

Thomas Hardy

Degree 2 (English Honours)

Paper 4

Thomas Hardy is regarded as the most outstanding novelist in the history of English Literature. Besides a prominent novelist, he is also a very good poet. Hardy is known as Wessex novelist and tries to emphasis on a particular region in each novel that's why he is also called a regional novelist. Though, his approach towards life is pessimistic. He gives much due respect the fate of his characters. As he says, Fate is an external agency which over man has got no control. His characters are naturally associated with the low occupation such as farmers, hay cutters and wood cutters.

Hardy was attempting something very different from the aims of most novelists. The art of the novelist who sets out to display human beings in the context of social life must be one of constant differentiation and discrimination between characters. But social life as we find it depicted variously in Jane Austen, Thackeray, Trollope, George Eliot... scarcely exists in Hardy. His characters stand in relation to other things: the weather, the seasons, a traditional craft. He sees his characters much as Scott does his, first in their generic aspects: thus, before he is anything

else Gabriel Oak is the good shepherd, Tess is the dairymaid... Individuality as such is not at all what he is after; what concerns him most in human beings is their response to the deep-rooted passions, above all sexual love. Hardy was a devoted reader of philosophy, scientific texts, the Bible, and Greek literature, and he incorporated much of his knowledge into his own works. One of the most profound influences on his thinking was Charles Darwin, particularly Darwin's emphasis on chance and luck in evolution. Though brought up to believe in God, Hardy struggled with a loss of faith suffered by many of his contemporaries; he increasingly turned to science for answers about man's place in the universe.

One of Hardy's central concerns in all of his writing was the problem of modernity in a society that was rapidly becoming more and more industrial. One of his projects as a writer was to create an account of life in the swiftly changing Dorsetshire as it had once been. He was particularly interested in the rituals and histories of that part of England, as well as the dialect of its locals. The title *Far from the Madding Crowd* suggests avoidance of the life of a city, modernized government, crowds and industry; in it, Hardy tries to fashion a portrait of what he saw as an endangered way of life and to create a snapshot for future generations.

Hardy wrote 14 novels in all (12 for serialization), and three volumes of

short stories. They are all, in very different ways, love stories, and concern themselves with what Hardy calls in his Preface to *Jude* "the strongest passion known to humanity": sex. Sex was a subject that no publisher of the time, if he wished to remain in business, dared to mention. Hardy explores blind passion and unwise marriages, and as his relationship with his own wife became increasingly strained, even questioned marriage itself. In *Tess* marriage is "an arbitrary law of society which has no foundation in Nature" and in *Jude* it is seen as a "sordid contract based on material convenience". His career as a novelist may be said to begin with the anonymous publication of his novel *Desperate Remedies* in 1871. The plot has a lot of Gothic elements in it, although Hardy characteristically rejected the supernatural. Under *the Greenwood Tree* is a tale of rustic life, a woodland pastoral.

Far from the *Madding Crowd*. In this novel Hardy first used the term Wessex as the name for the section of southern England in which he set his work. It corresponds mainly to his native Dorset. In this novel he tells the story of the love of Gabriel Oak for Bathsheba Everdene, who eventually marries him after a disastrous marriage to Troy. Hardy was unique in applying his own system of place names to a fictional area based in fact. He did so comprehensively. To help readers identify the real place names he had disguised, Hardy produced a map of Wessex

complete with 'county' boundaries, natural features, coastal resorts, towns, villages and hamlets. It's evident that his Wessex took a shape and form that extended the boundaries of his real world. Once created, the fictional name for a real place in one book was usually carried over to another. The 'Weatherbury' in *Far from the Madding Crowd* appears throughout the Wessex novels as the name of Puddle town, or Piddle town as it was called before the reign of Queen Victoria. Dorchester, the heart of Wessex is referred to as 'Casterbridge'. Dorset's scenic coastline features in many of his novels. His fictional place names echo now-forgotten folklore elements.

Despite being an imagined world, the Wessex novels contain descriptions of life in the region which are completely authentic. During Hardy's childhood Dorset in particular had remained relatively remote and old-fashioned. The railway only reached Dorchester in 1847, when Hardy was seven. His earliest memories were of 'men in the stocks, corn-law agitations, mail coach's road-waggons, tinder-boxes and candle snuffing'. Condemned, for the most part, to a life of poverty and squalor, the farm labourers of Dorset -among whom Hardy could count close cousins and uncles- were the worst paid and worst housed in the country. To maintain a reasonable family income, the women and children also sought work on the land. So, though picturesque, his

settings were not sentimentalized, real hardship and poverty were to evident during the agricultural depression. At Corfe Castle in 1868, for example, a family of eight lived in an outhouse built for a calf. Hardy called the castle ruins 'Corvsgate'.

Thus, we can say that Hardy's way of writing and his attitude towards his characters is unique from other writers. His characters are the real portrait of the society who struggle against his faith and the consequences of the society.

By, Arshad Khan

Dept. of English

J N College

Madhubani