduction by R.N. Furbank, Macmillan, 1974, p.12.

[44]Ibid., p.13.

and vissions of life cannot be fitted into a moral scheme.

P.N. Furbank next discussion some 'modern' traits in Hardy. He states that Hardy at the outset of his literary career had pictured himself as a 'modern' novelist, one who had seen deeply into modern experience and could interpret it and make moral and intellectual sense of it. But Hardy was a modern with a difference. Says Furbank:

> He was not born to be a Dostoevsky or Ibsen or Lawrence, a writer who could handle the issues of the modern consciousness in realistic art.[45]

Another very modern charactistic about Hardy is his great qualities as a "photographic" novelist. Furbank adds:

> He is obsessed with physical evidence and with evoking the numberless lives of the past from the rubbings and abradings they leave on objects. One can go further and say that he thought of stories as 'telling themselves' and humans as - through such traces - imparting their own portrait as in early experiments in photography.[46]

For Hardy, Furbank says, "shadows" have

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[45] Thomas Hardy: Op.cit., p.14.

[46] Ibid., p.15.

always been appealing and rewarding in terms of his narrative. "Shadows" have the same fascinating appeal with Hardy as with photographers. Hardy "was obsessed with physical evidence and with evoking the numberless lives of the past from the rubbings and abradings they leave on objects."[47] Shadows speak for themselves just as Hardy conceived of stories as "telling themselves" and of humans as - through such traces imprinting their own portrait, as in early experiments in photography.

This brings Furbank to his next point in declaring Hardy as "extraordinarily cinematic". He says:

> First he gives you a close-up of a hand holding dice, then, with undussing focus, moves up the arms, to the gamblers head, and to the scene behind his head. And, as in the cinema, one is first presented with an object and then has to decipher its meaning.[48]

Hardy as a cinematic novelist is a master in matters of perspective and lighting. Most of his physical objects speak for themselves in his use of photo-cinematic devices and to this are added the ones taken from painting. Further, Furbank explains

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[47] Thomas Hardy: Op.cit., p.15.

[48] Ibid., p.16.

that the 'how' of a thing is an always overriding interest with Hardy in considerations of perspective and lighting on how an object may be lit from more than one source.

Furbank sees a close connection between Hardy's photographic skill in matters of perspective and lighting closely linked to the novelists' moral and authorial sense. In terms of narration says Furbank, "he likes to abrogate responsibility for the witnessing and interpreting of events and to shuffle it off on to the shoulders of his characters, making them into eavesdroppers and voyeurs".[49] Thus Hardy does not see the necessity of moral judgements and firm intellectual commitments. Here Furbank once again sees Hardy as not being essentially a 'teacher'.

Furbank next describes what he thinks is the heart of the Wessex Style. He says:

> His model, for him as a novelist, was the countryman. He read histories and tragedies out of the Wessex scene, and out of the pages of country histories with the same expertness with which Gabriel Oak and Giles Winterborne, from the visible scene read the time of day and the approaching weather. He also had another "persona" as writer, that of the local antiquarian, a man professionally committed to minute descriptive accuracy. These

[49] Thomas Hardy: Op.cit., p.17.

> disguises and analogies were a support to him, they gave him is convention as a prose-style. And what this convention reminds me of is something more familiar to us in another art, that of the decorative designer. Hardy saw the immense potentialities for literature, potentialities feeling, in the convention by which, on a plot or a bas-relief the limb of a satyr may be both a limb and the completition of a decorative pattern, or his neck be also the 'neck' of a jug. It is the best analogy I can find for those endless devices by which Hardy implicates his characters in landscape, so they become part of it, or - to use his words in TESS - 'an integral part of the scene'.[50]

Furbank describes Tess as "an allegory or intermittently a whole series of allegories".[51] He explains the whole series of successive landscapes of Tess's life as plainly meant as "Bumganesque". He says that they are also, obscurely, "an allegory of Hardy's own sexual development, the comedy of Marian's finding 'queen shaped flints' - petrified sexual emblems - in the fields of Flintcomb-Ash, and shrieking with laughter at them, has a note of confessional irony and then, at another time, Tess, enslaved to the threshing machine, typifies traditional agriculture in its defeat."[52] These are some of the symbols used to explain several of his ideas.

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[50] Thomas Hardy: Op.cit., p.18.
[51] Ibid., p.19.
[52] Ibid., p.19.

The allegorical representation and Hardy's masterly use of pen-pictures are the source of the novel's greatness. Secondly, says Furbank it is possible to see in Hardy characteristics of a 'modern' novelist and an embattled social critic. It was in **Tess** says Furbank that Hardy depicted and was so well equipped for showing the great problems of life that confront modern writers. Explaining the great 'modernity' present in Hardy, Furbank states such major issues as the clash between the old but confirm forms of religion as opposed to 'pharisaic Victorian travisty'; his coming in touch with 'the great passionate pulse of existence' and viewing life from its inner side' is what Hardy depicted in **Tess** and later in **Jude the Obscure**. Says Furbank, "Hardy has realised that 'vitalist' strain in philosophy which runs through Nietzsche and Bergson to Lawrence."[53]

If there is any novel where Hardy expressed his heart completely, it is **Tess**. Says Furbank, "He was no doubt Angel himself."[54] In the clash of Angel and Tess he was dramatizing the life-denying and life-affirming elements in his own temperament. As for Tess, Hardy had a strangely possessive attitude towards her; he liked to refer to her as 'my' Tess

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[53] Thomas Hardy: Op.cit., p.20.

[54] Ibid., p.21.

and has a way in the novel, of talking of her as if she had been a real person.

In describing Hardy's skill and versatility as a novelist, Furbank is quick to recognize the writer's great originality as revealed particularly in **Tess**. For Furbank states in the conclusion to his essay:

> That free inventiveness of Hardy's, his power of moving from mode to mode and turning everything to expressiveness, is even mode commanding in **Tess** than in any of his earlier novels and makes me regard it, imperfect as it is, as his master-piece.[55]

Dale Kramer is another critic of this period and his tightly-knit, polished study, **Thomas Hardy: The Forms of Tragedy** was published in 1975. Kramer supplements the extensive commentary on Hardy's tragic vision, not so much by redefining its particulars qualities as by revealing the distinctive "formal principle" by which it is expressed in each of the major novels: in **FarFrom the Madding Crowd** (not really a tragedy, as Kramer acknowledges), "schematization and dichotomy", in the **Return of the Native**, the use of two characters to dramatize opposing "worlds" of value; in **The Mayor of Casterbridge**, the struggle

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[55]Thomas Hardy: Op.cit., p.23.

of an individual within a historical cycle of change, and the "excapsulation" of the whole action in a single episode, in **The Woodlanders**, the use of many characters in paralled situations rather than a single hero, in **Tess**, an emphasis on the subjectivity of consciousness, and in **Jude**, the use of "authorial distance" to provide varying perspectives.

One can criticize this highly analytical study on its own terms but that is to find fault with an intelligent and readable book. In terms of the development of Hardy criticism its importance lies in that it merely adds one more to a number of intelligent and readable books, equal or superiod in quality, that apply analytical metholdology to Hardy's fiction. Kramer circles back once again over established materials and issues - how the ending of **Far From the Madding Crowd** seems unsatisfactory, how Herchand is different from Farfrae, whether or not tragedy can be written about common people. The relation of Hardy's work to nineteenth-century under-standing of tragedy (rather than to the definitions of later critics like Joseph Wood Krutch and Richard B. Sewall), the influence upon his literary views

of the quarterlies, and even the conceptions of the tragic underlying those poems that include the word tragedy in the titles. These subjects may be ancillary to Kramer's formalist concerns, but they are nevertheless relevant to the longer issues, and they have yet to be explored systematically and in detail.

Thomas Hardy and the Modern World, J. O. Bailey seems to see a bright future for analytical studies. He writes that Hardy scholarship up to the 1940's "said what could be said about the facts of Hardy's life, work, and ideas,"[56] and that the subsequent generation "began to look beneath the surface into what Hardy called the 'heart and inner meaning' of his works". After summarizing a number of critical studies, most of which, like Kramer's try not so much to place Hardy's achievements in contexts as to analyze themes, motifs, images and structures, Bailey concludes, "The microscope may show yet more".[57] Among the other essays in the collection, nevertheless, those that focus the microscope on the contexts of Hardy's works primarily and secondarily on the works themselves seem most freshly interesting: Harold Orel's: Hardy, War, and the Years of Pax Britannica,

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[56]Quoted by Paul Zietlow: Nineteenth Century Fiction, Vol. 31, Number 1, June 1976, p.98.

[57]Ibid., p.98.

James Gibson's brief description of problems in editing the poems, andRobert Gitting's portrait of the Gifford family.

The essays focusing primarily on the texts themselves provide note-worthy evidence of a growing consensus among Hardy critics that his works provide tentative affirmation of compassion, sympathy charity. Jean Brook's statement that "Hardy's heroes and heroines find moral assertion of the best values humanity has known still possible in a chaos of indifference without fixed standards of value"[58] is of a piece with F.B. Pinion, "in all three: Manty South, Giles Winterbourne, andTess, shine the virtues Hardy most admired -- selflessness, devotion, fortitude."[59] As I noted earlier, no longer do the critics see Hardy as a despairing pessimist. This over-simplified description of the novelist was in part shaped by the "facts" of Hardy's life and ideas that were allegedly established by the 1940's.

The accounts so far cited by different critics only illustrate the lasting impact Hardy had made on his readers. Unlike contemporary criticism, that

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[58] Ibid., p.99.
[59] Ibid., p.99.

which came in the 1940's and in the early 70's, one thing is certain that the critics belonging to this phase were highly resourceful interpreters of Hardy's meanings.

Geoffhey Thurley's book _The Psychology of Hardy's Novels_: _The Nervous and the Statuesque_ (1975), opens with an introductory chapter that is an inadvertent corrective gloss on the title of the book generally. Since this is a book burdened with a special vocabulary, it is surprising that Thurley does not take greater care with his terms. He has confused the two terms in fiction: "The concept of Typology in Fiction" and a "morphological theory". But we begin to see that typology, for Thurley at least, almost always means morphology. Reading the chapters on the novels, we also realise that is not a psychological study in the usual sense and that by the misleading title of the book Thurley does not mean psychological study as we usually understand it, but rather what he calls the psycho-physiology of Hardy's novels. He is in short a typological critic dealing with characters as "types".

Thurley claims that Hardy criticism has

been led astray in recent years by too much emphasis on his philosophy, and proposes to reinstae its natural course:

> Hardy's novels are about relationships, not man in a cosmic void, against a natural background or unsettled by a changing society, but involved with other men and women.[60]

If Thurley had carried out his intended programme, a study of interpersonal relations in Hardy, we might have had something like the psychological study the title announces, but as it turns out, Thurley's typological read "morphological" thrust has these men and women, as he calls them, continually dissolving before our very eyes into mere types. Thurley claims that his study is a return to an earlier mode of understanding Hardy, to D.H. Lawrence's famous characterization of Hardy's "white virgins" and "dark villains". He calls Lawrence's study the most penetrating word yet written about Hardy, and acknowledges that Lawrence's work anticipates much of his own book.

Finally, Thurley's provocative statement about Hardy, and one that suggests a genuinely new area of investigation in Hardy studies, is linguistic

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[60]Geoffrey Thurley: The Psychology of Hardy's Novels: The Nervous and the Statuesque, Quoted by Michael Ragussis in Nineteenth Century Fiction, Vol.31, No.3, December 1976, p.369.

in nature:

> Before we can evaluate his philosophic ideas, we must at least be able to read his language; in his case, this language is framed principally in terms of psychological concepts, or, as the preceding discussion has already hinted, psycho-physiological.[61]

In short, Thurley's discussions of Hardy's vocabulary are imprecise. For example, while he convincingly shows physical differences between Herchand and Farbrae, down to Herchand's own remark about Farfrae's slim girth and strength, he neglects a curious verbal echo in these descriptions. He argues that Henchard (statuesque) and Farfrae are "differentiated all levels", but when he points to Farfrae's first action in the novel - "to smile impulsively"[62] - the difference beings to look like similarity. Impulsiveness certainly makes as think of Henchard, and to boot Thurley lists it as typing Henchard. This either suggests carelessness on Hardy's part, if we are to accept Thurley's typological argument about a consistent vocabulary in Hardy, or an ironic vocabulary, undetected by the critic, that undermines the kind of archetypal differentiations he has fastened onto.

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[61] Geoffrey Thurley: Op.cit., p.369.

[62] Ibid., p.369.

Virginia Hyman in Ethical Perspective in the Novels of Thomas Hardy (1975), sees Hardy's characters as types too, but the vocabulary she uses in identifying these types is completely different from Thurley's. Her chapter entitled "Character as Ethical Type" makes that much clear, and shows a typological consistency that Thurley's vocabulary often lacks. Her introductory chapters are sharp and lucid as she argues against metaphyics (like Thurley's argument against philosophy in Hardy) and for morality as the basic issue in Hardy's novels. She convincingly shows that the theory of ethical evolution as it came to Hardy through Comte, Mill, Darwin, and Leslie Stephen had a profound influence on him. Hyman sums up ethical evolution as the belief in "altruism as the highest ethical value," and "that by a process of social evolution altruism would eventually prevail."[63] With a keen discrimination, she singles out Stephen for Hardy singled him out in the same way, and Hyman quotes Hardy's acknowledgement that Stephen's philosophy influenced him more than that of any other contemporary. Hymen says that Stephen was the one who taught Hardy how "the path of duty does not coincide with the path of happiness."[64] This view of morality

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[63]Virginia R. Hyman: Ethical Perspective in the Novels of Thomas Hardy, Quoted in Nineteenth Century Fiction, Vol.31, Number 3, December 1976,p.370.

[63]Ibid., p.371.

can, according to Hyman, correct our mistaken view of his metaphysics and our simplistic sense of fatality and pessimism in Hardy's novels:

> Failure to recognize the fact that Hardy saw unhappiness and pain not as the final end for modern man but as a necessary condition for his future moral growth has been one of the chief stumbling blocks in critical interpretations of his works.[65]

As good as these opening chapters are in outlining the moral back-ground of Hardy's thinking, the remaining chapters of interpretation become somewhat creaky.

Since all she is concerned with is character types - both Hyman's and Thurley's studies suffer from this singular focus on character, from a particular narrow angle, and a scarcity of technical insights. But Hyman's last chapter, devoted entirely to sue Bridehead, comes alive with a series of fine insights, and here the information gathered from Hardy's source is, in fact, used to advantage. Comte she tells us:

> "Saw marriage as the crucial pivot between the personal and the domestic stage. The relationship between husband and wife, based originally upon selfishness, becomes, ideally, transformed into the only association in which entire identity of interests is possible.[66]

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[65] Virginia R. Hyman: Op.cit., p.371.

[66] Ibid., p.372.

Marriage and the family become the axes around which hyman's illuminating discussion of Sue's tragic failure, revolves, and some of the detailing of the husband-wife, parent-child relationships in this chapter suggests a fruitful area for fuller work on Hardy.

J.T. Laird's book is a model of this kind. An important contribution to our picture of Hardy as a working novelist. The manuscript of Tess of the D'Urberville's was the first subject of an article-length study (Aumula, 1966) by John Laird. In his book The Shaping of Tess of the d'Urbervilles (1975), Laird makes an important contribution to understanding Hardy. Like John Paterson's The Making of "The Return of the Native", it offers us a meticulously complete picture of the making of Tess. Laird is happy to show that Paterson was wrong on one point, namely in his claim that in Tess "the artistic transaction was completed with relatively little interference of an editorial nature."[67] Laird's textual analysis of Tess carefully describes the evolution of Hardy's novels from the version to its various printed forms - from the serial version published in the Graphic in 1891 and "the episodic sketches" published in the Fortnightly Review and the National Observer of the same year, to the important editions of 1891,

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[67]Virginia R. Hyman: Op.cit., p.372.

1892, 1895, 1902, and 1912. With plot and themes, imagery and characterization in mind, and discriminating between bowdlerizations and important artistic changes, Laird charts the course of this, perhaps Hardy's most complicated, manuscript. His documentation of many of the patterns of classical and biblical allusions and four major themes - intention, nature as norm, will and the insignificance of the individual entity - in the Ur-version is admirable, and the discussion becomes positively absorbing with the development of the heroine's character and her emergence as "pure woman" in the later versions.

An important book of the 70's is Thomas Hardy After Fifty Years (1977) edited by Lance St. John Butler. The book brings together some excellent readers of Hardy, almost all of them display the kind of rich durable regard which Hardy calls for. From the point of view of the development of Hardy criticism, the different insights display a good range and balance in the topics covered. The approaches and interpretations are diverse, yet there is an implicit and lively interplay of argument.

In an essay entitled "Thomas Hardy: Fifty Years of Textual Scholarship", R.C. Schweik makes an assessment of the scholarly critical editions, descriptive bibliography and textual analysis contributed by individual writers. He speaks of these dissertations

as being, "sometimes brilliant and subsantial, often weak and disappointing, and all of it, in a very real sense, only preparatory to the publication of the kind of authoritative critical editions, complete with definitive apparatus, which are the final goal of modern textual scholarship."[68]

Schweik distinguishes between three closely related areas of study: descriptive bibliography, textual analysis, and editing. He cites the publication of Richard L. Purdy's Thomas Hardy: A Bibliographical Study as being a "really comprehensive and highly reliable descriptive bibliography, a model of patient accuracy and thoroughness which remains today the best available single source of information on Hardy's manuscripts and the evolution of his texts."[69] The whole purpose of descriptive bibliographies is to throw new light on Hardy's texts, textual materials have been uncovered or their significance reassessed. Schweik says:

> Analytic studies simply cannot satisfactorily serve as substitutes for direct consideration of the textual evidence itself, any more than a critical study of a novel can satisfactorily serve as a substitute for

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[68] R.C. Schweik: Thomas Hardy: Fifty Years of Textual Scholarship in Thomas Hardy After Fifty Years, edited by Lance St. John Butler, Macmillan 1977, p.136.

[69] Ibid., p.137.

> the novel itself. What a fully informed Hardy scholarship requires, then, is critical editions which provide authoritative texts and full records of all textual variants so that each scholar and critic may see for himself what editorial choices have been made and interpret for himself the significance of Hardy's revisions.[70]

In talking about editing, Schweik distinguishes between 'practical' and 'critical' editions. The first type involves a faithful following of some well accepted text. In this case he cites 'the text declared by the author to embody his final intention' -- the 1912 Macmillan 'Wessex' edition. The latter is the definitive edition of Hardy's work where practical editions: the Norton critical edition, simply follow more or less faithfully, but uncritically, one on another of the impressions of the 'Wessex' edition. About the Macmillan: '<u>New Wessex Edition</u>', Scheweik says:

> This is nevertheless, certainly the most important practical edition of Hardy's work ever undertaken:..... ... the explanatory notes are exceptionally good.[71]

The purpose of the 'critical' editions says Scheweik will be to represent as fully and accurately

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[70] <u>Ibid</u>., p.143.

[71] <u>Ibid</u>., p.144.

as possible, Hardy's final deliberate authorial intention. What is important to emphasise here says Scheweik "is that such editions are the 'sine qua non' both of well founded critical judgements and fully informed historical interpretations of Hardy's work. Scheweik calls Simon Gatnell's critical edition of Under the Greenwood Tree (1973) a work of modern critical editing done to the very highest standards.

Scheweik explains the importance of further editing Hardy's letters and notebooks, his scrapbooks which survive. These are of potentially great value for what they can reveal about Hardy's thought and art, and they deserve editing.

In short, Schweik has stated that although an account of the study of Hardy's texts over the last fifty years has been largely a history of preliminary work and disappointingly fragmented scholarship, the time is now at hand when that history of neglect is finally being remedied. With the ongoing publication of practical editions of good quality, including the extensive 'New Wessex' edition by Macmillan, with well advanced plans by the Clarendon Press for publication of scholarly critical editions of poems

the letters, and at least some of the fiction, there are signs that what had been sown during the first fifty years of textual scholarship on Hardy is finally bearing fruit.

F.B. Pinion in his essay: "The Ranging Vision" states that Hardy's literary longevity "owes much to his thoughtfulness and verbal economy, more to a creative gift which is often poetic, but most to his vision of life."[72] F.B. Pinion does not think of Hardy as 'egotistical' or 'provincial' as was the custom of earlier critics. The latter based this opinion on the fact that many of Hardy's works related to his own emotional experiences, and that most of his stories are set in very circumscribed areas. F.B. Pinion argues that:

> As an artist he has the rare faculty of combining imaginative experience relative to the individual (himself included) with an unwavering sense of man's place in universe; his Wessex trancends topographical limits and it is in under dimensions that those elements which contribute most to his greatness are to be found.[73]

Wessex supplied quite enough 'human nature . . . . for one man's literary purpose' and extended

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[72] F.B. Pinion: The Ranging Vision. Printed in: Thomas Hardy After Fifty Years edited by Lance St. John Butler. Macmillan 1977, p.1.

[73] Ibid., p.1.

the rnge of Hardy's vision. Even though Hardy derived a special satisfaction from preserving its old superstitions beliefs and customs, the artist in him is opposed to "representative fidelity" as a general rule. His subject was 'life' and not its 'garniture'. Pinion states that his principal interest was not in manners, but in the substance of life only. Therefore his characters were 'beings in whose hearts and minds that which is apparently local should be really universal.'[74]

Hardy in his formative years had imbibed the new scientific philosophy. There was a great deal of scientific opinion in the country for the descerning thinker, and in none was it more constructive than in J.S. Mill, whose new 'religion of humanity' was rooted in the Positivism of Auguste Comte. Hardy's ideas came from these and other sources. Further, local history extended the range of Hardy's vision of life. Pinion adds: "Hardy's familiarity with the Bible probably did more to enlarge his historical sense than any other literatures".[75] Biblical echoes are almost legion in Hardy's fiction, and where they refer to well-known events and figures (Cain and Job, for example) they still have a universalising effect.

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[74] F.B. Pinion: Op.cit., p.3.
[75] Ibid., p.5.

Pinion adds that Hardy achieves a considerable degree of universality through his use of literature. His main purpose was to please at a much higher level, and with this in view he drew Wessex parallels to the Old Testament Story of Saul and David, to the Oedipus Rex of Sophocles, to King Lear and even more notably to Les Miserables. Pinion insists that Hardy is no more borrower. He adapts and transmutes, and the critical question relates not to the means but to the result. Say Pinion:

> Only a creative writer with imaginative vision can re-create effectively in this way, and only situations which are essentially the same through out the ages can respond to this kind of treatment.[76]

Hardy was probably one of the finest writers who had a strong traditional awareness. His fine historical sense involved a perception not only of the "pastness of the past" but compelled him to write not "merely with his own generation" but "with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order."[77] Hardy's works are strewn with them from many sources, ancient and

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[76] F.B. Pinion: Op.cit., p.6.

[77] Quoted by F.B. Pinion in The Ranging Vision, p.6.

contemporary. This says Pinion accounts for the multiplicity of Hardy's vision.

In short, Hardy's ranging vision involved an alliance between "the local and the contemporary and those relatively timeless issues which remain essentially unchanged because they are true to life."[78] Pinion fully justifies Hardy's methods. The principal key to Hardy's continuing success says Pinion:

> Is that he combines to an unusual degree a scientific vision of man's place in the universe with an artistic realization of the greatness in writing which has commanded assent through the ages.[79]

Truly, F.B. Pinion's essay has been one of the finest contributions, to modern Hardy criticism. Perhaps, no other writer has shown in the past the influence that Arnold and Pater had on Hardy. The influence of Arnold and Pater on <u>The Return of the Native</u> and the parallelism of <u>Less Miserables</u> and <u>The Mayor of the Casterbridge</u> are discussed in F.B. Pinion, <u>Thomas Hardy: Art and Thought (1977)</u>. Pinion argues that if a particular locality appeals to an author however limited it may be, it can be adapated to imaginative settings and situations far more successfully than less familiar scenes. This opinion

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[78] <u>Ibid</u>., p.11.

[79] <u>Ibid.</u>, p.11.

made short shrift of the old criticism that Hardy's style is not responsible for the steady growth of interest in his work. Arnold defined this as 'the imaginative reason'; Pater, more precisely, as 'the imaginative intellect'.

In an essay, The Form of Hardy's Novels, R.M. Rehder makes an assessment of the principles that contributed to the development of a strict and rigorous form in his fiction. From earlier reviews and articles that appeared during his life-time and from the writer's own statements, it is obvious that Hardy had a carefully working definition of form. Says Rehder:

> He stresses symmetry and tightness. He deplores the spasmodic, the hetrogeneous and the conglomerate.[80]

Rehder reports that 'self-concealment' was one of the earliest factors that made for the awakening of Hardy's sense of form. That he is made no parade of his art neither did he display emotion for ita appeared that Hardy as a young child, was distrustful of spontaneous and strong emotion, pondering it as a problem. Says Rehder: "His response to this trouble is secrecy".[81]

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[80] R.M. Rehder: The Form of Hardy's Novel, Thomas Hardy After Fifty Years, edited by Lance St. John Butler 1977 (Macmillan), p.16.

[81] Ibid., p.15.

Further, Hardy rejected that the idea of the novel should be merely a representation of sensation or the would. Selection and treatment was the criterion for a good novel. Rehder adds, "like Shakespeare, like all the great poets, he had a metaphor-making mind."[82] One of the greatest demands on Hardy's descriptions and one that accounts for his greatness was that being "less discursive" and more specific, Hardy made things happen through use of a series of images.

Rehder says that a significant characteristic of most of Hardy's novels is their markedly unhappy endings. Says Rehder:

> He is the first major English author to write a number of novels that end unhappily, although the conclusions of his best novels can only be tragic. He does not simply negate happiness, he insists on sorrow. His achievement, in terms of form is to have combined the tragedy and the novel.[83]

A number of contemporary critics had condemned Hardy for over-burdening his plots with "coincidence" and "surprise". But Rehder speaks of Hardy as being a master of such surprises. They are essential to his way of telling a story and to his understanding

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[82] R.M. Rehder: _Op.cit._, p.15.

[83] _Ibid._, p.17.

of the world for "the form of his understanding is the form of his novels".[84]

In describing Hardy's attitude to form, Rehder's central theme shows how his self-concealment worked itself out in his fiction and how he thought of form as a way of holding feeling. Hardy's plots, his conception of character and his notions of development all come from this same matrix. Therefore Rehder declares that Hardy needs the tragic control because of the overwhelming power of his feelings. No other English novelist had expressed sorrow so vehemently as Hardy. His idea to tragedy represents a combination of Greek, Shakespearian and Biblical tragedy.

Hardy's great subject matter entitled "the destruction of the old world by the new".[85] It was Hardy's great task and he did this with some difficulty "in aligning the inner and the outer life, and this is related in his novels to the tug between the past and the present. Hardy always felt the inevitability of change, of the destruction of the old, but the old is charged with more feeling than the new and he is always aware of the past in the present - his feeling is divided.

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[84] R.M. Rehder: <u>Op.cit</u>., p.18.
[85] <u>Ibid</u>., p.25.

Hardy was an unusually creative man for he was poet and novelist, he drew and painted in water colour. He was an architect. As musician he could play the fiddle and was well being able to sing. Says Rehder because of this remarkable diversity of his artistic accomplishments he is perhaps "the only writer to be both a great novelist and a great poet."[86]

Finally, there is no doubt that an account like Rehder's has helped in a considerable way to enhance Hardy's reputation as "one of the greatest English novelists, with Jane Austen and George Eliot, Henry James and Joseph Cornad."

One of the most original and modern approaches in this collection of essays is David Lodges: "Thomas Hardy as a Cinematic Novelist". Hardy a 'cinematic novelist', Lodge argues, anticipated films, not that he was influenced by them. Lodge explains that Hardy, like a film-maker, seemed to conceive his fictions, from the beginning, as human actions in a particular setting:

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[86] R.M. Rehder: Op.cit., p.25.

[87] Ibid., p.26.

> The dense woods of The Woodlanders, the wild heathland of The Return of the Native, the contrasting valleys and heights of Tess, are integral to the imaginative unity of those novels. He called them 'novels of character and environment', and it is his ability to make concrete the relationship between character and environment in a way that is both sensuously particulars and symbolically suggestive that makes him such a powerful and original novelist, in my opinion, rather than his skill in story - telling, his insight into human motivation or his philosophic wisdom.[88]

In 1978, John Bayley published a detailed critical study: An Essay on Hardy. This book suggests a new approach to Hardy as poet and novelist. It concentrates not so much on ideas and attitudes as on the texture of the writing, and on the crucial importance in it between one kind of exposition and another. John Bayley starts by establishing a difference between Hardy the private 'noticer' of things and people, and Hardy the professional author committed to interpreting these observations to his readers. The vital ingredients of eroticism and humour are analysed in detail, as are the unusual ways in which passiveness, 'pessimism', and anthropomorphism function in the poems and novels. Professor Bayley shows that the rewards of reading Hardy are today greater than ever, although they are not necessarily those which

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[88] David Lodge: Thomas Hardy as a Cinematic Novelist: Thomas Hardy After Fifty Years, edited by Lance St. John Butler, Macmillan (1977), pp.80-81.

the reader expects to find, or has been taught to look for.

At the very outset Professor Bayley states: "Although every Hardy text is far more effectically aesthetic than anything of theirs (Defoe, or Meredith) - he is in a sense the least aesthetic of all English novelists."[89] In the light of this remark Professor Bayley does away with all statements applied by James and Stevenson to Hardy's novels. But he adds in reading Hardy if disappointment comes it is due to "Hardy's seeming lack of desire to speak" but it is a reaction much more intimate and intermingled, which is an assert in itself - we are in a master's hand.

John Bayley compares Hardy to his Giles Winterbourne, for he is by nature, as a novelist, 'one of those silent unobtrusive beings' who 'scrutinise others' behaviour' the more closely in consequence, but he does so with such an independence and makes no claim to being a law unto itself.

Quietly and unobtrusively, Hardy presented life's contradictions Hardy indicated that he did not care for standardisation and the mass grouping

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[89]John Bayley: An Essay on Hardy, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1978, pp.3-4.

of ideologies. His was the politics of an 'Intrinsicalist'. Bayley says that the social comment most frequently made in the novels "is that there is no such thing as class solidarity; the work - folk of a country place resolve themselves when closely observed into individuals just as different from each other as those in London drawing-rooms."[90] He was on the side of any improvement and "living was something for each individual to do in his own way."[91] The most Victorian thing about his novels says Professor Bayley is, their plot: the least, their sense of time, place and event."[92] A further point about Hardy is that there are no norms, no steady pressure of belief or philosophy or message such as all other novels of his time were conditioned by.

John Bayley affirms that Hardy is no 'coterie writer' of the type of Eliot and Lewis. He has never had a coterie following, of the sort that exiles like Lawrence and James Joyce attracted. He kept to himself as far as his position in the public eye was and he considered this kind of dolitariness a privilege, one he made the most of. Bayley summed up what seemed to be Hardy's curious and unique kind of anthropomorphism: "Keep yourself to yourself,

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[90]John Bayley: Op.cit., p.13.
[91]Ibid., p.13.
[92]Ibid., p.13.

while at the same time wondering about others".[93] But Bayley sees this as an advantage for he declares that withdrawal and misunderstanding become in Hardy's method artistic assets of the first value. Therefore Hardy's world is much more one of stasis and acceptance than his public supposed, an acceptance based on his imagination of things and people, dead or alive, communicating with as only through the strength of ttheir difference. This cast of his mind become more conscious as he thought more about art, and as public expectations of his art, increased with fame.

One of the great skills of Thomas Hardy, says John Bayley that made him so arresting, "is that the closer and more satisfyingly he sees things, and the more 'humanity' he endows them with, the more cut off they are. Further, Bayley has a point to make about Hardy's humour. Whether the humorist is obviously on duty in his fictions, as in the scenes at the melt-house in Far from the Madding Crowd, or in the Chunch vault in A Pair of Blue Eyes, he has no trouble in making clear that his natural port was 'comick', as Dr,. Johnson said of Shakespeare. Says Bayley: "He was liberated by working in a medium he had taken on professionally, and he could get across to readers at home in the same medium."[94]

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[93] John Bayley: Op.cit., p.41.
[94] Ibid., p.70.

The nature of such comedy is nothing less than things as they really are: its principle is the presentation in art of the incongruity of life. No doubt Hardy enjoyed the humour. It was one of the ways in which consciousness made existence tolerable.[95] Says Bayley, "that he is a humorist - even too much of one - is his defence against critics who don't know a joke when they see it."[96]

Bayley next takes up Hardy's great talent of relating memory to visual or physical impression, something that always fascinated him. Hardy himself described the experience as "a state of mind which takes cognisance of little things, without at the time being conscious of them, though they return vividly upon the memory long after."[97] In Desperate Remedies and Far From the Madding this idea revives graphic illustration, and says Bayley, "it is the most important way in which Hardy gets inside some of his characters, without either analysing or taking them over."[98] So memory now becomes a very important aspect of Hardy's art as a novelist.

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[95]John Bayley: *Op.cit.*, p.77.

[96]*Ibid.*, p.70.

[97]*Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.

[98]*Ibid.*, p.81.

Bayley points out, as part of Hardy's 'pansonical' side, the novelist displays what he knows with the relish of a sermonist providing himself agile in scriptural text and interpretation. Says Bayley, "his passion for painting and literature is infections, and his communication of it wins the sympathetic reader completely."[99] Further, Hardy had taken a keen delight in art and culture and he knows how to use them as assets, in pursuit not only of fame and fortune but of love itself.

Hardy was further a master in the presentation of social differences. His characters divide into those who are aware, like Elizabeth Jane, of the conditions which life seems to demand of them, and of the kind of rewards it offers, and of those who 'love it desparately', however little they may be aware of the fact, and who are for that reason outside - more or less the kind of consciousness which Hardy disposed of, the kind of which he is the master in his poems.

Hardy excels in portraying personality by means of place and event, and their intersection. We have too the close proximity of trees and other living things in a wood at night, where each sound

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[99] John Bayley: Op.cit., p.84.

or movement conveys the unheedingness of each to the other. Hardy himself describes such a situation after, numbering with pleasure the different responses of leaves, plants and grasses to wind and rain. Says Baley, "the reader - with an equal pleasure - is made aware of all, though no effect is definitively in change. It seems to be our own activities among the constituent parts of the writing that give us our sense of what is going on."[100]

In Bayley's account, a claim is made for the stature of the earlier and less considered novels. For example he claims that Ethelberta is not a failure: and that it does not show, as most Hardy critics assume, that he had no sense of how to handle a social and metropolitan them. Rather, "he had too much sense of it." Said Bayley, "Ethelberta, like Hamlet, is an imaginative impression of 'court life', about which the novelist is too intrigued to be sure-footed. Yet for Shakespeare himself no English writer is more naturally a courtier than Hardy."[101] Yet both ethelberta and A Laodicean says Bayley, "does show us something about Hardy's originality. The two pieces of fiction are more characteristic, more concentratedly Hardyan and also more dynamically doctrinaire, novels."[102]

[100]John Bayley: Op.cit., p.118.
[101]Ibid., p.153.
[102]Ibid., p.152.

Bayley does devote the last section of his account to Tess. Hardy 'loved' Tess, so much is clear. Tess was not only a potent influence on Lawrence's imagination - as he makes clear in his study of the Hardy novels - but strikes the present day reader too as having a good deal in common with the atmosphere of the Lawrence world, the world of symbolic divisions which confronts us, for example, in Women in Love. Says Bayley:

> The triumph involved in Tess's creation a triumph whose limitations constitute the book's essential form, is the bringing together of such an objective and traditional idea of a milkmaid with the Hardyan intimacy of a 'sensitive soul'.[103]

Before Bayley moves into Hardy's character portrayal of Tess he cites other examples of persons in his novels who have been endowed with the grandest of literary parallels.

> Clym toils in discovery like Oedipus; Bathsheba at the crisis of her marriage utters a cry recalling that of Christ from the cross.[104]

But Bayley goes on to state such parallels on references, "Are like those of the author and his characters to events in the Bible they impose no burden of significance on themselves or the reader."[105]

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[103] John Bayley: Op.cit., p.170.

[104] Ibid., p.181.

[105] Ibid., p.181.

But there is no such inevitability in the analogies which attend his imagination of Tess. It appears that Hardy had put so much of himself into Tess. Like Madame Bovary, says Bayley, Tess is closely identified with her author, and yet presented with an appearance of objectivity. Therefore, Hardy's portrayal of Tess is as close to the life he had created. Tess like Emma Bovary has been shaped by her society. Tess & Emma Bovary are not a part of the worlds they have to live in. Says Bayley: "Both exist to embody, as they superlatively do, their creator's sense that consciousness cannot be at home in the conditions of existence."[106] Bayley notes that in general, Hardy does not 'merge' with his routine experience of his characters; he lets the two lie side by side while experience is noted between them. But with Tess says Bayley: "It is very definitely Hardy's experience of the mature as of the youthful author. Hardy creates his heroine in order both to disown the world, and to rejoin it by being at one with its victim, the heroine."[107] In short Bayley concludes this section of his account by stating: "If Tess is in its way the formal culmination of methods always congenial to Hardy fiction - the natural uses of inconsistency and separation."[108]

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[106] John Bayley: <u>Op.cit</u>., p.184.
[107] <u>Ibid</u>., p.186.
[108] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 191.

There is no doubt says Bayley that Tess is one of Hardy's greatest successes as a novelist.

> Tess was his own fantasy in a very particular sense, but any market researcher toay could see it has exactly the right ingredients for popular success - a beautiful and persecuted neroine, the victim of social injustice, a hanging, and above all the romance of history brought up to date - any of us might be descended from D'Urbervilles, or their equivalent, which makes identification all the more seductive. Moreover as in all the most successful best sellers, Hardy was himself firmly in the grip of his own fantasy which turned out to raise a fervent echo in so many other bosoms.[109]

This is a radically very different approach to Tess from that of T.S.Eliot, Henry James, and F.R. Leavis who agreed that Hardy is not finally for them a great writer. But Bayley is different in his approach for he says, "Nothing in him can be revealed which Hardy has not, quite simply, revaled himself."[110] Of all novelists, Hardy makes the things that he invents appear most like the things that have taken place throughout the time of man, and before it. Like Knight, on the 'cliff without a name', we confront with him the eye of the fossil embedded in the rock.

To use Hardy's own words, he is an 'unobtrusive'

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[109] John Bayley: Op.cit., pp.221-222.

[100] Ibid., p.231.

process. No other author appears to make his true greatness out of less than Hardy, nor does it without any of the creator's egocentric energy, and will to power. Says Bayley, "his style is never taken in by its own pretension to epic size and philosophic weight."[111]

In terms of approach the accounts of the critics of this phase are essentially complex and imaginative. This shows that Hardy's work is not as simple as is made out to be. No longer do we hear the old familiar cliches - Hardy's Irony, Hardy's Fate and Destiny, his range, his pessimism and the like Hardy in the 70's began to be seen less as a traditional Victorian novelist and more as a pioneer in the novel.

Critics of the 70's had become highly resourceful and began to see Hardy in the light of his affinities with twentieth century novelists. This is beginning to be examined. His ideas on man and society are now seen to have much in common with some aspects of twentieth century thinking, including existentialism, as Roy Morrell (1965) and Jean Brooks have suggested.

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[111]John Bayley: Op.cit., p.232.

Roy Morrell in Thomas Hardy, the Will and Way, made a breakthrough in 1965. He proved irrefutably that Hardy was right in asserting that he was not a 'Fatalist and pessimist'. And suggested that he was looking forward as well as back, and had affinities with the Existentialists. The book was an important turning point because it rejected the patronised, traditional, nostalgic Hardy and suggested his relevance to the modern world.

To a certain extent criticism that came during this phase had one major draw-back. Though highly resourceful, in trying to modernise Hardy, writers tended to say too much. This leads to a lot of distortion in their accounts, and in certain cases the work becomes an end in itself.

The earlier critics seemed to have understood better the milieu of Hardy's novels. They remained closere to the man and wrote essentially in the context of Wessex. But Hardy originally conceived, however, this 'world' had a crucial limitation which Hardy soon recognized: it could make his work narrow and stereotyped. He was aware of the pecuniary value of a reputation for a speciality . . . . yet he had not the slightest intention of writing for ever about

sheep farming, as the reading public was expecting him to do, and as, in fact, they presently resented his not doing. It was in the process of writing The Return of the Natuve, with the introduction of Clym, that Hardy realized that Wessex need no longer he thought of as 'writing about sheep-farming" but, in Matthew Arnold's phrase, could be made to include 'the dialogue of the mind with itself'. Into Wessex Hardy was able to introduce not simply the structure provided by indigenous customs and plots, but more inclusively, the structure of a contemporary consciousness ambivalent in its sympathies, sceptical in outlook. The development of Wessex could, in other words, be made commensurate with the development of the author.

With Hardy's change in attitude, critics of the 70's approached him in a way different from those contemporary ones. Now the critics began to study his novels in terms of imagery, metaphor, rather than emphasise plot and story. Some began to refer to Hardy's art as cinematographic - where his novels have been compared to the work of a director prolix in stark images and novel camera-angle.

Other critics began to ask the question

- what other writer has given more to the world, than the generous, compassionate Thomas Hardy? A Critic like John Bayley was able to use in Tess and Herchard characters created on the heroic scale. This does not mean that Hardy is the equal of Shakespeare, but it does mean that he is one of those who most nearly rival him, like Chaucer, with whom he has so much in common. Then, Hardy was among the leaders of thought in his age, a meliorist who realised the potential grandeur of man, yet one driven to despair by the slowness of his progress.

In Jude, written twenty years before the first World War, he had asked, "When people of a later age look back upon the barbarous customs and supersititions of the times that we have the unhappiness to live in, what 'will' they say? What, one wonders, would he say of the times the critics of the 70's lived and wrote nearly a century later? But, then, as he wrote in one of his loveliest lyrics: "I shall mind not, slumbering peacefully."[112]

Each of the critics of the 70's has displayed the kind of rich durable regard which Hardy calls for. There is beyond doubt in their assessments a

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[112]Quoted by F.E. Halliday:Thomas Hardy the Man in His Work. Thomas Hardy After Fifty Years, edited by Lance St. John Butler. Macmillan, 1977, p.134.

good range and balance in the totality of Hardy's concerns. The approaches and interpretations are diverse, yet there is an implicit and lively interplay of argument.

Death came to Hardy in 1928, and now after another fifty years critics of the 70's have remembered with affection and gratitude "another tradesman's son", witty and like Shakespeare, a lover of humanity.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt, tht behind Hardy's sadistic imaginings, and pessimistic declarations lie, of course, a deep concern for the fortunes of his characters, an incorrigible sympathy for all who are lovely and all who long for happiness. My point is, that in spite of the numerous attacks meted out to his works both during his life and after, a large number of critics have paid glowing tributes to a man where heart, imagination and intellect combined to produce the very best in English novel writing.

Hardy excelled in coming to grips with the 'Wessex' of his imagination and his novels derived much of their strength from Hardy's intimate knowledge of the speech, customs, and ways of life of people of his native county of Dorset. They are also a conscious attempt to translate some of the themes of Greek tragedy into terms of the English novel. Although Hardy attached more importance to his poetry than to his novels, I am of the opinion that his novels are responsible for his popularity and acclaim him as a great literary figure in English literature.

This is well illustrated in the variety of studies and approaches that have been published by some of the finest critics of this century.

Contemporary criticism on the whole had been unkind to Hardy throughout the serial publication of his novels. Critics were unfair to use George Elliot as a standard for comparison as Hardy developed his rural themes. However, the article by Havelock Ellis, one of the most enlightened critics of the time marks a change in the approach to Hardy. It is the most searching and sensitive essay ever written on Hardy, the more so because it neither praises the novels in the conventional way, nor makes what had come to be the equally conventional attack on their vices. As one might expect, Ellis is interested in the more intimate places of the Hardyan psychology, though he pushes them with delicacy and tact. He points out that all women in his novels must be weak, even when weakness is an aspect of their strength, as with Bathsheba. They are incapable of moral firmness or ascendancy - the natural birthright of George Eliot's women: if they possessed it they could not attract Hardy or be seen by him and identified with as they are. Naturally Ellis does not speculate on the reasons for this, though as a doctor and psychologist

in training he is clearly thinking about it. How true was Ellis's remark that Hardy though without training as a literary artist, it was genius ~~that~~ ~~carried~~ that carried him through.

Unfortunately, the critics that reviewed Tess and Jude in the nineties did not think in the manner of Havelock Ellis. Their accounts tended to be seriously distorted by outraged conventionality and the concentration upon moral and philosophical issues. By the time the storm died down the tendency was to work out parallels with the classical tragedians. W.L. Courtney contributed a significant two-part essay on Mr. Hardy and Aeschylus. Interesting enough less attention was given to the qualities of style and narrative technique which had so preoccupied earlier critics. References to these matters were less often remarked on and tended to be played down.

The best single studies on Hardy were contributed by Lionel Johnson, Samuel Chew and H.C. Duffin. All agreed on Hardy's masterly portrayal of character, the dominant role of nature, the symmetry of his plots and one who was steeped in the traditions of his country-side. Those "post-Victorian" critics, seem to me vitiated by hardened pre-occupations - pre-occupation about fatalism and passimism, for

instance. But we should on Mr. Chew's generation with envy rather than disrespect, because there is no doubt that their accounts contributed immensely to Hardy's ever-growing popularity and to the development of criticism on his novels.

A recent British survey showed that Hardy is now extremely popular with young people. F.R. Leavis's refusal to include Hardy in his great tradition is not acceptable to most contemporary readers. Together with Leavis, T.S. Eliot and Henry James share a dislike of the novels which owes something to fastiduousness at the conventions of their plotting and melodrama; but more as John Bayley says, "it would appear, to a sense of the 'parochial' confusions in them, the radical disunity."[1] In short, these critics, inhibited by the critical habits of their generation and unable to place Hardy in perspective, dismissed him rashly as an Unrewarding and sentimental writer.

One on whom Hardy certainly exerted a deep influence was D.H. Lawrence, by exploring Hardy's people he had found a language in which to articulate his vision. But above all, his experience of Hardy must have been the greatest possible authentication

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[1] Bayey, John, An Essay on Hardy, Cambridge University Press, 1978, p.40.

and encouragement of his own vision. Here, of all English novelists, was one who saw human life against a vast impersonal landscape, and whose characters already existed in terms of being and consciousness rather than the conduct and sensibility of 'the old stable ego.'[2] As he pondered more deeply he had come to see how, as Hardy's fiction develop, the great background had become internalised in the conflict of universal forces within the characters themselves, at such a depth that they already clarified in credibly human complexity, the interplay of contraries which he had been trying to understand in his own life and Art. Yet he must have felt - the most liberating perception of affinity - that Hardy had neither seen clearly where he was going nor gone far enough, that there was no room to move beyond him and above all, to move beyond his pessimism. What Tess and Jude began, The Rainbow could complete. In short, Hardy helped Lawrence to find himself, and to carry to completion what he saw in the Wessex novels.

Both Virginia Woolf and E.M. Forster had joined Lawrence in paying tribute to Hardy. Virginia Woolf, who had chosen to read The Mayor of Casterbridge on her journey to Max Gate in the summer of

[2]Quoted by Mark Kinkead - Weekes: Lawrence on Hardy. Lance St. John Butler: Thomas Hardy After Fifty Years, Macmillan: London, 1977, p.101.

1926 to visit Hardy, found herself strangely affected by the felt condition of the novel. It required Virginia Woolf's alertness of feeling to intuit and affirm that Hardy was an irresistibly great novelist despite his rather uncertain reputation at that time. For E.M. Forster the works of Thomas Hardy was his "home". For Forster, one of Hardy's greatest strengths as a novelist in his creation of "a sense felt life", so that his readers can experience what it is like to be Tess or Sue, Clym or Jude. This derives in part from ability to "let a bucket down into the subconscious" as Forster describes the process, so that Hardy is imaginatively exploring his characters in the process creating them. Further, Forster with his theory of "the undeveloped heart" and Lawrence with his stress on the need for a harmonious balance between mind and body are clearly developing themes that were central in Hardy's work. The change is the concept of characterisation, with the emphasis on the existence of unknowable areas of the personality, is not quite so striking as the change in subject matter, but it is a natural consequence of it. Lawrence wrote:

> "The novel has a future. It's got to have the courage to tackle new propositions without using abstractions; it got to present us with

> new, really new feelings, a whole new line of emotions, which will get us out of the emotional rut."[3]

A little hesitantly and cautiously, Hardy is doing this. These developments are embodied in a character that has so much vitality and is depicted with sympathy that it is indeed "a point of major innovation in prose fiction."

Before 1940 criticism tended to look upon Hardy more in the light of a traditional Victorian novelist. We call Hardy a Victorian because he spent the first sixty years of his life in the nineteenth century and it was that century which formed many of his beliefs and ideas. But he was not a typical Victorian; he now seems to exemplify the more modern, adventurous, questioning spirit which came into literature about the turn of the century and led on directly to the work of F.H. Lawrence. Many of the most cherished Victorian beliefs, in Providence, for example were just those which Hardy found that he could not accept. Another way in which he seems untypical is in his preoccupation with the life of the countryside. The consciousness of most educated Victorians, writers or not, was decidely "urban"; Hardy was very different from them in this way.

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[3]Quoted by Rosemary Sumner: Thomas Hardy: Psychological Novelist, London, Macmillan Press Ltd., 1981, p.182.

But in other ways he could not help being influenced by the contemporary intellectual climate. Hardy fitted into the Victorian literary tradition. Other novelists did not influence him, except in a negative way. Hardy admired Fielding, who had lived in the same part of England, and thought he was not appreciated enough 'as a local novelist'. Dickens was still alive when he first went to London, and the young man often went to hear him reading from his own novels, but in general they wrote about very different subjects and in still more different ways. At that time, Thackeray was generally thought to be the best living novelist. Hence because his novels stand as high as works of Art or Truth, they often have anything but an elevating tendency, and on that account are particularly unfitted for young people - from their very truthfulness. As for George Eliot, Hardy had, as I have illustrated, the strange experience of being mistaken for her. Hardy thought that she was a 'great thinker' - one of the greatest living, but not a born storyteller by any means,' and that her novels were not representative of real country life. The other great novelist of the late nineteenth century was Henry James, but although he and Hardy met several times they were really incompatible.

But during his growing period in London he was reading hardly any novels, and a great deal of poetry. He was influenced by poets much more than by novelists. He had a thorough knowledge of Milton and Shakespeare, yet his real roots were in the English Romantic tradition, the tradition which, in one way or another, helped to form almost all English poets until it was killed by the First World War. Hardy had more in common with Wordsworth than with any other Romantic writer. Wordsworth had insisted in his Preface to Lyrical Ballads that poetry must be written in 'real language of men.' Hardy must have felt the same, as he incorporated a good deal of ordinary language, including dialect, in his poems and novels. Further, like Wordsworth, he is deeply interested in man's relationship to his natural environment - in his cse Dorset, in Wordsworth's the Cumberland hills. Like Wordsworth, he writes about men and women who live in constant communion with nature, shepherds, for example, or tramps, or rural workers and he feels that nature provides these people with a permanent source of strength.

Further, the ability to put up with 'solitude, pain of heart, distress and poverty' and still carry on is what makes up the heroic aspect of man. This

is an essential part of Hardy's philosophy, which the Victorians called pessimism, and which he himself thought was the only realistic and possible creed. That was why Wordsworth's poetry seemed to him so good as a 'cure for despair.'

Surprisingly, it seems that Hardy's favourite Romantic poets were Keats and, above all, Shelley. He felt a strong sympathy for both of them as people: Shelley because he had been persecuted for unorthodox ideas, and Keats because he had been abused by the critics (like Hardy himself) and died in obscurity. Hardy's own attitude to religion was very much the same as Shelley's. He believed in what he called 'the spirit of the sermon on the Mount', but, except as a very young man, he didn't believe in a personal God.

Finally Swinburne's work had an electric effect on Hardy. The latter described this effect, many years lter, in his elegy for Swinburne, 'A Singer Asleep'. Why did Hardy admire Swinburne so greatly? Hardy's enthusiasm was always appealing because he was a bond and independent thinker. Like him, Swinburne was what we would now call a humanist, one who believed that man, not God, was the most important being in

the universe. He asserted this, deliberately provocatively, in his 'Hymn of Man', which announced that God was dead and that "Man is the master of things."[4]

With his atheism went the belief that there was no such thing as Providence, and that man is necessarily alone and must work out his own destiny. Such lines: "Save his own sould he hath no star", (which is the motto for Book II of Jude the Obscure) were some of Hardy's favourite lines. Both writers tended to see man as a lonely and heroic figure, 'slighted and enduring'. They were both 'pessimists' in the sense of believing that man must solve his own problems, without any help from a superhuman force. Therefore, it is most surprising that both Swinburne and Hardy should find themselves unpopular among critics and more sin an age which hated and feared originality and tried to reduce its artists to mere entertainers. For this reason, Hardy had a fellow-feeling for Swinburne more than for any other living writer, and he records rather touchingly in the Life that after he had written 'A Singer Asleep' he 'gathered a spray of ivy and laid it on the grave of that brother-poet of whom he never spoke save

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[4]Quoted by Merryn Williams: A Preface to Hardy, Preface Books, Longman: London and New York, 1976 rpt. 1979, p.71.

in words of admiration and affection.'[5]

Critics up to the 40's failed to see that one of the great forces which shaped his art was his compelling need to seek out the truth, however uncomfortable or painful; the other was his passionate hatred suffering. 'What are my books' he said, 'but one long plea against "man's inhumanity to man" - to woman - and to the lower animals? Whatever may be the inherent good or evil of life, it is certain that man make it much worse than it need be.'[6] The cruelty of man and society, the immeasurable value of each human being and the tragic waste of human potentiality; these are the great themes of Hardy's writings, and in this sense it is true to say that he is a novelist of protest.

The finest criticism came in 1940 in the Hardy centennial issue of the Southern Review. The accounts survey the multiple facets of Thomas Hardy's talent by a host of the greatest critics of the time. They include Donald Davidson, Dorothy Van Ghent, Morton Dauwen Zabel, W.H. Auden, and Katherine Anne Porter. I call this phase a 'revival' in the development

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[5]Quoted by Merry Williams: A Preface to Hardy, Preface Books. Longman: London and New York 1976 reptd. 1979, p.72.

[6]Quoted by F.B. Pinion: A Hardy Companion: A Guide to the Works of Thomas Hardy and Their Background, London, Macmillan, 19768, Rev,. ed. 1976, p.178.

of Hardy criticism because for the first time we have essays in criticism which throw new light on his novels. Hardy criticism had gone through a revival in the same way as Dickens criticism had done. Further, it is surprising that there are some stimulating and constructive essays in Hardy criticism in the Hardy centenary issue of an American periodical, nearly all by Americans. Here I refer to Mr. Zabel's "Hardy in defence of his Art: The Aesthetic of Incongruity", one of the finest essays of the time written on the novels. The valuable analysis of '<u>Jude the Obscure</u> as a Tragedy' by Arthur Mizner - such a really fundamental analysis of one novel done with intelligence and critical method, and by someone in possession of a great deal of parallel information about Hardy's mentality and outlook, is more illuminating than a library of "Aesthetic" flounderings; and the final essay on "The Novels of Hardy To-day" by Herbert J Muller. These really are essays in criticism which enlightening and gave to the world a brand new approach to Hardy. Says Q.D. Leavis in his review of the essays that appeared in the centennial issue of the <u>Southern Review:</u>

> What really warms one's heart is the complete absence of the belletristic approach or of any aesthetic posturing, in this collective enterprise.[7]

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[7]Leavis, Q.D., 'Hardy and Criticism', <u>Scrutiny</u>, Vol. XI, No.3, Spring 1943, p.237.

A wonderful tribute paid by Leavis to this remarkable collection of essays and beyond doubt, the most helpful critical work on Hardy I know of since 1928.

The really useful critical biography of Hardy had not yet been written up to 1940. With the publication in 1942 with Edmund Blunder's book: <u>Thomas Hardy</u>, he had gone some way towards producing one. Following this account we have the brilliant critical study of Hardy where Albert of Guerard breaks sharply with the traditional view of the novelist and writers of Hardy, not as a ponderous old-school philosopher, but as a great storyteller who dramatized the destructiveness, the drift, and the absurdity of life. <u>The New York Herald Tribune</u> reviewing Guarard's book states: "Crisp, challenging, informative, highly intelligent .... He has crammed into this little book more vital comment on his author than can be found in a whole shelf of ordinary criticism."

With the thematic critics of the 50's and 60's, I feel placing Hardy's novels solely in the context of history had been over done. From all accounts there is no doubt Hardy did paint a picture of 'English rural life' and his novels do relate to the condition of rural England in the latter half of the nineteenth

century. It was in 1982 where Nooral Hasan in his book Thomas Hardy: The Sociological Imagination stated:

> The Wessex novels take the form not of historical fiction, but of fiction as research into the history of rural culture. It would not do therefore, to place them in a given historical context.[8]

Reviewers commenting on the works of the thematic critics concluded that Hardy beyond doubt was concerned with social data, with gross historical references but this was not the essence for his writing. Nooral Hasan's analysis is that Hardy's fiction is essentially an evocative cultural statement about the quality of life in a rural community. This author shaved the central assumption of the sociological school in Hardy criticism but he takes a different view of both rural history and Hardy's treatment of it in his Wessex novels. Dr. Hasan argues that Hardy looked upon local history as an interpretive and metaphoric structure rather than as regional predicament. C.B. Cox in his foreward to Dr. Hasan's book states that this book is undoubtedly an important addition to our understanding of the drama of warring values in Hardy's fiction.

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[8] Hasan, Noorul, Thomas Hardy: The Sociological Imagination, Madras; 1982, p.1.

My own view is that fiction for Hardy is a human necessity for making sense of the world. Therefore, Hardy used the novel as a means for expressing the truth and various things he wrote, show that he understood this state of mind only too well. It saddened him that critics approached his work with ignorant prejudice against his "pessimism." He preferred to describe himself as a 'meliorist' where he showed in the novels that the world can be better, if people try. It was no good pretending that pain did not exist or did not matter. Pain has been and always will be. In terms of religion, however much he might want to believe in christianity he refused to let himself be persuaded against his judgement. He went on being an agnostic all his life. But there is no novelist who made so mũch use of Biblical references as Hardy did. Hardy's familiarity with the Bible probably did more to enlarge his historical sense than any other literature.

Therefore, almost everything Hardy wrote about arose out of personal feeling that the world was frightening, planless, and dangerous. Matthew arnold wrote in a similar fashion in his poem 'Dover Beach'. Hardy found himself on a 'Darkling Plain' as it were. Man must create his own values, for,

living in a universe of cruelty and chaos, he will find no guidance from anything outside himself. This is what Hardy set out to declare in his novels.

Coming, to the critics of the 70's we have some of the most original and vigorous approaches to Hardy. It is not possible to place these critics and what they have to say about Hardy under any definite subject. By looking at him in a variety of fresh ways the contributors provide a range of new ideas and interpretations that help to identify what is important in Hardy to-day. Criticism since 1928 has gone a long way. From being the writer of pastoral tales, a lover of nature he is accredited with being a great psychological novelist. Hence, Rosmary Summer's publication in 1981, <u>Thomas Hardy: Psychological Novelist</u>. Hardy considered it important for a writer to be 'fifty years ahead of his time'. His desire to change peoples attitudes, to make them more understanding, more tolerant and less prejudiced arose largely from his profound insight into psychological complexities.

With Hardy's work still a potent force in modern writing it is too early to assess his influence. But the numerous critical studies come out after

the 70's speak for itself - Hardy remains as popular a writer in the modern world. No writer in the past has taken pains in exploring man's relation to the natural world, writing at length the significance of his fictional world 'Wessex', and to modern society. Hardy has been one of the first English novelists to treat the relationship between the sexes with the seriousness it deserved. It is no wonder in the light of this Hardy's novels have proved so very attractive to modern critics and his influence is still present in several ways.

Hardy's influence is seen in one of the most remarkable of modern English novels, The French Lieutenant's Woman by John Fowles which is set in Victorian times in Lyme Regis. The influence has been felt in U.S.A. and in Japan. In Australia, finally, there is the distinguished output of Patrick White. Because of his concern with the country in such a book as The Tree of Man one is barely aware that the village life is other than an English one. It is of a universal nature but has affinities with the Wessex novels that it may be read as part of the progeny of Hardy.

Finally, because of the increased output of Hardy's works from the press and the demand for still more precise editions of what he wrote he may be forming the consciousness of writers who are still in the process of self-discovery. There has at the same time been a renaissance in Hardy's studies and scholarships, for although the public has long known that he was a great writer it has taken longer for critics to find this out and explain precisely why. Although the world in which Hardy grew up has gone for ever it is impossible to picture him as a Victorian. He has indeed transcended these limits and comes over to most people as a curiously modern and readily accessible writer of the highest order and of to-day.

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