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Pessimism in the novels of Thomas Hardy

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PREFACE

"Of all approbrious names," says Florence Emily Hardy, "Hardy resented most "pessimist." Yet a thorough study of his novels will certainly convince one that his attitude toward life is definitely pessimistic. Mrs. Hardy quotes him as saying: "My motto is, first correctly diagnose the complaint -- in this case human ills -- and ascertain the cause: then set about finding a remedy if one exists."

According to Hardy, humanity is ill. In diagnosing the case, he is not much concerned with the surface of things, but is more interested in probing far below the surface to find the force behind them. Since this force in his novels is always Fate, and since he is always certain to make things end tragically, the writer of this study will attempt to show that he well deserves the name, "pessimist."

In this study the writer will attempt to analyze Hardy's novels in order to ascertain the nature of his pessimism, as well as point out the techniques by which pessimism is evinced in his novels. In discussing the causes of pessimism, the writer

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2Ibid.
Deems it necessary to consider Hardy's personality, influences, and philosophy, which appear to be the chief causes of the pessimistic attitude taken by him. The nature of his pessimism will be studied by means of an analysis of his settings, themes, plots, and characters. Finally, the writer will discuss the techniques of diction, imagery, irony, and symbolism used in the novels which created for him the name of "pessimist."

This study will be based on the following novels by Hardy: Desperate Remedies (1871), Under the Greenwood Tree (1872), A Pair of Blue Eyes (1875), Far from the Madding Crowd (1874), The Return of the Native (1878), Two on a Tower (1882), The Mayor of Casterbridge (1886), Tess of the D'Urbervilles (1891), and Jude the Obscure (1895).

Since philosophical terms and reference to forces of Nature are capitalized in Hardy's novels, the writer of this study will do likewise. Hardy personifies the forces of Nature, and makes them play the symbolic role of persons having superhuman qualities. In the case of the philosophical terms used by him, there can be no better explanation than that given by Ethlynne Elizabeth Holmes in her thesis, "Thomas Hardy's Departure from Victorianism," in which she states that "it seems to be an idiosyncrasy of the author even as he coins terms at will to fit his delineations of persons, places, and things."

At this point, the writer wishes to make acknowledgements to all persons who gave assistance to her while she was

1Ethlynne Elizabeth Holmes, "Thomas Hardy's Departure from Victorianism" (Unpublished Master's thesis, Department of English, Atlanta University, 1936), n.p.
engaged in this study. She wishes to express appreciation to
the librarians, who made available the materials needed for
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research, and who is, to a large degree, responsible for the
completion of this study.

This study is dedicated to my husband, Rudolph R. Reid,
my son, Roderick Jerome Reid, and to my mother, Rebecca M.
Greene.
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CHAPTER I

THE CAUSES OF PESSIMISM

Hardy might be characterized as a person of grave and kindly manner, with deep-set brooding eyes which appeared rather dispassionate. He had an affection for the soil, and was known to have a humanitarian spirit. He was quite sociable, but subject to reflectiveness and withdrew himself when dark thoughts assailed his memories.

Many character sketches have been written concerning Hardy's personality. A few which seem most descriptive of the author have been selected for study here. Certainly one must agree with Ernest Brennecke, Jr. when he describes Hardy as being

...keen-witted, with a strange, slippery logic to cover an enigmatic personality. A memory but fitfully illuminated, and in unexpected places. A touch of common simplicity, a strain of common nobility. An unflinching grip on reality, and a sentiment that trembles at the touch of things.¹

Although, as Brennecke says, he is endowed with an "enigmatic personality" -- that is, one that is inexplicable, the writer believes that if one takes into consideration his sentimental make-up (traits) and his unpleasant experiences

¹Ernest Brennecke, Jr., The Life of Thomas Hardy (Boston, 1923), p. 1.
during his early years, one can explain why he developed into a pessimist. Ruth A. Firir notes that Hardy has been thought unduly somber and ironic. This profound melancholy and deep-seated irony, like Browning's obscurity, lies partly in the poet's temperament, and partly in the heart of his subject.

while Holland Clive classifies him as

...a representative man to whom the experiences, bitter struggles, disillusionments, stoical sufferings of wrongs, and primitive passions of peasantry...were well and intimately known.

Phelps believes that

...his pessimism is mainly caused by his deep, manly tenderness for all forms of human and animal life, and by an almost abnormal sympathy.

The environment in which a man lives inevitably plays a great part in shaping his destiny. So it was with Hardy.

Like the Athenian dramatists who found in their tiny Mediterranean peninsula a cosmic mirror wherein the whole panorama of what is richest, direst, best, worst, deepest, most colorful in the minds and actions of humanity might be discovered and artistically presented, Hardy has found in the southwestern corner of his island all the ingredients for a complete literary picture of his time.

The Hardy country greatly colored Hardy's work. Hardy said of himself that he had become convinced that climate really makes character. He grew up in an environment of ignorance

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and superstition where omens and premonitions played a large part in the lives of the people. Some families had unmistakable death warnings; others believed in omens of ill luck, such as stumbling, bad weather on a wedding day, being married on a Friday, the crowing of a cock in the afternoon, the appearance of a comet, etc. Still others thought that dreams, omens, and pre-sentiments were predictions of the future. Hardy, having grown up in an environment of folklore and folk-custom, made use of many of these superstitions in his writings. Ruth A. Firir thinks that

Hardy's intimate knowledge of folklore and folk-custom had an almost incalculable influence upon his art. It deepened a temperament already melancholy; it profoundly affected his philosophy of life; it fed his imagination with rich and varied stuff; and it gave us his most precious quality -- a brooding pity for all living things.¹

Hardy grew up in this atmosphere; though always above it by reason of a cultivated mother, the forces of a formal education, and a widening acquaintance with the world outside Wessex, he was none the less a part of his own community, and gloried in the fact.²

Although environment played the greater part in shaping Hardy's life, there were also other forces that influenced him. Tales told to him by his grandmother during his boyhood days are believed to have been instrumental in aiding him to create living images in prose of the swiftly vanishing color of his Dorset environment, for he retained in his memory many of the impressions that she gave him. It is believed that Hardy actually

¹Firir, op. cit., p. 308.
²Ibid.
acquired his insight into the female heart from his grandmother's penetrating interpretations of the tales she recounted. Brennecke further says:

If his grandmother thus provided the raw materials for his cold x-ray studies of character under the bombardment of environment and circumstance, it was Hardy's mother who stimulated his earliest impulses to translate them into artistic entities.¹

His mother was rather proud of the fact that she was well versed in all of the classical literature, notably the work of Vergil, Horace, and Catullus. She had also read the French romances and tragedies, and writings of the English Cavalier poets. From his mother he received his affection for the soil and its creatures, his subjective appreciation for their emotions and reactions, his fiery train of humanitarianism, his artistic taste, and his superficial sense of expression.

It is believed that he was influenced by the Periclean and Elizabethan dramatist. This is believed true because, in his works, there is the apparent revival of the artistic instinct toward great dramatic motives -- the setting forth of that collision between the individual and the general -- which were formerly worked out with such force by the above-named dramatists.

W. D. Nevin, an authority on religion, says that

The prevailing ideas of scientific pessimism which were spread through the works of Charles Darwin gave naturalism fresh impetus. This new scientific naturalism

¹Brennecke, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
seemingly influenced Hardy to a great extent in his interpretation of the universe. ¹

Contradictory opinions have been expressed as to whether marital troubles contributed toward his becoming a pessimist. F. B. Adams in his review of Carl C. Weber's article, "Hardy in America," says,

Certainly as his marital troubles increased in the 1880's he read Schopenhaur and Von Hartman, and returned to the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles which he read so carefully twenty-five years before, and these may have confirmed his melancholy, but they did not change his fundamental outlook, or create any new element in his art. ²

He further states that "his eccentricities are...natural outcroppings of his personality." ³

It has been previously suggested that his environment was not conducive to developing optimism. In order to clarify this statement, it is necessary for the writer to mention a few historical facts about the period in which Hardy lived. This was the age of the Industrial Revolution in which many changes occurred. First, the old agrarian system was gradually being destroyed; second, there was a shift of population from rural communities to the city; and third, there was a change of religious, political, and social ideas which apparently baffled Hardy greatly. This confusion in him changed to melancholy, and finally culminated into pessimism. The effect of the age

³Ibid.
on Hardy's disposition is very succinctly expressed by Lord David Cecil in the following paragraph:

This disposition to the melancholy view was confirmed and increased by the age in which he lived. It was a disturbing age for a sensitive mind; for it was an age of transition. The Industrial Revolution was in the process of destroying the old agricultural England; the population was shifting; the old ties which had united the small communities of the past were breaking bit by bit. Along with the disintegration of the old social and economic structure went a disintegration of ideas.¹

It is Cecil's belief that Hardy was more affected by this great rebellion against convention which shook the fundamental basis of belief -- religious, political, and social -- than many others whose personalities were not so deeply tinged with melancholy. Lord David Cecil also tells of two rather horrible experiences to which Hardy was exposed early in his life. These experiences are as follows:

Hardy saw two hangings before he was eighteen. He stood under the scaffold to see a woman die on one occasion. On another occasion, from a neighboring hill, he watched through a telescope the white figure of a man, silhouetted against the facade of the prison, drop down from the gallows as the clock struck eight. Overcome with horror, he turned homeward. He was a very sensitive boy, responding precociously to experience; and the life in which he grew up stamped itself so deeply on his imagination that, when his faculties had reached the creative stage of development, he conceived his picture of life in its terms.²

Hardy appeared to have been influenced by the Greeks and Romans in his settings, which usually consisted of heaths,


²Ibid., p. 28.
meads, undulating plains, ruins, hamlets, and small towns reminiscent of the Romans; a setting indigenous in tradition and rich in universal experiences.

There are those who say that Hardy is a most original writer, influenced by no master; others say that Schopenhauer has touched him. William Lyon Phelps shows the similarity of Hardy to Schopenhauer in the following expression:

The pessimism of Mr. Hardy resembles that of Schopenhauer in being absolutely thorough and absolutely candid; it makes the world as darkly superb and as terribly interesting as a Greek drama.\(^1\)

Because of Hardy's philosophy and writings, he has been called "a Disciple of Destiny" and a "Pessimist." His philosophy is based on both experience and reading. This is animated by a discerning insight into human characters. According to Hardy, the universe is a true proscenium within which the drama of man's fleeting life is enacted. He thinks that the universe consists of three levels: earth, over-world, and cosmic infinity. Wessex is Hardy's earth, and surrounding or above the earth is the over-world. It is peopled with Super-terrestrial Phantom Intelligences which watch over the affairs of the earth.

The over-world characters, the Super-terrestrial Phantom Intelligences, are endowed with either indifferent, malignant, or beneficent motives. All of the sentiences are given power to hold in their inscrutable depths meanings and fates for man not always discernable or deserved. Hardy therefore believes

\(^1\)Phelps, _op. cit._, p. 511.
that the events of the earth depend on the whims of the sentiences.

Hardy's philosophy might be considered an unfavorable criticism of God inasmuch as he thinks that it is one of the divine incongruities that man, placed in a universe shaped blindly without knowledge or foresight for his convenience, should be chained to the past and eternity so helplessly. The reference to the past and eternity is Hardy's belief that for each person there will be two polar nights and a twilight -- the night of the past, the night of eternity, and the brief span of man's sojourn on earth. Hardy pictures the sentiences as acting in three different ways: first, in their indifference; secondly, in their sinister attitude toward man; and thirdly, in a moving and potent malignity.

When Hardy thinks of man, placed in an indifferent universe, and struggling through a fleeting existence, he is moved to pity. He thinks that the indifference of the universe exists because of man's infinitesimal insignificance in the scheme of things. He pictures man as a fleeting atom working out his destiny unheeded. Accordingly, he assumes that before man's advent into the world there were universal laws, which since his coming have remained unchanged and inexorable. They were not framed for man, and he must conform to them or suffer annihilation. Human beings, then, are merely puppets of fate, and destined to misery.

Hardy also described nature as having moods. In many of his novels, nature is pictured as having a terrible temper,
not one that scatters kindnesses and cruelties alternately, impartially, and in order, but one that is heartless and severe. In A Pair of Blue Eyes, Hardy, in speaking of nature, states that "In her friendly moments, there seems a feline fun in her tricks, begotten by a foretaste of her pleasure in swallowing her victim."1

Holland Clive tells us in his book that a note written by Hardy reads thus:

"...pessimism is in brief playing a sure game; you cannot lose at it, you may gain. It is the only view of life in which you can never be disappointed. Having reckoned what to do in the worst possible circumstances, when better arise, as they may, life becomes a child play."2

William Lyon Phelps, in discussing Hardy's view of life, says,

"As a spectator of human history, he sees life as a vast tragedy, with men and women emerging from nothingness, suffering acute physical and mental sorrow and then passing into nothingness again. To his sympathetic mind, the creed of optimism is a ribal insult to the pain of humanity and devout piety merely absurd."3

Richard G. Lillard says that "Hardy, in studying the manifestations of destiny in the world of men, sees men blindly pitted against overwhelming odds, suffering from an unjust fate."4

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1 Thomas Hardy, A Pair of Blue Eyes (New York, 1873), p. 243. All subsequent references to Hardy's novels are entered without the name of the author.


3 Phelps, op. cit., p. 513.

Lillard thinks that the following statement summarizes Hardy's philosophy:

Man is predominantly the creature and the victim of lost opportunities, of the tricky fatalities that lurk in obscure impulses, of accidents that have backward and forward connections, all working through the blind force of circumstance in a world composed of riddles. Evil is inherent in fate, not in man... Chance is against man; so is its ally, Time, that cannot be hurried, and its enemy, Death, that will not wait.¹

Lillard further states that Hardy finds a metaphysical basis in an Imminent Will who rules carelessly over man, administering preadjusted laws concerned only with heartless cause and effect... Hardy sees a tragic collectivism on earth.²

Lord David Cecil gives Hardy's environment as the chief reason for his pessimistic philosophy. The following statement is synonymous with his belief.

Dependent and ignorant, exposed alike to the oppressions of the social system and the caprice of the weather, every moment of their existence, the people among which Hardy was brought up were made conscious of man's helplessness in the face of circumstances.³

He continues to say that Hardy himself felt the same as his neighbors in Wessex. He fancied that a figure stood in his van, with arm uplifted, to knock him back from any pleasant prospect he indulged in as probable... Since the world he looked at seemed so full of pain and disappointment, then, he argued, pain and disappointment were outstanding characteristics of human existence.⁴

William Newton says of Hardy that "It is this all

¹Ibid.
²Ibid.
³Cecil, op. cit., p. 28.
⁴Ibid.
pervading sense of some sinister power behind events"¹... that made Hardy think as he did. Hardy expresses in a note which was written a day or two after finishing *The Mayor of Casterbridge* what to him is the business of the poet.

The business of the poet and novelist is to see the sorrows underlying the grandest things, and the grandeur underlying the sorriest things.²

Ruth A. Firir, in discussing Hardy's philosophy, says

At rare moments he allows his intelligence and his humor to play over this superstitious way of looking at life; but on the whole, it is not the comedy, but the tragedy and the irony of life that move him most. Not because he is himself superstitious, ... but because, after all, there is a certain undeniable truth and beauty in this primitive way of thought and feeling, does he dwell so constantly on omens and superstitions. He saw, no doubt, that of all the dogmatists the man of science is the most terrible, because the most unconscious; and the later in all honesty must end in the confession that the universe is an enigma. Hardy would seem to say that to view the future with awe and a natural touch of fear is not to lack quiet courage and strength.³

William Lyon Phelps in a comparison of Meredith and Hardy made the following statement:

Mr. Meredith and Mr. Hardy were both Pagans and regarded the world of men and women from the Pagan standpoint, though the deduction in one case was optimism and in the other pessimism.⁴

If one reads further in his article, one will discover that

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¹William Newton, "Chance as Employed by Hardy and the Naturalists," *Philological Quarterly*, XXX(April, 1951), 169.

²Clive, op. cit., p. 107.

³Firir, op. cit., p. 40.

⁴Phelps, op. cit., p. 505.
the pessimism refers to Hardy. Phelps notes that

...Mr. Hardy's pessimism is the one deep-seated conviction of his whole intellectual process.... His God is a kind of insane child, who cackles foolishly as he destroys the most precious object, as in 'The President of the Immortals had finished his sport with Tess.'

The attitude Hardy takes toward Destiny, according to Phelps, is as follows:

Destiny is whimsical, rather than definitely malicious; for Destiny has not sufficient intelligence even to be systematically bad.

In spite of the fact that Hardy resents being called a pessimist, his philosophy proves that his outlook on life is pessimistic. He appears to have the conception that man's struggle against fate is futile. He differs from Swift in the belief that man is contemptible. Whereas Swift lashes out at mankind, Hardy reserves his lashes for the force which governs man and manipulates him into destruction.

Not only can an author's philosophy be determined by what he says, but it can easily be ascertained by what he does with his characters. Since he believes that Fate masters man, he puts this belief into his characters, and, in each case, allows Fate to master them.

We find the heroes and heroines in these novels, in spite of their desperate efforts to succeed, fighting a losing battle against Fate. Over and over his characters are seen

\[1\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 512.}\]
\[2\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 513.}\]
playing an inevitable role planned for them by malignant destiny. His fatalistic philosophy can be seen in their actions and expressions. A common expression among his characters, is "it was to be."\(^1\) This was the attitude taken by the milkmaids at the dairy when Angel Claire chose Tess instead of them. This also was the attitude taken by Mrs. Durbeyfield when Tess was chosen by fate to bear an illegitimate child. The author expresses this same idea when he says of Jude that "he was the sort of man who was born to ache a good deal before the fall of the curtain upon his unnecessary life."\(^2\) Jude shows his belief in fate when he says, after his oldest child had hanged the two younger children and himself,

> Nothing can be done. Things are as they are and will be brought to their destined issue.\(^3\)

Brennecke says in his book, *Thomas Hardy's Universe*, that Hardy believes that

> The whole universe of men, nations, and spirits, is conceived as an immense automatic clockwork, which, having been wound up once for all, must run its course according to the predetermined plan.\(^4\)

Sometimes fate seems the result of a character's inner nature. This has been shown in Jude who could not control his sex desires. Some cause tragedy because of their urge to live and be happy. They do not deliberately bring trouble to their

\(^1\) *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, p. 80.
\(^2\) *Jude the Obscure*, p. 12.
\(^4\) Brennecke, *Thomas Hardy's Universe* (Boston, 1925), p. 102.
fellows. Mrs. Yeobright and Lady Constantine are examples of Hardy's characters who bring woe although their intentions were good. Lillard says,

the only offense these people commit is to be alive. ... Hardy makes a character's action the only action that character could take. ...what he does is inevitable because of the gradual coming together of a thousand small circumstances through the workings of august and inscrutable destiny.¹

Man, according to Hardy is fighting a battle against impersonal forces, the forces conditioning his fate. Hardy blames Fate for all of the wrong actions of his characters. Cecil summarizes Hardy's feeling toward his characters thus:

Henchard, as he sees him, is a pathetic figure, born with an unfortunate disposition but genuine longing to do right, tortured by remorse when he does wrong, and always defeated by some unlucky stroke of Fate. Eustacia, too -- the gorgeous, tragic Eustacia of 'The Return of the Native' -- what desolation she brings on all around her in her unscrupulous fight for happiness! Yet Hardy does not represent her as hateful. An exotic orchid, planted by chance in the unfriendly northern moorland of Egdon, who can condemn her for snatching at every chance to achieve the sort of life in which alone her nature can find fulfilment.²

From this quotation, one can see that Hardy is blaming Fate and not Henchard or Eustacia for their actions. Chiefly, in his novels, Fate incarnates itself in two guises -- as chance or as love. Of the two, chance is more typical.

The humorous statement of Grandfer Candle in The Return of the Native, illustrates Hardy's belief in Fate. Grandfer Candle in attempting to justify his non-attendance at church

¹Lillard, op. cit., p. 322.
²Cecil, op. cit., 39.
says, "'Tis such a mortal poor chance that you'll be chose for up above, that I bide at home and don't go at all."¹ When Tess goes to Flintcomb -- Ash, Hardy says, "There seemed to be no help for it; hither she was doom to come."² When Troy seeks to change his course, he meets a grotesque rebuke from the gargoyle on the church roof. ... the power symbolized by the gargoyle "actually jeered"³ his resolution to change. Cytheria Graye is forced to promise Miss Aldclyffe that she would marry Manston in order that her sick brother would be cared for.

Firir thinks that

a strong personal fatality attaches to Jude, Tess, and Eustacia Vye. Eustacia's every impulse and action is significant; she carries her fate with her. It is wholly true of Henchard, but not of Eustacia, that Character is Fate; the god's themselves conspire against the 'Queen of Night'.⁴

In each of Hardy's novels, one can see the workings of Fate upon the lives of man. He pictures man as a puppet of Destiny. In each case he is entangled by snares of Fate. In each case, he gives a pathetic picture of thwarted ambition or desires caused by the intervention of Fate.

In the preceding paragraphs the writer has attempted to show how Hardy puts his fatalistic philosophy to work by instilling in his characters the belief that Fate is against them, and

¹The Return of the Native, p. 21.
²Tess of the D'Urbervilles, p. 323.
³Far from the Madding Crowd, p. 365.
⁴Firir, op. cit., p. 37.
having them speak and act accordingly. His philosophy can very
well be summed up in the words of one of his characters, Eusta-
cia Vye, when she says:

How destiny has cruelly been against me! ... I do not
deserve my lot! ... 0, the cruelty of putting me into
this ill-conceived world! I was capable of much; but
I have been injured and blighted and crushed by things
beyond my control! 0, how hard it is of Heaven to de-
vise such tortures for me, who have done no harm to
Heaven at all!"1

1Werner Taylor, The Return of the Native, p. xxxiv.
CHAPTER II

THE NATURE OF PESSIMISM

The aim of this chapter is to show the nature of the pessimism in the novels of Hardy through a thorough analysis of his settings, plots, and characters.

Hardy chooses Wessex as a setting for his novels rather than or in preference to a more cultural section. The Wessex country with its heaths and moors seems admirably suited for the type of tragedy he usually produces. Hardy centers many of his novels around the little town of Dorchester, on the outskirts of which he had lived for many years. Dorchester was really the Casterbridge of his novel The Mayor of Casterbridge, and Egdon Heath, which plays such a prominent part in The Return of the Native, is the stubborn waste area of the Wessex district. The name Wessex is a name coined by Hardy for the portion of southwest England where he was born. Lord David Cecil explains why Hardy chose Wessex as a setting for his novels.

Hardy chose Wessex as a setting because in such a society, human existence appeared at its most elemental, with its naked structure unconcealed by the superficial trappings of more sophisticated modes of existence. ... Concentrated in this narrow, sequestered form of life, the basic facts of the human drama showed up at
their strongest; undisturbed by other distractions, the basic human passions burned at their hottest.¹

Aside from the reason given by Cecil that the inhabitants of such a rural area would be free from artificiality, the writer believes that this rural locale is more suited for the displaying of the superstitious ideas which many of Hardy's characters express. In other words, since superstition is more prevalent in rural areas, such a place as Wessex seems ideal for portraying characters who believe so profoundly in presen
timents, dreams, and omens. Cecil states further in his book that

The law of nature, cruel and indifferent, forms the background of every one of Hardy's books, incarnating itself now as savage Egdon Heath, now as the woods of Hintock, whose apparent peace masks an unending strug
gle for survival. Even a love scene, in the pastoral idyll of "Under the Greenwood Tree," is jarred by the anguished scream of a bird caught by an owl.²

He continues by saying that Hardy

... always takes the opportunity to make use of any off manifestation of Nature's power. Clym makes passionate love to Eustacia out on the heath during an eclipse of the moon, and Hardy emphasizes the strangeness added to the scene by the lurid, joyless light in which it is drenched.³

Phelps says, "as Mr. Hardy has no God, he has drawn close to the world of trees, plains, and rivers."⁴ This is apparently true; nevertheless, he seems to prefer the rather

¹Cecil, op. cit., p. 45.
²Ibid., p. 36-37.
⁴Phelps, op. cit., p. 509.
gloomy settings of those more conducive to happiness and jolli-
ty. This is probably due to his pessimistic nature -- his preference for the dark, dreary, and somber side of things. He is a genius in creating gloomy atmosphere. His ability to create a weird atmosphere might be compared to that of Edgar Allen Poe in his description in "The Fall of the House of Usher."

He creates an atmosphere of definite gloom in The Return of the Native when he says,

The gloom of the night was funereal; all nature seemed clothed in crape.... The moon and stars were closed up by cloud and rain to the degree of extinction. It was a night which led the traveler's thoughts instinctively to dwell on all that is terrible and dark in history and legend -- the last plague of Egypt, the destruction of Sennacherib's host, the agony of Geth-
semane.  

And in Two on a Tower, in describing the setting, he says,

Thus they reached the foot of the column, ten thousand spirits in prison seeming to gasp their griefs from the funereal boughs overhead, and a few twigs scratching the pillar with the drag of impish claws as tena-
cious as those figuring in St. Anthony's temptation.

Other evidences of pessimism in the setting of the novels of Hardy are his picturing the vegetable world on a win-
ter afternoon as a "weird multitude of skeletons through whose ribs the sun shone freely," his hearing the "sob of the

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1The Return of the Native, pp. 420-421.
2Two on a Tower, p. 65.
3Ibid., p. 1.
environing trees,"¹ and his saying "the sun never pierced that moaning cloud of blue-black vegetation."²

Lord David Cecil, on discussing Hardy's theme, notes that "His theme is mankind's predicament in the universe."³ This certainly appears to be true, for there is much tragedy in the lives of his Wessex people. Sometimes they are pictured in the clutches of poverty and passion, and sometimes yearning to accomplish an impossible task -- reaching for an unattainable goal. Most of Hardy's novels are love stories. Cecil states that

Love is the predominating motive actuating his characters. Once or twice he presents us with a hero moved by other desires. Jude longs for learning; Swithin is ruled by his passion for astronomy. But Swithin's story soon becomes a love story; ... and Jude soon forgets his intellectual ambitions and is absorbed solely in his passion for Sue.⁴

In order that the reader might see the pessimism in Hardy's themes, it is necessary that a clarification of his idea of love be given. No better description can be given than the lines by Cecil that follow:

...every sort of human being in every sort of circumstances responds to the call of love. Alas, their hope is vain. For love, so far from being a benevolent spirit, consoling and helping man in his struggle with the inhuman forces controlling human existence, is

¹Ibid., p. 3.
²Ibid.
³Cecil, op. cit., p. 28.
⁴Ibid., p. 42.
itself a manifestation of these forces. Love, conceived by Hardy, is 'the Lord of terrible aspect' -- a blind, irresponsible power, seizing on human beings whether they will or not; intoxicating in its inception, but, more often than not, bringing ruin in its train.1

Pessimism is reflected through Hardy's skillful development of his plots. In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, his plot demanded that the Durbeyfields have more children than they could support. He planned that "Tess" guardian angel should be talking, pursuing, on a journey, or asleep and not to be awakened" when Tess was seduced by Alec D'Urberville. He further planned that Angel Clare should learn of his wife's past on their wedding night. Likewise, he plotted Clare's return after Tess has been seduced a second time by Alex D'Urberville. Finally, he plotted the murder of D'Urberville, and the execution of Tess.

In *Jude the Obscure*, the pessimistic elements in the plot are as follows: Jude is an orphan living with an old aunt who constantly makes him feel that he is not wanted. When he grows up, he is tricked into marrying Arabella Donn; therefore he is forced to give up his ambition to go to Christminster to school. Later Arabella leaves him. He goes to Christminster and falls in love with his cousin, whom he was not free to marry. There follows a love affair between them; however, and this leads them both to shame.

Hardy shows his pessimism by selecting only those incidents which tend to rouse in the reader a feeling of

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1Ibid.
melancholy, pity, and grief. Such is the case in Jude the Obscure when Jude is severely whipped by his employer for letting the birds eat the grain out of the field, when he tries to drown himself in the pond, when he becomes the victim of the scheming Arabella, and when he dies broken hearted because of thwarted ambition.

The incidents in Tess of the D'Urbervilles cause the reader to become equally as much engulfed in sadness as in the preceding example. Our hearts bleed for Tess when she is forced to go to the D'Urbervilles in order to secure a small amount of economic security for her family, when she becomes an unmarried mother as the result of her going, when we look on her grief as her baby is dying, when she pictures his being tossed with a pitch-fork by the devil in hell, when he is buried in a corner of the cemetery with drunkards and other unworthy persons, when she is deserted by her husband because of her past, and finally, when she is driven to commit a murder and is hanged.

In Hardy's plots, according to Cecil,

We are witnessing a battle between man and Destiny. Destiny is an inscrutable force; we do not understand its nature or its intentions, and we cannot therefore predict what it will do. In consequence, its acts always show themselves in the guise of inexplicable, unexpected blows of chance. Mrs. Yeobright calls on a visit of reconciliation with her son at the one moment when, by an unlucky combination of circumstances, Eustacia, his wife, cannot admit her. In consequence, she goes away to die, unreconciled with him. This is not just a mere clumsy device to make the story end sadly. Hardy is out to show that Mrs. Yeobright and Eustacia in their struggle for happiness, are alike up against the process of the universal plan
which takes no account of their feelings and may therefore make a move from pure caprice, it may seem -- which renders their efforts vain.¹

Many times Hardy's plot centers around a concealment -- that is, sometimes a character fails to explain his position frankly, or perhaps by some coincidence the explanation is not received by the intended recipient. R. G. Lillard says,

In Hardy the inhibitions of men and their concealments of pasts and motives lead to dramatic irony, where the reader knows all as it happens. The reader sees Susan Henchard and Tess and Melbury failing to explain frankly at the proper time and subsequently tangling up themselves and their associates in tragic and bitterly ironic denouements.²

Cecil says,

It is significant how many of Hardy's plots turn on the revelation of a past action coming to light after being kept secret for some time. This happens in "A Pair of Blue Eyes," "Far from the Madding Crowd," "The Return of the Native," "The Mayor of Casterbridge," and "Tess." ... By this means he can convey how the fate of his characters is predetermined by forces hidden from them. To the characters, the past may be dead; they may have put their past actions behind them. But they cannot escape their consequences. For the action has become a hostage which they have presented to Destiny and which Destiny may use against them, which it will use with a ruthless indifference to their feelings, if it should prove necessary to its mysterious purpose.³

Two novels that serve as examples of a past action coming to light are *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. In the former, Tess is ruthlessly cast off by Angel Clare when she confesses her past; in the latter, the plot

³Cecil, *op. cit.*, p. 41.
turns on the revelation by Mrs. Jethway that Elfride had had and deceived two lovers previously.

Lillard continues his discussion by giving a second method used by Hardy to develop his plots. He says that coincidences are a second fundamental of the ironic method. To obtain ironies a writer must depend upon coincidence to turn the course of events to ironic frustrations and disappointments.¹

Mr. Durbeyfield's conversation with Parson Tringham in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is purely coincidental, but it changes the whole course of the Durbeyfield's family life. In *Jude the Obscure*, Jude Farley's career is ruined by a coincidental meeting with Arabella when he happens to walk home by a new route. Other examples of coincidence are Fanny's going to the wrong church in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, and Venn's giving the guineas to the wrong person in *The Return of the Native*. Lillard concludes by observing that

He creates a series of ironical situations and then subjects a few hapless beings to seemingly inexorable agencies. The result is an extremely effective brute chance.²

Florence Emily Hardy quotes Hardy as saying:

There are only two ways of exhibiting a tragic action. The victim may be represented as being overwhelmed in a conflict, perhaps unconscious, with existing human institutions; or he may seem to meet disaster in his opposition to 'forces inherent in the universe,' which for convenience rather than for sober belief, are traditionally personified, in accordance with primitive notions, as Fate or Chance, or as a God who is stern or

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angry or indifferent to the welfare of beings he has created.\footnote{Florence E. Hardy, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 176.}

Certainly Elfride, the heroine in \textit{A Pair of Blue Eyes}, furnishes a good example of one who is overwhelmed in a conflict of which she is unaware. Elfride, the heroine, is loved by a village youth who pines away and dies when he finds that his love is not returned. His mother becomes Elfride’s enemy, spies on her, and twists whatever she sees into a scandalous story. As a result, Elfride loses the one man she loves, becomes despondent, marries another man whom she doesn’t love, and dies in childbirth.

Another example might be found in \textit{Jude the Obscure}. Jude, apparently born under an evil star, has very little to do with shaping his destiny. His yearning for higher knowledge is thwarted continually by his base desires over which he has no control. These lower urges within him appear to have as their allies accident and chance. By chance, he happened to go home by a new route, meets Arabella, and is later tricked into marrying her. He later meets Sue and falls in love with her at a time when he shouldn’t if he were to accomplish his aim. Here again he is thwarted, and dies without accomplishing his aim.

Cecil’s interpretation of his plot is as follows:

His tragedy is village tragedy, composed of the drama of broken love and wronged girls, the feuds and hangings which filled his early memories. ... Tess, the
beautiful innocent maiden, is betrayed by a wicked seducer and ends her life on the gallows tree.\(^1\) while Lillard, in his comparison of Hardy and Conrad, states that Hardy searches for metaphysical explanation.... He sets forth frustrations directly and clearly.... Hardy depicts his ironies in the vivid present, Hardy illustrates his ironies with a thousand small incidents, a thousand minutiae, closely timed; Conrad kills with one stroke, Hardy with many strokes.... Hardy has a thesis to prove.... Hardy's method is to make things happen from the very beginning and lead from one to another with increasing speed.\(^2\)

No better example can be given of a series of incidents which happen with increasing speed than those in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Dr. Thomas D. Jarrett sums up these incidents very uniquely in "A Study of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*." His statement follows:

The fateful incidents that have militated against Tess from the beginning, D'Urberville's learning of his lineage, the killing of Prince, her father's death at the wrong time, and Angel's return too late -- all of these events can only lead her toward her doom, which Hardy ironically summarizes in his famous lines, 'Time the Arch satirist, had had his joke out with Tess.'\(^3\)

It has been brought out in the preceding chapter that Hardy made use of the folklore and folk customs of the people of Wessex in his writings. Ruth Firir states that Hardy's use of omens, dreams, premonitions, and fatality shows the somber tinge of his mind, the saturation of

\(^1\)Cecil, *op. cit.*, p. 25.


\(^3\)Dr. Thomas D. Jarrett, "A Study of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*," p. 5.
the experiences of a long life in intimate contact with people who still think in a primitive way.¹

Many times Hardy can probably give a scientific explanation for the accidental happenings in his plots, but he never chooses to do so. Firir says,

He gives us these omens and premonitions for what they are worth in the lives of his Wessex people; they are worth a great deal to them and to us. It is surprising to look back over this mass of superstition, as we call it, and realize that in not a single instance have we been moved to scorn or contempt for the believer in omens.²

Many of Hardy's plots include omens of death. In Desperate Remedies, Cytheria Graye hears the howl of a dog immediately before the death of Mr. Aldclyffe. According to Firir, omens of death in Hardy's works are:

the coffin-speech; the breaking of a key, ring, or mirror; the falling of a portrait; the sight of one magpie; the screech of an owl or raven; a ringing in the left ear; the clock's falling or striking crazily; a gathering of thirteen persons; the limp corpse or the corpse that won't keep its eyes closed; the sound of trotting does in a deserted park; the shadow on a sundial pointing to one who is next to die; flies or bees wearing crepe scarves; rats deserting a doomed house or ship; a sudden shiver; the sound of a bell as it 'goes heavy'; whine or howl of horses or dogs (ghost-seers).³

Probably the most interesting device used in Hardy's novels for plot development is his introduction of an outsider into a tranquil current of events to project a disturbing force into the story. J. O. Bailey says,

¹Firir, op. cit., p. 40.
²Ibid.
This outsider turns the current and sometimes continues to deflect it to a tragic end. Critics have called the outsiders 'invaders' or 'human apples of discord' but they have not considered what light may be thrown on the nature of these invaders if they are studied in terms that Hardy himself suggests. In speaking of redlemen, the class to which Diggory Ven belongs, Hardy uses the term 'Mephistophelian visitants.'

These "Mephistophelian Visitants" intervene to change the lives of others, though their lives remain unchanged.

In Under the Greenwood Tree, when Mr. Day declares that marriage is an impossibility, one of these visitants is introduced into the novel. Fancy is driven by a rainstorm to the home of Elizabeth Endorfield, who plays no other role than to advise Fancy to practice deception; and another invader is Sergeant Troy in Far from the Madding Crowd. Everything is working smoothly and leading toward the marriage of Bathsheba and Boldwood. Troy enters into the picture, playing the pivotal role in the novel, "flattered her impudently, and smiled within himself, and probably the devil smiled from a loophole in Tophet, for the moment was the turning-point of a career...."

In The Return of the Native, Diggory Venn is the invader. He appears into the story just in time to throw the intended marriage of Thomasin and Wildeve into confusion. The misunderstanding between Eustacia and Mrs. Yeobright that led to the tragic end was caused by Venn's misapplication of fifty guineas intended for Clym Yeobright.

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1J. O. Bailey, "Hardy's Mephistophelian Visitants," PMLA, LXI (December, 1946), 1146.

2Far from the Madding Crowd, p. 197.
Thus the writer has attempted to show that there is pessimism in the plots of Hardy's novels by indicating how chance, coincidence, circumstance, and other elements enter to bring about tragedy.

Hardy's characters are equally as interesting as his plots. Hardy chooses nineteenth-century country people from Wessex for his characters. His people are what they are because of their environment and ancestry. He believes firmly that climate affects character. Cecil says that the peasants in *The Return of the Native* show an "almost fetishistic, pantheistic feeling for nature and inanimate things..."\(^{1}\) Hardy does not stress individuality in his characters. They appear to represent types. For example, Tess might be representative of all betrayed women, Eustacia for all passionate imprisoned spirits, and Jude, thwarted ambition. Cecil further states that his men and women would find it possible to walk the bleak road from the cradle to the grave resignedly enough; they might endure life fairly easily, even if they did not enjoy it, were it not for this storm which sweeps them off their feet, only to fling them down again, broken and despairing.\(^{2}\)

Most of his characters are farmers, hedgecutters, shepherds, or people of similar lowly occupations of life who never stray beyond the borders of the Wessex country. Very rarely, characters like Swithin St. Cleeve, Clym Yeobright, and Jude Farley, leave their native home to seek fulfilment elsewhere.

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\(^{1}\)Cecil, *op. cit.*, p. 308.

\(^{2}\)Ibid., p. 42.
Hardy many times selects characters who are rather innocent, ignorant, and naive so that they very easily become victims of Don Juans and flirts. This can be seen in Tess, who because of her ignorance is seduced by Alex D'Urberville; Thomasin, who is betrayed by Wildeve; Bathsheba, who was deceived by Troy; and Jude, who was the victim of the treacherous Arabella. Sometimes he depicts characters, such as Angel Clare and Knight, who inflict unmerited suffering on the women they love from a harsh doctrinaire idealism that freezes the flow of natural compassion.

Another type of character he sometimes pictures is one who is endowed at birth, through no wish of his own, with an intensity of sexual temperament which he cannot control. Such a person was Jude Farley.

Cecil says that

The characters are not always aware of the part Fate plays in determining their future. Henchard is obsessed by his hatred of Farfrae; Bathsheba looks on Troy as the author of her misfortunes. But from the point of vantage from which Hardy surveys their stories, Bathsheba and Henchard are seen to be under an illusion. For those whom they think their enemies are as much as themselves puppets in the hand of fate. Fate, not they, is ultimately responsible for their quarrels.¹

Hardy sometimes puts his pessimism into his characters. This he does with Swithin St. Cleeve when he makes him see the ghastliness behind the beauty of the stars.

Because of Hardy's pessimism, he sees solemnity, awfulness, and ghastliness in the stellar universe, whereas the

¹Cecil, op. cit., p. 38.
average person sees only beauty. He puts these words into Swithin St. Cleeve's mouth:

Look, for instance, at those pieces of darkness in the Milky Way...... In these our sight plunges quite beyond any twinkler we have yet visited...... There is a size at which dignity begins; further on there is a size at which grandeur begins; further on there is a size at which solemnity begins; further on, a size at which awfulness begins; further on, a size at which ghastli-
ness begins.1

It is interesting to note the part played by women in his novels. The following quotation from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* shows Hardy's view of women:

His view of women is more French than English; it is subtle, a little cruel, and not as tolerant as it seems..... He sees all that is irresponsible for good and evil in a woman's character, all that is untrust-
worthy in her brain and will, all that is alluring in her variability. He is her apologist, but always with a reserve of private judgement. No one has created more attractive women of a certain class, women whom a man would have been more likely to love or to regret loving. He gradually allows his women more liberty with a franker treatment of instinct and its consequences.2

In selecting his characters, Hardy chooses people who are firm believers in premonitions, dreams, and omens. Ruth Firir says that

Omens and premonitions play a large part in the fortunes of Hardy's people. Certain times, places, and weather have a fatality of their own. A well marked streak of ill luck follows Elfride, Tess, and Eustacia Vye; Jude Farley and Sue Bridehead are victims of a predisposi-
tion of failure and unhappiness. Certain families have

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1 Two on a Tower, pp. 33-34.
unmistakable death warnings; Nelson and the Duke of Brunswick foresee the hour of their death.¹

Ruth A. Firir quotes Christian Candle from The Return of the Native as saying, "And I was born wi' a caul, and perhaps can be no more ruined than drowned."² She quotes Mark Clark in Far From the Madding Crowd, when he says "He is a 'queer Christian' like the Devil in a caul!"³ These two statements refer to the common superstition that anyone born with a caul will be healthy and immune from certain dangers like drowning. He is also gifted with a second sight, and will have success in whatever he undertakes. Of course, the Devil in a caul will have more than his usual luck.

Other examples of superstition in characters follows: Christian Candle laments the fact that no woman would marry him because he was born at an ill-omened hour when there was no moon. The afternoon Tess was married, she and all of the dairy folk felt that the cock's crowing three times was a prediction of impending doom. This was apparently true since the news came soon after that Retty had tried to drown herself. In Desperate Remedies, Cytheria Graye heard the "moaning of the pet housesdog, and the mournful howl of the great watchdog in the court"⁴ which predicted the death of Mr. Aldclyffe.

¹Firir, op. cit., p. 1.
²Ibid., p. 4.
³Ibid.
⁴Desperate Remedies, p. 104.
As has been stated previously, dreams play an important part in the lives of his characters. Only two will be mentioned here. First, Miss Aldclyffe's dream that Time with its wings, hourglass, and scythe, came nearer and nearer to her, grinning and mocking. This was the prediction of her death. And second,

Eustacia Vye's dream that she danced to the wondrous music with a knight in silver armor; how suddenly they 'dived into one of the pools of the heath, and came out somewhere beneath an iridescent hollow arched with rainbows', where just as he was about to kiss her, 'there was a cracking noise, and his figure fell into fragments like a pack of cards'; how she woke crying, 'O that I had seen his face!'\(^1\)

This was the prediction of Wildeve's and her drowning on Egdon Heath.

Three examples of premonition will be given here. First, in the words of Firir,

The most solemn premonition in all Hardy is perhaps Eustacia Vye's hatred and fear of Egdon Heath. As of some implacable enemy, she says, 'Tis my cross, my misery, and will be my death.'\(^2\)

Second, we hear these words: "I don't feel quite easy," Tess said to herself. "All this good fortune may be scourged out o' me afterwards by a lot of ill. That's how God mostly does."\(^3\) Another striking premonition is that of Elfride when she slipped and was rescued by Knight. She felt that this was not the last time they would be in danger. As a result of her

\(^1\)The Return of the Native, p. 138.
\(^2\)Firir, op. cit., p. 33.
\(^3\)Tess of the D'Urbervilles, p. 235.
premonition, they found themselves suspended many feet up in
the air, clinging to "The Cliff without a Name."

Hardy's characters assume three different attitudes. Some of
them are eager and hopeful as can be seen in Swithin and Jude. Oth-
ers have a stubborn determination to know the worst the future
has in store, as can be seen in Henchard. Still others, and proba-
ably the largest group of characters, seem resigned in the belief that "what will be, will be"; it is
one source of the quiet, undemonstrative courage with which
many of Hardy's characters face whatever comes to them.1

Hardy's "Mephistophelian Visitants" were mentioned in
the discussion of the plot. Here, in discussing characters, it is
necessary that a description of their appearance and
characteristics be given. J. O. Bailey says,

This term is not inapt, I think, to describe a series
of invaders, three of them dressed in red and all pre-
sented in a background of suggestions that they are
preternatural.2

Elizabeth Endorfield, the invader who taught Fancy to
practice deception has the local reputation of a witch

...founded on the following items of character. She
was shrewd and penetrating; her house stood in a lone-
ly place; she never went to church; she wore a red
cloak; she always retained her bonnet indoors; and she
had a pointed chin. Thus far her attributes were dis-
inctly Satanic; and those who looked no further called
her, in plain terms, a witch.3

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1Firir, op. cit., p. 17.
2J. O. Bailey, op. cit., p. 1146.
3Ibid.
Bailey pictures the witch whispering her scheme to Fancy and "glancing into Fancy's face 'with an expression of sinister humour.'" She is known for her unscrupulous intelligence, or as Hardy elsewhere calls this quality, "the subversive Mephistophelian endowment, brains."¹

Troy who is also a "Mephistophelian Visitant," is usually dressed in brass and scarlet. He is reported to have learned all languages; he could write the Chinese language in shorthand; he became a sergeant without even trying at all; he was moderately truthful toward men, but lied to women like a Cretan.

Diggory Venn, probably Hardy's best "Mephistophelian Visitant", is pictured as having an eye as "keen as that of a bird of prey, and blue as autumn mist..."² He has the peculiar habit of appearing whenever the devil or anything else supernatural is mentioned. When Christian Candle murmurs while looking at the dancers, "'tis tempting the Wicket One, 'tis,"³ Diggory appears. He is not only dressed in red, but his skin is dyed red.

Cecil seems to think that the chief character trait in Hardy's people is nostalgia. His characterization follows:

The most characteristic note in all Hardy's emotional scale -- the strain which, as it were, forms an accompanying undercurrent alike in his scenes of fun and his scenes of tragedy -- its nostalgia; the longing

¹Ibid., p. 1147.
²Bailey, op. cit., p. 1150.
³Ibid., p. 1151.
for a world where, if happiness were not really attainable, men were still under the illusion that it could be attained.1

Swithin has a passion for astronomy; Jude longs to satisfy his desire for learning; and Eustacia Vye yearns for the colour and luxury of life in Paris.

Nostalgia, gentle in "under the Greenwood Tree," lyrical in "The Woodlanders," romantic in "The Trumpet Major," bitter in "Jude," echoes hauntingly through his every work.2

The most important character, the one which he portrays most strongly, is Nature.

Nature, first of all, played a larger part in his books than in those of any other English novelist. It is not just the background in his drama, but a leading character in it. Sometimes it exercises an active influence on the course of events; more often it is a spiritual agent, colouring the mood and shaping the disposition of human beings. The huge black darkness of Egdon Heath dominates the lives of the characters in "The Return of the Native."3

Phelps says, "There are striking characters in "The Return of the Native," but the greatest character in the book is Egdon Heath."4

The writer has tried to show in the preceding pages that there is pessimism in Hardy's selection of characters by pointing out the types of character, varied attitudes assumed by them, and the influence of their environment upon them.

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1Cecil, op. cit., p. 37.
2Ibid.
3Cecil, op. cit., p. 23.
4Phelps, op. cit., p. 509.
CHAPTER III

PESSIMISM AND HARDY'S TECHNIQUE

Hardy seems to marshall diction, conceits, similes, imagery, irony, and symbolism in order to effectively create the atmosphere of pessimism. He seems to have the knack of throwing together words that create in the reader the deepest and saddest emotions that can possibly be experienced by human beings.

Hardy's description of Egdon Heath in The Return of the Native furnishes many examples of words that are chosen apparently for the purpose of creating a feeling of melancholy in the reader. In the expression,

The sombre stretch of rounds and hollows seemed to rise and meet the evening gloom in pure sympathy, the heath exhaling darkness as rapidly as the heavens precipitated it. And so the obscurity in the air and the obscurity in the land closed together in a black fraternization towards which each advanced half-way.\(^1\)

words such as "sombre," "hollows," "gloom," and "darkness," are suggestive of melancholy. The word, "obscurity," suggests isolation and loneliness to the extent that nothing can be seen or is noticeable. The word "black" in literature usually suggests evil, and thus "a black fraternization" suggests to the writer

\(^1\)The Return of the Native, p. 4.

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a brotherhood with evil intent. Further on in Hardy's description, he uses the expression "Men have oftener suffered from the mockery of a place too smiling for their reason than from the oppression of surroundings oversadly tinged." The words, "mockery," "oppression," and "oversadly," are all suggestive of melancholy.

Hardy seems to carefully select words that contribute to a pessimistic atmosphere in his descriptions. He refers to Egdon Heath as "Haggard Egdon." The heath's "solitude seemed to look out of its countenance. It had a lonely face, suggesting tragical possibilities." He plunges the reader into the depth of despair when he says, "This obscure, obsolete, superseded country figures in Domesday." In Far from the Madding Crowd, he pictures the rays of a dark lantern bursting from prison. In the same novel, he says that "the gurgoyle's jaws directed all its vengeance into the grave." As Cecil observes, the terms, "harsh world," "sinister figure," "sombre garb," "cataclysmal onset of centuries," are typical of Hardy's descriptions.

1Ibid., p. 5.
2Ibid.
3Ibid., p. 6.
4Ibid.
5Far from the Madding Crowd, p. 184.
6Ibid., p. 362.
7Cecil, op. cit., p. 85.
Hardy emphasizes his pessimism by the use of conceits and similes. Examples of these are: "ferns like bishop's croziers," "the cuckoo-pint is like an apoplectic saint," "the toothwort like human flesh," "The bloated white visage of the winter's day, emerged like a dead-born child," "The dark stormy waves, edged with foam, that beat against the Cliff without a Name looked like a funeral pall with a white border."\(^1\) A further example is found in *Two on a Tower* where Miss Tabitha Lark describes Lady Constantine as "Eaten out with listlessness."\(^2\)

Hardy's works contain an abundance of images, two of which have been mentioned in an account of his philosophy.\(^3\) The writer has reference to the sentiences or spirits that, according to his philosophy, surround the earth. He portrays a world of grim beauty whose heaths, barrows, and ruins are personalized. He therefore gives his readers a graphic picture of a vast, dim moorland rising against the rim of the earth, with its skyline cutting the misty radiance of the sun, and its streamers appearing like the spokes of some gigantic cosmic wheel.

In *The Return of the Native*, Hardy endows the heath with strong potencies and dim sentiences. He personalizes the heath and gives it complete control over the dawn, noon, and evening. He further endows it with eyes and ears so that it is

\(^2\) *Two on a Tower*, p. 17.
\(^3\) *See supra*, p. 8.
able to watch and listen expectantly. An example is seen in the following description:

The face of the heath by its mere complexion added half an hour to the evening; it could in like manner retard the dawn, sadden the noon, anticipate the frowning of storms scarcely generated, and intensify the opacity of the moonless midnight to a cause of shaking dread.... The sombre stretch of round and hollows seemed to rise and meet the evening gloom in pure sympathy, the heath exhaling darkness as rapidly as the heavens precipitated it. And so the obscurity in the land and the obscurity in the air close together in a black fraternizing towards which each advanced halfway.\(^1\)

Another rather frightful example of imagery in *The Return of the Native* is the following description of the heath:

The place became full of a watchful intentness now; for when other things sank brooding to sleep, the heath appeared slowly to awake and listen. Every night its Titanic form seemed to await something; but it had waited thus, unmoved, during so many centuries, through the crisis of so many things that it could only be imagined to await one last crisis -- the final overthrow.\(^2\)

Other instances of pessimism in imagery are seen in *Jude the Obscure*. After Jude had lost his job, all around him "there seemed to be something glarish, rattling, and the noises and glares hit upon the little cell called his life, and shook it, and scorched it."\(^3\) On Jude's first night at Christminister, as he roamed the streets, he apparently saw ghosts of poets, philologists, Governor-Generals, Lord-Lieutenants, Chief-Justices, and Lord-Chancellors. In the gloom it seemed as if

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\(^1\) *The Return of the Native*, pp. 3-4.


\(^3\) *Jude the Obscure*, p. 14.
he ran against them without feeling their bodily frames.¹

Isolation made him appear to himself a self-spectre, the sensation being that of one who walked, but could not make himself seen or heard. He seemed to be his own ghost.²

Still another example of pessimism in imagery is seen in A Pair of Blue Eyes. Hardy makes the reader feel the presence of loneliness as if it were a person when he says that the hero looked about him and "felt himself in the presence of personalized loneliness."³

Many examples of pessimism in imagery might be pointed out in Tess of the D'Urbervilles; only four, however, will be mentioned in this study. As Tess and her brother ride to market

...the occasional heave of the wind became to her the sigh of some immense sad soul conterminous with the universe in space, and with history in time.⁴

On the dairy farm as Tess is talking to Angel Clare she points out this interesting image:

The trees have inquisitive eyes, haven't they? -- that is, seem as if they had. And the river says, -- 'Why do ye trouble me with your looks?' And you seem to see numbers of tomorrows just all in a line, the first of them the biggest and clearest, the others getting smaller as they stand further away; but they all seem very fierce and cruel and as if they said, 'I'm coming! Beware of me! Beware of me!'⁵

¹Ibid., p. 91.
²Ibid., p. 90.
³A Pair of Blue Eyes, p. 239.
⁴Tess of the D'Urbervilles, p. 34.
⁵Ibid., p. 159.
Even the sun, which appears to most people as an object of beauty and admiration, appears to Tess "like a great inflamed wound in the sky." However, the most pessimistic of all the images mentioned in this novel is that of Tess' dying baby being consigned to the nethermost corner of hell as a double doom for lack of baptism and lack of legitimacy; the arch-fiend tossing it with his three-pronged fork similar to the one they used for heating the oven on baking days.

In the dismal watchfulness of Egdon Heath, the eerie feeling of Jude as he walked among the ghosts at Christminster, and the baby's being tossed on a three-pronged fork by the devil in hell, Hardy shows through his imagery his pessimistic nature.

Ironical elements may be seen in all of Hardy's novels. In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* he makes use of irony when Clare returns home despondent over his wife's past. He has Clare's father select as his scripture lesson: "Who can find a virtuous woman?...." Clare's mother, in her desire to learn more about his wife, asks him if she is a young woman whose history would bear investigation. And in the same novel one of the most striking examples of irony is the author's having Tess' baby buried in the section of the cemetery reserved for "notorious

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1Ibid., p. 173.
2Ibid., pp. 117-118.
3*Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, p. 300.
drunkards, suicides, and others of the conjecturally damned.\textsuperscript{1} Still another example is shown in the author's having Tess, after she had been seduced by Alex D'Urberville, meet a man as she is walking home who paints the damnatory texts: "Thy Damnation, Slumbereth Not," and "Thou, Shalt, Not, Commit.\ldots\textsuperscript{2}

Mizener in his article, "Jude the Obscure as a Tragedy," ironically states that "College, church, social convention, the very things that Jude had at the beginning believed in as the representatives of his ideal, have killed him, either by betraying him directly or by teaching Sue to betray him."\textsuperscript{3}

Another striking ironical statement is that made by Hardy in Far From the Madding Crowd concerning the fate of dogs and other philosophers. He is apparently saying that, in the eyes of Fate, men and dogs are on the same level.

George's son (referring to a dog) had done his work so thoroughly that he was considered too good a workman to live, and was, in fact, taken and tragically shot at twelve o'clock that same day — another instance of the untoward fate which so often attends dogs and other philosophers who follow out a train of reasoning to its logical conclusion and attempt perfectly consistent conduct in a world made up so largely of compromise.\textsuperscript{4}

In Two on a Tower Hardy's irony demands that Swithin work for over a year to discover the mystery of the stars, only to find that someone else had published the theory, which was

\textsuperscript{1}Ibid., p. 118.  
\textsuperscript{2}Ibid., p. 88.  
\textsuperscript{3}A. Mizener, Jude the Obscure as a Tragedy, Southern Review, VI(1940), 193.  
\textsuperscript{4}Far from the Madding Crowd, p. 42.
similar to his, a week previous to his discovery. Similarly in
An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress, Egbert Mayne, who
wants to make a name for himself, publishes a book of sterling
merit, anonymously. In Far from the Madding Crowd the dog
which helped Fanny Robin was stoned away from the door.

Irony can be found in the titles of some of Hardy's
novels, such as An Indiscretion, Jude the Obscure, and Far from
the Madding Crowd. William Newton even found irony in the ti-
tle, A Pair of Blue Eyes. He notes that

A half sinister irony lurks behind the very title of
A Pair of Blue Eyes, and the characters and the reader
alike feel that they are in grips with something more
than an author who was determined to have the unspeak-
able Mrs. Jethway see Elfride at all the wrong times,
or with a rather silly girl who accidentally dropped
an earring at the most inconvenient of moments.¹

In his article, "The Irony of Hardy and Conrad," Lillard
argues that

Conrad and Hardy use all the known varieties of overt
concealment of irony. Sophoclean or dramatic irony,
in which certain characters are unconscious of the
trend of events visible to the reader; Socratic or
rhetorical irony, in which in the remarks of the au-
thor or of the characters there is a disparity between
surface meaning and underlying meaning; and irony of
fate, in which the whole group of characters is una-
ware of the course of events.²

Of all the irony in Hardy's novels, the most pathetic
is seen in his account of Nature's indifference. Dr. Jarrett
gives a clear picture of Nature's indifference in the following

¹Newton, op. cit., p. 169.
²Lillard, op. cit., p. 317.
statement:

While Tess suffers and the reader looks ruefully on, Nature looks on disinterestedly and watches Fate do with Tess what it will. Aloof from the action and indifferent to the suffering of Tess or the conflict in the mind of Clare, Nature sits impishly by, smiling. Here Hardy is at his best in the use of Irony.¹

The above quotation shows that Hardy's philosophy was one that expressed his belief in Nature's indifference to man. Pessimism is shown in the ironic statement of Swithin in Two on a Tower:

Whatever the stars were made for, they were not made to please our eyes. It is just the same in everything; nothing is made for men.²

Similarly, nature again shows her indifference and irresponsibility toward man in one of the most dramatic and pathetic scenes in Tess of the D'Urbervilles. When Tess confesses her past to Clare and awaits his reaction

The fire in the grate grew impish -- demoniacally funny, as if it did not care in the least about her strait. The fender grinned idly, as if it, too, did not care. The light from the waterbottle was merely engaged in a chromatic problem. All material objects around announced their irresponsibility with terrible iteration.³

And, as observed in Dr. Jarrett's "Study of Tess of the D'Urbervilles,"

... when Tess' baby, Sorrow, dies, Hardy is not content to let this incident, pitiful in itself, go unemphasized. Through the innocency of her small brothers and sisters and their lack of knowledge of Tess!

¹Jarrett, op. cit., p. 6.
²Two on a Tower, p. 31.
³Tess of the D'Urbervilles, p. 258.
suffering he ironically intensifies the pathos. We see Tess, almost hysterically, make a last effort to give her baby the proper sacrament, while her sister and brothers mechanically assist her, not knowing the thoughts that play on Tess' mind. 'When the other children awoke they cried bitterly, and begged Sissy to have another pretty baby,'1 But 'poor Sorrow's campaign against sin, the world, and the devil was doomed to be of limited brilliancy...that bastard gift of shameless Nature that respects not the civil law.'3

Symbolism also plays an important role in Hardy's novels. In a few cases, the names given to his characters are symbolic of the type of persons they are. Mrs. Endorfield, who has already been described previously as having the appearance and also the peculiarities of a witch, is symbolic of the Witch of Endor. Bathsheba, the heroine in Far from the Madding Crowd, is symbolic of the Biblical character of the same name who was guilty of tempting David, thus promoting his downfall. When Jude and Arabella stop at an inn, they are attracted to a photograph of Samson and Delilah. This is symbolic of the fact that Arabella would deceive Jude the same as Delilah had deceived Samson. Troy's showing Bathsheba the sword-drill is indicative of, or suggestive of the part he was destined to play in her life, for, through his actions, he pierces her heart as keenly as the sword is capable of piercing the body.

Satanic symbolism is suggested by all of Hardy's Mephistophelian Visitants. They resemble the devil in appearance, in shrewdness, in the way some of them appeared in lurid lights,

1Ibid., p. 106.
2Jarrett, op. cit., p. 8.
in the way they affected others, and more than all, in the way the stories take a turn for the worse after their appearance.

Hardy's best symbol is probably Egdon Heath with its vast and sombre landscape. Its appearance is symbolic of impending doom. Werner Taylor says,

...the heath is symbolic of a Hardian time to come when 'human souls may find themselves in closer and closer harmony with external things wearing a somber-ness distasteful to our race when it was young.' It is a 'near relation of night' and brother of 'winter darkness, tempests, and mists...the storm is its lover; and the wind its friend.'... It is not merely the scene of the tragedy, it is the tragedy itself.1

1Taylor, op. cit., p. xxx.
CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The writer has attempted to show through an exposition of Hardy's background, the nature of his subject matter, and the techniques employed in setting forth his subject matter that he is truly a pessimist. It has been noted that Hardy apparently stands aloof and makes no effort to guide his characters away from the pitfalls and dangers of life. He watches as Fate plays pranks on human beings and dogs with equal indifference. In spite of the fact that he has created women with little or no morals, and men with even less, all of them are lovable characters. Instead of causing in the reader a feeling of disgust and scorn for the shortcomings of his characters, he creates in them a feeling of deep sympathy. This is due to his profound sympathy for humanity.

On the basis of what has been said in this study, one might conclude that Hardy is as absolute a Pagan as if he had written before the advent of Christianity into the world. One might further conclude that he is more closely related to the early tragedians and epic writers than he is to the contemporary novelists of his day in that if one wants to really appreciate his works, he must envisage life in the tragic and epic focus.
In spite of the fact that he uses Wessex as a setting for all of his novels and pictures the life of the Wessex people, he never lets us forget that the whole human race is as surely entangled in the web of Fate as they. He seems to suggest philosophically the frustration and futility that await all of man's open-eyed but blind striving.

Hardy's technique, his use of diction, imagery, irony, and symbolism, seems to be designed to put the reader in a melancholy mood. Through his technique he is able to give very graphic mental pictures of pain in varying degrees. He pictures the tired, wistful sadness of Bathsheba as she sits in the churchyard, listens to the singing of the choirboys, and wishes that she could change places with them. He pictures Eustacia's surging agony on the night of her death as she roams wildly over Egdon Heath. He shows equally as well the eerie terror that breathes from Susan Nunsuch's cottage as she sets Eustacia's waxen image to waste with unholy rites. These are only a few examples of what Hardy does through his technique in portraying pessimism in his novels.

Through all of this, one can see such a deep and profound sympathy for mankind that Hardy has been compared to Wordsworth in this respect. Weber quotes Newinson as follows:

No Englishman since Wordsworth has heard the still, sad music of humanity with so fine an ear, and none has regarded...men and women...with a compassion so profound and yet so stern, as they pass between the grave and the stars.¹

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