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# Metaphysical Concepts in the Work of Thomas Hardy

Mary Leo Hogan  
*Loyola University Chicago*

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METAPHYSICAL CONCEPTS IN THE WORK OF  
THOMAS HARDY

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of English  
Loyola University

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

by

Sister Mary Leo Hogan, B.V.M.

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## INTRODUCTION

Although Thomas Hardy during his later life consistently discouraged imputations of metaphysical thought, and greatly resented the acceptance of his "fanciful alternatives" as evidences of his personal creed,<sup>1</sup> yet he will probably live as a writer who tends almost naturally to project his individual reactions to the universe in his own creative work.

"Philosophic" and "metaphysical" are convenient because general words, but both are apt to turn awkward when applied to literature. Philosophic poetry, according to Abercrombie, must give "certain shape to an aesthetic metaphysic, formulate in clear art some supposed relation of known and unknowable whereby man may live. But there is no necessity that the formulation, the metaphysic, should have to submit itself to a strictly philosophical scrutiny."<sup>2</sup>

The following pages, in accord with Mr. Abercrombie's observation, make no attempt to subject the metaphysic of Thomas Hardy to a philosophical examination; his metaphysic is indeed an attempt to formulate between the seen and the unseen a relation which will bring comfort to his disillusioned heart, and which will provide some means by which he can bear to withstand this inexhaustible thing called life, but it provides little substance for philosophical scrutiny.

It is well here to recall that most difficulties in matters meta-

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1 Florence E. Hardy, The Later Years of Thomas Hardy (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1930), p. 218.

2 Lascelles Abercrombie, Thomas Hardy (London: Martin Secker Company, 1912), p. 187.

physical are really misunderstandings; one fails to understand another's meaning, even when he is greatly striving to understand. The tendencies of individual temperament are deep-rooted and are dislodged unwillingly. Terms, abstractions, mental images, are highly compounded of the boundless store of remnants of old concepts and old manners of thought which, despite one's care, individually strengthen or weaken the thought process he is trying to build anew.

The term "metaphysical concepts", as here used in connection with Thomas Hardy refers to the world views held by the writer. Hardy was conscious, rather more than most men, of being a vital part of the vast scheme of creation, of being factored with the universe; he was interested in the cosmos, and in man's place in the cosmos; his own origin, the nature of his creator, his reciprocal relations with that creator, were all matters of deep solicitude for him. And as his solicitude was intensified by contact with daily living, he began to attempt some solution to the eternal questions confronting him.

Hardy, despite his cosmic anxieties, will undoubtedly always be denied the title of "metaphysician" or "philosopher." Metaphysical belief must ever stand or fall by reason of its own ultimate coherency as a way of thinking about Reality; it is purely objective and eternally immutable, and stands unaffected by the modern assertion that no metaphysical solution is possible because a metaphysic must change and develop as human outlook and intuition changes and broadens. Hardy's thought structure, although it was definitely an outgrowth of the philosophic

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assumptions of the time, and was, consequently, more easy of comprehension for his contemporaries than for those of a less positive age, has nevertheless, never been anything but a romance in the field of pure metaphysics. Although a highly interesting fabrication, it realizes no absolute and satisfying harmony between aspiration and actuality, and offers no challenge to disinterested philosophical survey.

Consequently, there will probably never be a thesis written for the purpose of establishing the relative and ultimate reliability of Hardy's cosmic concepts; yet the nature of those concepts, partaking so essentially of the atmosphere of the dynamic days of intellectual ferment following the overthrow by science of century-old standards, provides a valuable study. The celestial framework of the Wessex literature is fashioned directly from the thought of the time and shows Hardy very much a child of the despoiled nineteenth century.

It was a century of instability and conflict; these distracted years which saw the unresolved havoc caused by the contemporary assumptions that both science and religion were making, must be studied if Thomas Hardy is to be comprehended. It was a century which watched the distortion of the thought patterns of the centuries as the various fields of science each in turn attempted to disprove the necessity of Divine Guidance by substituting the working of mechanical law. It was a century of Darwin, of Spencer, and of Swinburne; of "Essays and Reviews," of "The City of Dreadful Night," and of "The Rubaiyat". It has seemed

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well, therefore, to include a chapter on the century out of which grew the concepts of Thomas Hardy; as Rutland states, although the German philosophers later influenced the mind of the Wessex writer, it was the sixties that shaped his thought.<sup>3</sup>

Hardy had within himself much of the spirit of philosophical inquiry that goes to make up the theologian; he was by nature fashioned with a certain inquisitiveness concerning the ultimate and general truth behind a trivial, seemingly accidental happening; what might be passed over by the average mind as lacking in meaning, bears for Hardy a deep and universal significance; and it was this significance that he was ever trying to interpret whether he was following a story of man and maid, or if he was tracing the indelible workings of the Immanent Will.

Besides having a temperamentally cosmic bias, Hardy had, as he confessed, a nature that tended to grow more vocal in the presence of tragedy than of comedy; this, coupled with a vast and sympathetic regard for his fellow-man--a regard that saw all unintelligible suffering as useless and therefore cruel--tended to develop in the writer a leaning toward the less happy side of life, and has resulted in his being labeled pessimistic. It is because this tendency to wrestle with the dark enigmas of life is to some extent natural, and to some extent the result of early influences and personal experiences in a world built not to his liking, that it has seemed advisable to provide a chapter treating of the temperament of the man, and of the personal forces playing upon his make-up.

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<sup>3</sup> William R. Rutland, Thomas Hardy: A Study of His Writings and Their Background (Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell, 1938), p. 56.

Creative literature is of two types: that in which a metaphysic is fitted to experience, and that in which experience is fitted to a metaphysic. Hardy's work, as a whole, is of the latter type. It is interesting to mark to what degree that metaphysic is permitted to appear in the work, and how its appearance affects the essential artistry of the Wessex literature; therefore, a relatively brief chapter has been inserted treating of the general place of the philosophy in the bulk of the writing.

Hardy is essentially a novelist; that is, his greater work is more consistently done in the field of the novel. It can but be recognized that here in his prose tales where the metaphysic is serving as a background complementing his art, the output is highly satisfactory; where, as in the case of the philosophical poetry and, more especially, in The Dynasts, the metaphysic tends to take control of the art, the work is weakened. As will be seen, the metaphysical device serves well as a background, but becomes offensively obtrusive when drawn into relief. Yet, the novels, presenting individual, aspiring man pitted against a hostile universe, provide more substance for "philosophical" inquiry than do the poems or The Dynasts, which merely present the somewhat questionable characteristics of Hardy's unknown God; therefore, the novels seem here more worthy of discussion than do the poetry and the drama.

It is rather important that the philosophy, the world mood, of Thomas Hardy be comprehended to some degree, because the Hardian literature has a youthful virility that should carry it onward. As W.J. Blyton, in a centennial essay of 1940, remarks, "The question of Hardy's

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philosophy has a live interest for modern reading and thinking Catholics, because his influence, thanks to his great art and his immense gallery of pictures, is going to live."<sup>4</sup>

Frank Chapman sees Hardy's world view as the greater factor justifying his reputation of greatness: "...the attribution of greatness is to be justified ... firstly, by his philosophy of life and tragic world outlook."<sup>5</sup>

However, B.G.Brooks objects strenuously to Hardy's being considered "the impure artist, the propagandist" because of his habit of embodying philosophical reactions in literature.<sup>6</sup> It is true that care must be taken lest Hardy's philosophy of life--after all, only a formulation of attitudes to existence--be drawn into false prominence. The writer's characteristic tendency to pedantry prompted him to the use of philosophic and scientific nomenclature which, although often disinterestedly used, will ever invite a certain amount of analysis. Perhaps, the so-called metaphysic is just a technical device for telling the story or denoting the experience, but that does not necessarily make it less interesting. As Chapman states, Hardy's philosophy was derived from a radical habit of mind, and was essential to his organization.<sup>7</sup>

Hardy had a deep attachment to the old faith which his intellect refused to countenance; his loneliness for its wealth of associations

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4 W.J.Blyton, "Hardy After a Century," Catholic World, 152:292, December, 1940.

5 Frank Chapman, "Hardy, the Novelist," Scrutiny, 3:22, June, 1934.

6 B.G.Brooks, "Thomas Hardy," Nineteenth Century and After, 128:377, October, 1940.

7 Chapman, op.cit., p. 30.

was never lessened by the multiplicity of explanations and substitutions which the new science was offering; so there was an elemental discord within the very soul of the man. From this conflict came forth the speculations, the world views; if they were querulous and inconstant, it was because the heart of Hardy had not yet found the essential explanation and satisfaction it was seeking.

## CHAPTER I

### Background of the Hardian Metaphysic

There is not a creed which is not shaken; not an accredited dogma which is not crumbling; not a received tradition which does not threaten to dissolve. Our religion has placed its faith in the fact; and now the fact is failing it.

Matthew Arnold

It is the disillusioned, fact-burdened mind of the late Victorian period that protests its betrayal. Man was to have relinquished his traditional creeds, his accepted dogmas, that he might rather honor his mind with Truth, and so live intelligently and hopefully; and instead he found himself blinded by error and possessed of something very like despair. Before he had committed himself to the great Victorian gamble whose stakes were the beliefs of the centuries, he had had some light by which to walk; the height had been visible when the path was illumined by the Christian doctrine of sin, punishment, free will, and fate; for then he could believe that no man is compelled to sin; that punishment is the correlative of sin; that suffering is discipline; that no inherited tendency to sin is as powerful as a good will; that God, with Whom there is no caprice or tyranny, established and sustains intelligible relations with His own creatures. But now man was equipped with the newer doctrine of Science, whose spasmodic flares served only to confuse the way as inconsequentials were drawn into prominence and values relegated to shadow. He learned that he had been relying on a false theory of the universe; that his very conception of God was a pitiful delusion; and, hardest of all,

that man himself, with all the aspirations and dreams which he had thought possessed some creative value, was of little importance in the entire set-up. The Christian principles by which he had walked dissolved in the piercing light of science; he was asked to believe that there were times when he is constrained to sin simply because of the causal relation wherein asserted conditions necessarily assert an inevitable result; that punishment may be merely the result of an unwitting collision with a law of nature, and so may indiscriminately fall upon the just and the unjust; that suffering is due mainly to the imperfect arrangement of the whole universal scheme, and serves no possible salutary end; that man is powerless in the grip of antecedent conditions completely determined and acting without purpose. And, finally, the creature was asked to reconstruct his theories concerning the Creator; he was told that whatever God there be, is, perhaps, limited in power and himself subject to universal law; or indifferent to the joys and disappointments of his creatures, or tired of them, or possibly, merely forgetful of his work; or he may be an unconscious power, working blindly and purposelessly, and therefore not deserving censure for the apparent lack of organization in his universe; or, perhaps, the universe itself is God, in which case, self-contained and self-acting, the universe is probably working out its own life problem. There was, in this last speculation, a ray of light discernible, for as the universe begins to realize itself, it must necessarily become

more sensitive of all its parts and improved conditions may follow. But any man who had cared deeply for the old faith must instinctively have felt that he was being offered a choice of concepts none of which had an exchange value other than pain. For these men, their intellects won by the new science yet their hearts clinging to the beauties of the old faith, the mental suffering must have been acute. They could easily utter with Thomas Hardy the terrible indictment

We come to live and are called to die.  
That--that's the thing....  
"Life proffers to deny."

It must have been a bitter century that could culminate with such an accusation. Yet it was a century of progress, unparalleled and unprecedented; it was not until later that the realization dawned that it was progress bought at a tragic price. It is Alfred Noyes who in his spiritual autobiography calls attention to the fact that, while through the course of history many ages have shown precisely the same signs of a dying civilization as does our own, yet there is one remarkable difference: the evils of this age, which had their beginnings in the last half of the preceding century, were largely the "result of its own achievement, in a great many directions, of a partial good."<sup>1</sup> The "partial good" did mean progress, but the

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred Noyes, The Unknown God (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1934), p. 10.

Victorian period tended to overlap itself. The century was lopsided in that while materialization engulfed all, intellectual activity, with the nation as a whole, was suffering a time lag. If man's mind had kept pace with his scientific advance, the intoxication might have been averted. But the supposition is presumptuous; both Copernicus and Darwin had so disorientated human thought that a long time was required for mental balance to restore itself.

The Victorian Period had opened happily enough; the years of disillusionment following hard upon the Napoleonic wars were over; the passage of the Reform Bill had given the middle classes a new confidence in England and in the English. The first two decades of the century had seen science, especially that science applied to industry and commerce, revolutionizing thought and life. The thirties followed through with consistently improved methods of invention and practical scientific applications, many so inexplicable as to develop a real reverence for anything of a mechanical nature. Progress, as Hayes states, was being popularly associated with a rapid multiplication of material things--steam engines, iron works, cotton goods, railways, factories, machines--and with a phenomenal increase of wealth and power for individuals and for nations, and England was becoming the "admiration for all ambitious Europe".<sup>2</sup> The forties saw a temporary drop in the rising curve of progress,

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<sup>2</sup> Carlton J.H.Hayes, A Generation of Materialism (New York: Harper and Brothers Company, 1941), p. 5.

but with the repeal of the Corn Laws and the establishment of Free Trade, a crisis was averted. With the prosperous fifties and more prosperous sixties, the nation easily forgot the past lean years, and it occurred to but few of the English that progress might spell tragic disaster. When in 1859 and 1874 the presentations of Charles Darwin crystallized in the popular mind as an assurance of automatic, mechanical progress, then did the thinkers of the time realize to what an appalling degree had scientific thought been misinterpreted by the ordinary man; and when the new concepts of the ultimate power underlying the universe began to formulate within the minds of many of the thinkers themselves, it seemed as if the faith of the centuries must give way.

The two basic ideas challenging traditional philosophy were that Universal Law is working with inexorable regularity in every department of the cosmos, and that a monistic evolutionary process, with more perfect forms replacing the imperfect in nature, comprehends all kinds of matter.

The idea of an evolutionary process is as old as the Greek philosophers. The atomists even "touched in spirit the essence of the theory of natural selection, though their basis of fact was insufficient."<sup>3</sup> It was two thousand years more before physiologists and naturalists had collected enough evidence to warrant the serious

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<sup>3</sup> W.C.Dampier-Whetham, A History of Science and Its Relations with Philosophy and Religion (Cambridge, England: The University Press, 1930), p. 292.

consideration of scientists. The theory of creation as had been generally accepted by the western world is found in the first two books of Genesis, and contains two fundamental assumptions, the geocentric and the anthropocentric. The geocentric theory was forever destroyed by Copernicus who relegated the earth to its proper place in the great system, and lessened the importance of the individual by stressing the size of the physical universe. The anthropocentric assumption--the more significant to man--suffered no serious assault until the latter half of the eighteenth century when Lamarck projected his theory of Evolution. His fame rests on that law which states the inheritance of acquired characteristics, which law is the essence of the theory of Evolution. Darwin was later to say of Lamarck:

He upholds the doctrine that all species, including man, are descended from other species. He first did the eminent service of arousing attention to the probability of all change in the organic, as well as in the inorganic world, being the result of law and not of miraculous interposition.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, investigation of the cosmic forces was proceeding. A most significant step was taken when the hypothesis of cataclysms, elaborated by Georges Cuvier as a means of explaining the changes in the earth's surface, was definitively disposed of by Sir Charles Lyell. Cunliffe, summarizing the work of Lyell, states that the geologist in a work published in 1815, showed that no such explanation is

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<sup>4</sup> Charles Darwin, The Origin of Species (New York: Clarke, Given, and Hooper Company, n.d.), p. XIV.



necessary to account for the terrestrial conditions of the past revealed by geological evidence.<sup>5</sup> Lyell described his book as "an attempt to explain the former changes of the earth's surface by references to causes now in operation."<sup>6</sup> The study played a major part in developing the already germinating idea of Evolution; but, although the geologist applied the idea to the development of the earth's crust, he seems to have held to fixity of species and special creation until later influenced by Darwin. While Lyell thus swung wide of any entanglement with theology, yet his work, shattering as it did the cataclysmic theory, was naturally a contributing cause to the weakening of belief in the immediate operation and intervention of an Almighty Power; and it gave substance to the idea of operation through Universal Law.

In 1844 there appeared a book important in that it prepared the way for The Origin of Species. The book, Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation, was a popularization of scientific thought of the previous forty years, so entertainingly written as to be immediately successful. Today it is considered more of a novelty than an authority, but it reveals the knowledge that scientific thought, once laboratory material, was fast becoming public property. A pertinent passage reads:

We have seen powerful evidence that the construction

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5 John W. Cunliffe, Leaders of the Victorian Revolution (New York: Appleton-Century Company, 1934), p. 7.

6 Sir Charles Lyell, Principles of Geology (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1887), p. x.

of this globe and its associates, and inferentially of all other globes of space, was the result, not of any immediate or personal exertion on the part of the Deity, but of natural laws which are the expressions of His will. What is to hinder our supposing that the organic creation is also a result of natural laws, which are in like manner, expression of His will?<sup>7</sup>

Such suggestions could have been only highly significant to the public mind which was beginning slowly to grasp the meaning of "natural laws".

A summarizing sentence states:

It is clear, moreover, from the whole scope of the natural laws, that the individual, as far as the present sphere of being is concerned, is to the author of Nature a consideration of inferior moment. Everywhere we see the arrangements for the species perfect; the individual is left, as it were, to take his chance amidst the melee of the various laws affecting him.<sup>8</sup>

The concept was fast developing that man is not the center of the universe, but rather one of its struggling members, perhaps only a relatively unimportant part of a vast, laboring machine. And the fact that the machine was considered self-sufficient did not add materially to the importance of any of its parts. Dampier-Whetham mentions that LaPlace had disagreed with the Newtonian theory which held that God occasionally by direct interposition must correct irregularities which may gradually accumulate in the solar system; in showing that such irregularities correct themselves, he proved the

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7 Robert Chambers, Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation (London: George Routledge Company, 1890), p. 120.

8 Ibid., 276-277.

dynamical stability of the system and its independence of any external power.<sup>9</sup> Naturally the establishment of this theory further substantiated the growing conviction that physical law alone could account for the cosmic history of the universe. The prestige of science was assuming proportions; new intellectual patterns were being slowly woven, and there developed a confidence that "human intelligence was capable of piercing to the essence of things and extracting all the understanding requisite for human living."<sup>10</sup> The result was the formation of a desire to take control of the orderly processes of reality in the interests of everyday living. The protest against the traditional supernaturalistic accounts of the origin of the cosmos was growing too; the simple belief that all creation is the work of an omnipotent, arbitrary God, who continues to exert sustaining force, seemed to be discountenanced by the recent discoveries favoring Universal Law.

Anthropology was also, although unintentionally, helping to weaken accepted beliefs. The English scholar, Professor Webb, states that anthropologists, in unveiling historical antecedents of the accepted code of conduct as well as of many prevailing social amenities, showed how rules which seem to possess no rational justification may wear such a halo of sanctity as has long invested, in the eyes of ordinary Englishmen, the provisions of the Decalogue. Convention has not only preserved such expediences, but has tended to stabilize them as

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<sup>9</sup> Dampier-Whetham, op.cit., p. 188.

<sup>10</sup> McCracken, Theological Reactions of Victorian Poets (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1935), p. 5.

dogmas. The natural result of such investigation was that men began to wonder if rules regarded as sacred in England or in Christendom, might not look grotesque if seen from another age. There then arose, Webb continues, an inclination to question the integrity of all traditional tenets, even those of Holy Writ.<sup>11</sup> Thus, even before Darwin tossed the bombshell which ignited the remaining decades of the century, an entirely new thought environment had been created--a tension situation of half-formed beliefs which was to grasp eagerly at The Origin of Species in search of some relief from the strain of intellectual bewilderment. "The decade of the sixties," says Brenneke, "...was a period of agitated transition; everywhere the old order was evacuating its familiar citadels with tears and imprecations; it created vacua, drew after it turbulent and unresolved novelties...."<sup>12</sup>

The doctrine of Evolution, especially as passed through the mind of the agnostic, Herbert Spencer, tended to slant away from Christianity, and the English church rose quickly to opposition. Certain of the church men were bitterly denunciatory of a scientific theory which was not only encroaching upon, but threatening to appropriate, a field which should be foreign to it--that of religious orthodoxy. Cunliffe remarks that the Copernican theory had taken hold gradually, but the Darwinian theory, revolutionizing traditional concepts of man's relation to other animals, was accepted by almost every intelligent individ-

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11 C.C.J. Webb, Religious Thought in England from 1850 (Oxford, England: The Clarendon Press, 1933), pp. 52-53.

12 Ernest Brennecke, The Life of Thomas Hardy (New York: Greenburg and Company, 1925), p. 120.

ual within a generation, and the implications with reference to orthodox religious beliefs were hotly discussed from the first.<sup>13</sup> The trouble seemed centered in the philosophical assumptions that science was making. These assumptions tended to explain the origin and end of man, his thought and behaviour, in terms of mechanical physics and evolutionary biology; they allowed for neither God's creative power nor man's soul, and therefore were a negation of Christianity. The charges of "naturalism" and "monism" and "determinism" were leveled against the scientists who were trying to identify physical and spiritual concepts.

But the blame for the controversy was not entirely on the side of science; over-zealous theology compromised itself by obstinately refusing to accept the most obvious of physical facts and seemed utterly to forget that St. Augustine had said that it makes little difference just how creation did occur. Yet the charges against the scientists were not without foundation. McCracken presents the situation:

The new pattern for Victorian thought could deal only with physical phenomena, and the materials of the new science were those forces observed in the natural processes, and it was not long before the theory of correlation of these activities was quite generally accepted. When uncritically applied to life and mind, as it was, this theory led directly to Materialism and raised serious question as to the existence of God, spirit, and as to whether life was anything but the accidental collocation of material forces.<sup>14</sup>

John Dewey notes that for over two thousand years the regnant

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13 Cunliffe, op.cit., p. 144.

14 McCracken, op.cit., p. 17.

philosophy of Europe had been based on the idea of purposefulness in nature. Increased acquaintance with the details of plant and animal life had strengthened the idea, and progress in botany, zoology, and paleontology revealed marvelous adaptations and exquisitely executed designs, all of which added such prestige to the teleological argument that by the late eighteenth century it was considered the central point of theistic philosophy.<sup>15</sup>

Then in his famous chapter, "The Struggle for Existence", Darwin states his belief "that probably all the organic beings which have ever lived on this Earth have descended from some one primordial form, into which life was first breathed."<sup>16</sup> While the scientist himself asserts that it is impossible to conceive this immense and wonderful universe...as the result of blind chance...yet since variations are in useless as well as useful directions...the design argument as applied to living things is unjustifiable.<sup>17</sup> This conclusion with its further explanation of Natural Selection cut straight under the cosmogony of the Pentateuch, and with it the infallibility of Holy Writ, and was, to the theologians, a virtual denial of western philosophy; equally destructive were the further implications of the doctrine. Webb in his survey of English religious thought has a splendid paragraph on just these implications and their significance:

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15 John Dewey, The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1910), p. 10.

16 Darwin, op.cit., p. 77.

17 Charles Darwin, Life and Letters (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1888), Vol. I, p. 282.

The importance of the idea of evolution was more important to religious thought than if it had merely, in its application in a particular form in a particular case, led to a questioning of the claim of Scripture to be considered infallible in respect to natural science. Regarded as the enunciation of a principle valid throughout the universe, it seemed to some minds to explain by processes going on within the universe what it had previously maintained that an intelligent Power beyond and above the universe was required to account for. If this idea of evolution was to be reconciled with religion at all, it must plainly be by some doctrine of divine immanence, which should replace an instantaneous operation of a transcendent, divine power, calling the world into existence in the same form as it is today, such as was then commonly supposed to be implied by the term "creation", by a gradual operation of God whereby some simple germ or seed might be developed into an ever progressively richer variety of forms. Whereby it would follow that individual members of any species--human beings as well--would come to be envisaged as transitory embodiments of relatively abiding types than as themselves the supremely important realities for the sake of which the whole process exists. 18

The thinker who seized upon the immanence of the Primal Cause as the only possible meeting ground between science and religion was Herbert Spencer. The Darwinian doctrine became the leitmotiv of his system of philosophy, and was carried over by him in his elaborations into psychology, ethics, and sociology. He was, like all the first supporters of Darwin, optimistic about the cosmic process and felt, like many others, that evolution would result only in improvement. He was, essentially, an agnostic, and his conception of our relations with the First Cause profoundly affected contemporary thinkers, who were wrestling with the recurring problem of evil. Spencer concludes

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18 Webb, op.cit., p. 12

the second chapter of *First Principles* thus: "If religion and science are to be reconciled, the basis of reconciliation must be this deepest, widest, and most certain of all facts--that the Power which the Universe manifests to us is utterly inscrutable."<sup>19</sup> Spencer makes, however at least one suggestion that the condition is improving. "Thus the consciousness of an inscrutable Power, manifested to us through all phenomena, has been growing ever clearer; and must eventually be freed from its imperfections."<sup>20</sup>

This idea of an unknowable ruling Power laid hold of many minds; the inexplicability of cosmic forces would form the motif of much literary and artistic thought in the ensuing decades. For those who could not accept the suggestion of meliorism, it was an unrelieved, tragic, metaphysic; the mind of man could not by merely accepting an intellectual decision, satisfy the powerful craving for Ultimate Knowledge that surged within his heart; yet agnosticism to a great many seemed the only answer.

Thomas Huxley was probably the most enthusiastic of the evolutionists; he modified in several measures the still hypothetical theory of evolution, and, what was of more import to his contemporaries, he wrote in defense of objective truth at a time when certain groups seemed to trust only to well-rooted opinion. It was he who stated that honest doubt had been not only removed from the seat of penance, but

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19 Herbert Spencer, *First Principles*, p. 39.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 52.



had been enthroned and consecrated. He continues, "...There is no alleviation for the sufferings of mankind except veracity of thought and action, and the resolute facing of the world as it is, when the garment of make-believe, by which pious hands have hidden its ugly features, is stripped off."<sup>21</sup> The effect of such a remark can, in view of the atmosphere of the day, be well appreciated; it certainly endorsed on the part of all "a full look at the Worst."

Another whose writing was strengthening the position of science was John Stuart Mill, the "logic machine". He wrote:

No one can be a great thinker who does not recognize that as a thinker it is his first duty to follow his intellect to whatever conclusions it may lead. Truth gains even more by the errors of one, who, with due study and preparation, thinks for himself, than by the true opinion of those who only hold them because they do not suffer themselves to think.<sup>22</sup>

Mill had, as a youth, confessed to Carlyle his inability to accept anything beyond that supplied by empirical knowledge,<sup>23</sup> and his posthumous work, Three Essays on Religion, shows that the years had made no material change in his outlook. In one of these essays, he contemplates the presence of evil in the universe and decides that it is incompatible with an Omnipotent Creator.<sup>24</sup> His work in general is

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21 "Thomas Huxley", Dictionary of National Biography, XXII, p. 898.

22 John Stuart Mill, On Liberty (London: Parker and Son Company, 1859), p. 62.

23 Emery Neff, Carlyle and Mill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1926), p. 20.

24 John Stuart Mill, Three Essays on Religion (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1874), pp. 38-39.

thoroughly in harmony with that of the new thinkers who undoubtedly appreciated having their theories complemented by the incisive statements of so recognized a thinker as Mill.

The first generation of Darwinians were almost determinedly satisfied with their creeds, and were now beginning to confuse the "physically fittest with the morally best." Spencer's "man", says Dawson, whose perfection was to be accomplished by machinery was but a romantic figment of Spencer's imagination.<sup>25</sup> He wrote:

Progress is not an accident, nor a thing within human control, but a beneficent necessity....This advancement is due to the working of universal law...in virtue of which it must continue until the state we call perfection is reached...and so surely must the thing we call evil and immorality disappear;...so surely must man become perfect.<sup>26</sup>

It was at this point, when evolutionary suggestions began to be applied to the practical side of religion, the side of ethics, that science was brought in really close contact with the problem of the basis of morality. Man's relation to his code of conduct is thus stated by Dampier-Whetham:

If we believe that an objective moral law has been delivered to the human race, then there is no more to be said; we have no choice but to obey. However, if we hold no such belief, we must either accept with Kant the moral law of conscience as an innate "categorical imperative," to be taken as an ultimate though inexplicable fact; or we must look for some naturalistic basis such as Bentham and James Mill found in altruism emanating from their "greatest happiness" theory.<sup>27</sup>

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25 Marshall Dawson, Nineteenth Century Evolution and After (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1923), p. 55.

26 Herbert Spencer, Social Statics (London, England: Williams and Norgate Company, 1902), p. 31.

27 Dampier-Whetham, op.cit., pp. 337-338.

"Morality has arisen because it is socially useful," says Baldwin in summing up Darwin's assumption.<sup>28</sup> The main thesis of evolutionary ethics is, of course, that moral instincts are chance variations preserved and deepened by natural selection. Those races and peoples which make some effort to preserve them are gaining an advantage over those that do not. But competition occurs between individuals as well as between races, and it was here that the contrast between the moral law and the selfishness apparently necessary for success in the life struggle impressed contemporary writers. They saw "nature red in tooth and claw" and seemed to feel that morality could have but slight chance against personal self-interest. Then, too, the Darwinian theory itself was being conveniently stretched to include almost any contingency. The survival of the fittest was envisioned in shallow minds as a justification for the rule of might; aggression by a nation or by an individual could be interpreted as the performance of a duty--the adaptation of an organism to its environment by whatever modifications seem necessary.

These disproportionate inferences could not have been other than annoying to scientists themselves; as were also the incessant applications, with personally conceived interpretations, of Darwin's theory to every social phenomena. All such popular misconceptions were palling on the minds of thinkers, many of whom had begun, about the seventies, to perceive a nemesis lurking; even then the materialistic

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28 J.M. Baldwin, Darwin and the Humanities (Baltimore: Review Publishing Company, 1909), p. 62.

and mechanistic powers of physical science were wavering at the controls. True, the general public were still "so fascinated by the passing generation's positive achievements, that they continued to accept them unquestioningly as a whole and as a permanent legacy of the race."<sup>29</sup>

For these confident souls life probably appeared large with promise; the evolutionary idea had clothed the individual with a new dignity and a sense of elevation; was not man supreme in the universe? The culminating, crowning achievement of countless centuries of travail and effort? The more grateful minds seemed not to resent the assumption that they were but preparing the soil for a better, more highly endowed type, and were content to enjoy their transitory primacy. But in more sombre minds the reaction took a melancholy turn.

Many felt that if consciousness had really been derived from unconscious matter, then automatism and mechanical determinism were the natural inferences, and the philosophy of man could be only that of necessity--which in itself is a joyless thing. For these, it was the development of consciousness, then, that formed the real tragedy of life; insentient matter, devoid of feeling and thought, was rather to be envied. And for man, they saw only degradation and loss; they had known him to be more than the highest of earth's creatures; he had been the centre of all creation--the being for whom Beauty was objectified. Now they knew him as "a collocation of atoms"; and Beauty could not be conceived of as anything but accidental, without destroying Darwin's

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29 Hayes, op.cit., p. 339.

entire system. "The world," says Baldwin, "is no longer looked upon as a piece of mosaic work put together by a skillful artificer--as the old design theory looked upon it--but as a whole, a cosmos, of law-abiding and progressive change."<sup>30</sup>

Among the generation that grew up in the shadow of that system there gradually developed a reaction which crystallized in a type of neo-paganism. "If man were, indeed, an accident and his story a brief and transitory episode in the life of one of the meanest of the planets, then--'let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die'."<sup>31</sup> In the "Rubaiyat," growing to wide popularity in the seventies, the melancholy of the Epicurean was asserting itself in man's cry of dissatisfaction with a universe which he had himself conceived.

Ah, Love, could you and I with Him conspire  
To grasp this sorry scheme of things entire,  
Would we not shatter it to bits--and then  
Remould it nearer to the Heart's Desire.

There is in the poem a suggestion of the advisability of sensual deadening of anguish and fear; of plunging deeply enough into pleasure that the intoxicated senses present to the mind only a merciful illusion of life. Those, heart-weary of the struggle between faith and doubt, turned gratefully to the astronomer-poet who could sympathize with them so sadly and so charmingly. It would be hard to resist the pagan beauty of the song.

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<sup>30</sup> Baldwin, *op.cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>31</sup> D.C.Somervell, English Thought in the Nineteenth Century (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1940), p. 225.

Swinburne's "words in classic guise" contributed also to the anti-Christian movement in literature, a movement which was, of course, emotional rather than intellectual. Swinburne was very popular with the younger writers who were being led to think that a return to paganism would re-incarnadine a world grown grey at the breath of the Galilean. They were of those who felt that if a merciful God were abolished they would all somehow escape the laws of the pitiless universe, which without God was no more than a blind and crushing machine. It was the old idea again that gave them to feel that if they could get rid of a religion which talked about and dealt freely with the realities of suffering, they would somehow be rid of the suffering itself. Swinburne's fascinating handling of words was employed on the side of paganism, and his "Glory to Man in the highest" was but another attempt to commiserate with man over his loss. As the century wore on, the pagan ideal was incorporated into the whole Decadent school, especially the Aestheticists of Pater, who were retreating in the deepest dissatisfaction from the mechanistic ideal.

So there were many minds disillusioned and there were varied reactions. It can now be seen that behind the superficial optimism of the century, there lay a sense of horror from which sensitive souls shrank into the relatively consoling shadows of philosophic thought. It was those called into existence during the mid-decades of the eighteen hundreds who were unluckily destined to come of mental age just about the time that England was suffering the greatest

soul strife that she had ever known. They would be forced to form their metaphysical conclusions, their world views, at a period when the traditional philosophic patterns of the years were being violently deranged by the intrusion of new schemes.

And as these developing minds differed one from the other, so did their reactions differ; yet all sought solace and relief somewhere, as men must do. There were, first, those happy minds who discerned in the old faith a power to comfort and protect, and who managed to stand firm, and were often envied by the less fortunate; then there were those on whom the old faith rested lightly enough that they could adopt a newer one without greatly minding so superficial an exchange; and there were some whose sense of pain and loss was greater than their power to endure, who sought forgetfulness in some hedonistic creed. Then there were those, who, realizing themselves bereft of all and able to see solace nowhere, within or without, made no effort to build for themselves some faith by which they might walk, and so lived only in the bitter dissatisfaction that accrues from evasion.

But there were also imaginative men of sensitive mind and of poetic heart, men for whom the immortal life song of the centuries still rang with beauty--a beauty impaired and shaken, but living and subject to restoration. These were men who had listened and had tried to learn; who realized the depth of pain that man had suffered in his

displacement from a heroic place in the universe, but could still envisage him as the highest of earth's creatures.

Such a man was Thomas Hardy; a man of genius, certainly, who yet sounds forth as strongly as any the discordant tones of the nineteenth-century thought disorientation; whose soul witnessed a most bitter conflict--a heart which could not give up the beauty of the old faith, opposing an intellect which could be satisfied only with the convincing empiricism of the new. From this conflict came forth his speculations, his world views, so naturally, they were hesitant, sceptical, often confused; sometimes they were bitter and accusing, the demands of a peremptory intellect; often they were grieving and wistful, the cries of a disappointed heart.



## CHAPTER II

### HARDY THE MAN

"It was in a lonely and silent spot between woodland and heathland that Thomas Hardy was born...the 2nd of June, 1840,... in the parish of Stinsford, Dorset."<sup>1</sup> The loneliness and silence would please the writer whose nature was ever to become most vocal in the presence of loneliness with its attendant pain, and of silence duly encouraging ultimate thought. Stinsford was located on the edge of Egdon, the great, brooding, ageless heath which would impress its own personality so powerfully upon the sensitive mind of the young Hardy. Dorset, superficially Anglican, was still thoroughly permeated with many of the elements of primitive religion; a profound fatalism was its very atmosphere; its conception of the ruling power was largely that of a God of wrath and of punishment, circumvented, or, less happily, endured; it was an ancient code that formed the instinctive religion of Hardy's people. Being projected on the world scene in 1840 would bring Hardy to mental age during the most turbulent of the intellectually confused decades of the late nineteenth century: the youth was nineteen when The Origin of Species appeared; he read that book eagerly<sup>2</sup> and one year later was

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1 Florence E. Hardy, The Early Life of Thomas Hardy (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928), p. 3.

2 Ibid., p. 198.

studying Essays and Reviews;<sup>3</sup> he was forming his metaphysical concepts, his world views, during that period when contemporary assumptions by both science and religion were making destructive inroads into the accepted philosophies of past centuries, so it was but natural that his holdings should be tentative and shifting. This mental environment would profoundly affect the creator of the Wessex literature. He was a deeply sensitive man whose early playground was timeless Egdon, whose first acquaintances were the Dorset peasantry, whose intellectual heritage was handed him in shattered bits that he might piece together as best he could. These were the serious influences of environment that would play upon a man whose nature was of itself inclined to melancholy.

Thomas Hardy, if he is to be judged from his utterances, is pessimistic in that his outlook upon the general scheme of things--life as the common man knows it--definitely slants toward dissatisfaction, bitterness, and even tragedy. Whether or not he has established himself as a pessimist is hardly decided; that he is pessimistic within himself is simply incontrovertible. There were in the personal and public life of the author contributing causes to his unhappy cosmic outlook, but the basic cause of the "twilight view" lay deep within the very temperament of Hardy. The briefest reading in his personal notes and memoirs makes anyone wonder mightily just what type of man this could be.

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3 Ibid., p. 43.

It is the strange, unattractive matter that seems to have clicked most audibly in the mind of Hardy; ironic, bizarre, superstitious, grievous happenings are those he has carefully filed away for further use; murders, hangings, imprecations, broken vows, all appeal to this man as fit material for the building of a good tale. It is the feeling produced--that this type of distasteful thing better forgotten than remembered and yet so carefully recorded in the Hardy Journal--that brings the realization that there is something in the very make-up of the writer that makes him seek almost invariably the sorrier side of things. But even more revealing of his mental calibre are those remarks he makes regarding the whole cosmic process and the friction present in its operations. The strange anecdotes running through the journal invite the suspicion that the man is somewhat morbidly fascinated by unnatural happenings and unlikely characters; but it is the continuous remarks made concerning his views of life and man's lot in the "sorry scheme" that force the conviction, not only that Hardy was a man to whom metaphysical speculation was almost an intellectual demand, but, more pertinent, that those speculations were practically all of an embittered, fatalistic cast. There is some strain of the deepest melancholy in an author whose eye traces most naturally and most easily the duller, greyer threads running through the cosmic tapestry; it is not that he fails to see the brighter, warmer colors, but rather that he is unwilling to trust himself to their glow; he has an idea that they will never

bear out what their color promises incipiently. And so he is content with the grey, and assures himself that it is the only means of playing the 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 child's play."<sup>4</sup>

It was early in life and apparently with little trouble that Hardy convinced himself that in the general scheme of things there is a fundamental flaw. How early this dissatisfaction with the universal plan formed in his mind, cannot be decided; that it bothered him even in childhood is known from fact. There is in his last novel, an incident wherein the small Jude, his spirit rebelling against punishment, considers the obvious futility of life, and is suddenly consumed with an overpowering wish that he may never live to adulthood. Just such an occurrence is related in the early life of Hardy himself;<sup>5</sup> the young Thomas, though living the ordinary small boy's life in a happy, devoted family, is to be found lying on his back, staring meditatively at the sky, and finally expressing the conclusion of his reflections --he does not wish to grow up. Let other boys speak their dreams about the future; young Hardy, already suspecting that any future has little to offer, would prefer his present situation, though possessed

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4 Florence E. Hardy, The Later Years of Thomas Hardy (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1930), p. 91.

5 Florence E. Hardy, The Early Life of Thomas Hardy (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928), pp. 19-20.

of no material goods, and owning hardly half-a-dozen friends. Mrs. F.E.Hardy calls this strange wish a "lack of social ambition," but the fact that her husband applies the incident to Jude at just the time that the child was reflecting upon the injustice of things and the undesirability of a fuller life, makes it seem more probable that Hardy was himself early experiencing the same considerations.

It is a truism that a man becomes very much a part of what he reads. It is also true that a man's choice of reading reveals in what direction his mind is tending; and, more specifically, the annotations that are made in his passage through that reading show rather definitely the type of thought with which a man feels kinship. Hardy was studying Greek sometime before his twenty-first year.<sup>6</sup> William R. Rutland, permitted during the lifetime of the second Mrs. Hardy to visit the author's library at Max Gate, has carefully noted the markings made by the youthful Hardy in several of the Greek dramas.<sup>7</sup> A consideration of this matter seems significant in that it reveals the bent of the Hardy mind some twenty years before the man took up the study of philosophy--which study has been too often lightly stated as the integral reason for the greyness of his vision. To begin with, Schopenhauer and Von Hartman would appeal only to a mind predisposed in favor of pessimism; a study of Hardy's reaction to the poetry of the Attic stage helps to establish the presence of this predisposition. Hardy

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6 Ibid., p. 36.

7 William R. Rutland, Thomas Hardy: A Study of His Writings and Their Background (Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell Company, 1938), pp. 20-44.

was reaching out to those passages of tragic import which found harmony with his own inner consciousness, and at the same time that consciousness was being strongly modified in the general direction of tragedy and somber thought. In Hardy's copy of the Antigone a line is drawn against "For the future, and the instant, and the past, this law will suffice: nothing comes to the life of mortals far removed at least from calamity." Those are powerful words and extreme to appeal to a young man. In the same work is marked, "...wrongs that by day and by night I see continually budding rather than withering." In early life there was little of meliorism in Hardy; at that time the more contact he had with life, the more untowardness he perceived.

There are, according to Rutland,<sup>8</sup> continual markings throughout Prometheus; the hand which was later to write in favor of passive acceptance and dignified endurance in the persons of Giles Winterbourne, Gabriel Oak, and Marty South, and in conviction of the folly of rebelling against Necessity in the mighty conflicts of Henchard, Eustacia, and Jude, has most heavily underlined the words, "The fate which is ordained must be borne as best it may, knowing that the might of Necessity may not be contended with." Hardy, in later years, emancipates himself intellectually from the Dorset fatalism, but emotionally, he never succeeds in breaking away.

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8 Loc.cit.

Hardy's Greek reading is impossible to date; there is evidence that once having found satisfaction at the fathomless well of tragic thought, he returned upon occasion for inspiration, or for substantiation. A good deal of this reading was done during his years of apprenticeship in the office of Mr. Hicks. He had done considerable work on the Agamemnon and the Oedipus Rex in 1859 and the year following;<sup>9</sup> since he was expected by his father to begin, in 1862, to make his living by architecture, he was strongly advised by Horace Moule to give up his reading of Greek plays in favor of an intenser application to business. The counsel was disappointing, but seemed only reasonable, so his study of Greek was dropped. It must have been an abrupt break as Mrs. Hardy remarks, "though he did take up one or two of the dramatists again some years later, it was in a fragmentary way only."<sup>10</sup> There is no further mention of Hardy's devotion to the attic poets, but an investigation of his library has shown the presence of Bohn's translations. So while it may be impossible to definitively date all the author's reading of the tragedies, yet it is safely established that the study was well under way when Hardy was in his early twenties. The Return of the Native, published in 1877 before the philosophic reading had really begun, shows the influence of Greek thought. The theory of the world as illusion, or as a manifestation of the Will or Idea, is running in Schopenhauerian phraseology through the frame-

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9 Florence E. Hardy, The Early Life of Thomas Hardy (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928), pp. 43-44.

10 Ibid., p. 44.

work of The Dynasts, but twenty-five years before, the third book of Clym opened with the well-known passage: "The truth seems to be that a long line of disillusive centuries has permanently displaced the Hellenic idea of life, or whatever it may be called. What the Greeks only suspected, we know well; what their Aeschylus imagined our nursery children feel...."<sup>11</sup> The passage is indicative of much that will come under consideration later; at present, it is of significance in that it lends substance to the belief that the study of the tragic poets belong mainly to the early life of the author. It is the fact that the Hellenic thought early held so strong an attraction for Hardy that reveals again the somber bent of the youthful mind. Fundamentally, every Greek drama deals with some aspect of the mystery of human existence, and, more especially, with the eternal enigma of pain and suffering; it is these very problems that cause so great disquiet in the mind of Thomas Hardy.

It is easily recognized by almost all Hardy students that the author's philosophic holdings or "metaphysical excursions" were predominantly emotional rather than intellectual; while such an objective concept as the Immanent Will was, of course, intellectually derived from philosophic reading, yet it was the heart of the man that transmuted it into his own individual pattern. Unless it be understood that he was of a deeply and strongly emotional nature, the Dorset writer is not comprehended.



It is also true that Hardy was of a religious cast. His young wife says that although critics had often call him

Nonconformist, Agnostic, Atheist, Infidel, Immoralist, Heretic, Pessimist, or something else equally opprobrious in their eyes, they had never thought of calling him what they might have called him more plausibly--churchy; not in an intellectual sense but insofar as instincts and emotions ruled. As a child, to be a parson had been his dream;...He himself had frequently read the church lessons, and had at one time as a young man begun reading for Cambridge with a view to taking Orders. <sup>12</sup>

Born into the Church of England, her rites and ceremonies impressed themselves indelibly upon a mind ever sensitive to dignity and beauty; the very age of the fine old traditions, which had been carried over from the Roman Catholic Church, appealed vastly to this boy who all his life was to sense the particular grandeur that only the passing of the centuries can impart. And so Hardy had always an attachment to his church; the recurring allusions to her practices and customs, her music and song, which run through the Wessex literature, show not only how familiar his religion was, but how deep a hold this attachment had taken upon his feelings. A characteristic mark of Hardy's authorship is the frequency with which Biblical mention is made; even the fact that the Old Testament quotations occur far more often than the New, reveals a significant attitude of mind.

It would be hard to tell definitely if Hardy ever had any real faith; it is known that by about 1870 he no longer adhered intellectually

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<sup>12</sup> Florence E. Hardy, The Later Years of Thomas Hardy (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1930), p. 176.

to his church; he was himself aware at this time of his spiritual vacuity. The young man was, after several years in London, tired of city life for which he was constitutionally unsuited, and was weary of the details of architecture. He had always been interested in religion and in his fellow man; it was almost natural then that he should begin to consider the ministry as a life work. Mrs. Florence Hardy, rather strangely, considers this idea "highly visionary"; she seems to feel that it is but a notion formed at a time when the daily monotony of the commercial world weighed heavily upon a mind fashioned for writing, and thus made a life of study with probable time for poetry seem most desirable. But those who can take a more objective view of his work as a whole, and are familiar with the ever-present background of religion and philosophy, cannot help but see that Thomas Hardy had within himself very much of the spirit of metaphysical inquiry that goes to make up the theologian. At any rate, it was in 1865 that Hardy decided,<sup>13</sup> after a frank inventory of his religious and philosophical holdings, that he could not, with any degree of honesty, become a minister of the church whose doctrines failed to satisfy his intellect, even though her ceremonies and lovely traditions appealed so strongly to his heart. So the conflict within the mind of the writer must have been rather bitter; the iron indeed would have entered his soul. He is later beautifully to express his sense of loss and desire when he feels himself cut off from the "bright believing band," but resents

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13 Florence E. Hardy, The Early Life of Thomas Hardy (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928), p. 66.

the charge that blessed things  
 I'd leifer not have be.  
 O, doth a bird deprived of wings  
 Go earth-bound wilfully? <sup>14</sup>

Hardy, although he claimed himself an agnostic, never found the slightest happiness in unbelief; indeed, it is the dissonance of his holdings, and the inconstancy of his complaints that reveal the gnawing unrest within. The Hardian way of dealing with the Deity--of blaming, condemning, indicting; then of compassionating, pitying, consoling--must bring despair to anyone attempting a definite pigeon-holing of the man's metaphysical holdings; but once the inconsistency is recognized for what it must be--an eternally unslaked thirst for truth, and a continued dissatisfaction with whatever explanations were offered--there comes the realization that he was undoubtedly but one of a very probably many of the disillusioned children of the late Nineteenth century, who drank too deeply of the cup of scientific promise and had not the spiritual power to control the draught; and the attempt to push his metaphysics too far is recognized as impractical.

All his life Hardy was seeking anxiously for something that he could not find. The philosophical studies of his middle years, certainly undertaken for this very reason, failed to bring the solace he sought and honestly desired. Whatever of unpleasantness some may find in Hardy's world views, none can but admit the sincerity of his aim; and admitting that sincerity forgive him much, and at times there is much to be forgiven. There are two occasions when Hardy

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14 "The Impercipient." Collected Poems, p. 59.

presents situations which would be not only distasteful but offensive to any Christian-minded reader; while both "Panthera" and "The Wood Fire" are uncharacteristic enough to be unique in the bulk of Hardy's poetry, yet it would be hard to forgive his writing them; on the whole, far from seeking to offend, he is wistfully envious of those who can really believe. As Rutland notes, there is probably not a passage in Hardy that can be used as indication that he was in any sense a triumphant destroyer of religion,<sup>15</sup> while attacking what he considered the religious pretense of certain of his contemporaries, and scorning the too easy faith of optimists, (in 1897 he jotted down in his journal, "It is so easy nowadays to call any force above or under the sky by the name of 'God'--and so pass as orthodox cheaply, and fill the pocket!"<sup>16</sup>) it would be hard to find him condemning at any time the sincere personal belief of the individual. G.K.Chesterton remarks:

Hardy was humble. He defied the gods, but the great Greeks would have seen that there was no thunderbolt for him, because he had no insolence. For what heaven hates is not impiety, but the pride of impiety. The whole case for Hardy is that he had the sincerity and simplicity of the village atheist; that is, that he valued atheism as a truth, and not as a triumph.<sup>17</sup>

One of the most appealing poems Hardy has written was made possible only by his appreciation of the beauty of the Christmas story,

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<sup>15</sup> W.R.Rutland, Thomas Hardy: A Biography (Glasgow: Blackie and Son, 1938), p. 41.

<sup>16</sup> Florence E. Hardy, The Later Years of Thomas Hardy (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1930), p. 72.

<sup>17</sup> Gilbert Keith Chesterton, "Some Literary Celebrities," Saturday Review of Literature, 14:3, September 12, 1936.

justposed with his intellectual acceptance of nineteenth-century world concepts which discouraged the truth of the story; it is his realization of the superior satisfaction that could be afforded by the former that makes his wish that it could be true so doubly poignant; there is a great depth of grief sounded in the wistful cadences of "The Oxen." If his metaphysical lucubrations, in general, seem at times pointedly unsubstantial, it is undoubtedly because they are the blind gropings of a deeply sensitive, largely desirous heart which could only with sheerest pain accept the mechanistic and impersonal explanations which an intellect conditioned by a scientific age was imposing.

There was also a variety of other factors in the make-up of Hardy that were responsible for his suspicion of untowardness--a suspicion which would develop into a conviction that there is tragedy underlying all things; "the tragedy that always underlies Comedy if you only scratch it deeply enough."<sup>18</sup> One of the main factors in the nature of Hardy that made the Wessex novels and the bulk of poetry at all possible of conception was a vast regard of his fellow man; and it was his strange sense of time united with this regard that produced a respect for the dignity of the individual which has been seldom equaled by writers. Phelps sees Hardy's pessimism as not in the least personal, but as philosophic and temperamental; it is caused probably "by his deep, manly tenderness for all forms of

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18 Florence E. Hardy, The Later Years of Thomas Hardy (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1930), p. 257.

human and animal life and by an almost abnormal sympathy."<sup>19</sup> Hardy has an eye which sweeps infinity; he has an ear which catches the eternal song of the endless centuries; and, conscious of the enormous bulk of past time, he sees man not only as very little, but also as very great. A work characteristic of Hardy's sense of the ages is one of his later poems, "Clasped Skeletons". The last two stanzas read thus:

Yet what is length of time? But dream!  
 Once breathed this atmosphere  
 Those fossils near you, met the gleam  
 Of day as you did here;

But so far earlier theirs beside  
 Your life-span and career,  
 That they might style of yestertide  
 Your coming here!

A good many years before the same roving eye of Hardy saw Henry Knight hanging by his hands from a slippery cliff, seven hundred feet above the sea. As Knight's strength begins to fail death seems certain, and it is at this moment that he discovers the petrified eye of a fossil fixed unblinkingly upon him. And suddenly his own death is swallowed up in nothingness as his mind, flashing back across the appalling enormity of the earth's history, sees page after page of geological conversions unfold before his fascinated gaze; and then he returns to consider his own part in the mighty scene.

The First World War had seemed to Hardy the culmination of

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19 W.L.Phelps, "Thomas Hardy," Essays on Modern Novelists (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1918), p. 49.

"cataclysmic insanity"; in his poem, "In Time of 'The Breaking of Nations'," the great upheaval is dwarfed to but a passing mood of the universe by the immortal, simply love story of peasant man and maid. From his point of infinity Hardy seems to see the human individual as very large and very small, as very new and very old. Lionel Johnson has spoken at length and beautifully of this "double vision" of the man Hardy.

He dwells,...upon the earth's antiquity,...pagan impulses, the spirit of material and natural religion, the wisdom and the simplicity, the blind and groping thoughts of a living peasantry, still primitive; the antique works and ways of labor in woods and fields, the sense of a sacred dignity inherent in such things, in that immemorial need of man to till the soil for his daily bread; meditation upon the drums and trappings of great armies, the fair forms of vanished civilities, the heroism and the ambition, the beauty and the splendour, long past away, while still the old necessities remain, and still men go forth to their work and to their labor, until the evening; meditation upon the slow, sure end of all those evenings;...upon the generations of laborers in their graves;...upon their humors and habits, the homely pleasant features personal to each man of them, upon the great procession and continuance, above and beyond these mortal lives, of universal laws. <sup>20</sup>

Johnson has been decried as being rather too subjective in his interpretation of the Wessex novelist, but those who have consciously felt with him the sincerity of the heart of Hardy in his affection for humanity, can realize that in this passage is simply stated the truth in that regard. A sense of the dignity of common labor, of the beauty

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20 Lionel Johnson, The Art of Thomas Hardy (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1928), pp. 49-50.

of man's relation with the soil, of the power of the simple heart, are among the novelist's great characteristics. Not Mr. Meredith himself has a firmer conception of the greatness and smallness of the individual. A few men and women are taken, and round their life of a moment Mr. Hardy weaves a strange tale, but he always has one eye on the mighty world in which they are such insignificant atoms.<sup>21</sup> Marty South is as exquisite a woman as literature has to offer, and can always stand mitigating the charge of pessimism leveled against her creator; no pessimist could easily draw a Marty South. Her unlettered speech over the grave of the one who belonged to her only in great desire, is a bit of prose literature that grandly testifies to the universal charity of the Hardy heart, and to the lofty reach of the Hardy imagination when loosed upon the possible grandeur of the individual. Marty South, Giles Winterbourne, and Gabriel Oak are the immortal three on whom Hardy has spent the greatness of his vision.

Hardy had a depth of compassion for the suffering; it was out of this so great pity that there arose his fundamental dissatisfaction with the universe. The suffering that he saw around him, and the feeling that it is all unnecessary was the underlying theme of his tragic thought; it was the cause of all his questioning into the nature of the First Cause. "He will not stand by and see humanity submit to so heartless a tyrant."<sup>22</sup>

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21 J.M.Barrie, "Thomas Hardy: The Historian of Wessex," The Contemporary Review, 56:58, July, 1889.

22 Phelps, op.cit., p. 50.



The finding of Wessex must have made Hardy happy. Here was a land where his particular genius would be very much at home. For Hardy is capable of his best writing when treating of rustic life and the simple elemental truths of human kind; the farther he pulls away from this two-fold background, the more he weakens his power; it is then that his work grows artificial, ponderous, and unconvincing. The novelist, in actuality favouring the spread of education, seems in his writing to be divided in opinion as to its results. His familiar remark in the "Dorset Labourer" states, "It is among such communities as these that happiness will find her last refuge on earth, since it is among them that a perfect insight into the conditions of existence will be longest postponed."<sup>23</sup> The poet and the lover of nature are contending with the democratic sentiments of Hardy. He feels that the material advance has been bought at the bitter price of contentment in simple living. Chesterton expresses doubt as to whether Hardy himself realized that one of the very roots of his so-called pessimism lay in the fact that he, so great a lover of the soil, was forced to watch the neglect and decay of English agriculture.<sup>24</sup> England, too, had an "Old South," but it also had been left to slide into poverty and decay; there developed a general social aimlessness of the deserted countryside; men had "lost the shrine of the peasant and had never

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23 Thomas Hardy, Life and Art (New York: Greenberg, 1925), p. 21.

24 Gilbert Keith Chesterton, Generally Speaking (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1929), p. 288.

found the forum of the citizen."<sup>25</sup> It is because of his disillusioned outlook that Hardy attempts to show that the more humble classes are alone sufficiently ignorant of the real conditions of life to be capable of abiding happiness. But the peasant folk are usually not aware of their superior position; in The Woodlanders, Melbury fears for the culture of his daughter, lately returned from the city. "We, living here alone, don't notice how the whitey-brown creeps out of the earth over us."<sup>26</sup> But he knows that it does creep not only over him but into him, into his thought and feeling. Hardy uses, very often, the conflict that arises when the urbane character intrudes upon the solitude of the peasant; a harmony between the two seems impossible and the latter usually suffers by reason of misconceiving the real worth of the intruder; Grace misconceives Fitzpiers, both are unduly impressed by Felice Charmond, Tess trusts Alec, Bathsheba is fascinated by Troy, Eustacia errs in thinking Clym will suit her; always it is the intrusion of the unfamiliar element that works havoc with life.

Another characteristic that will bear mention in considering the man Hardy is the presence of incongruity in his nature. All men have a certain amount of the contradictory, but few to so great a degree as had Hardy. Back in the 1890's, Gosse stated the case as definitely as any of the later critics have done. He relates with a touch of imaginative thought, that on the day of the novelist's birth the Spirit of Plastic Beauty slipped into the room and bending over

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25 Ibid., p. 289.

26 The Woodlanders, p. 35.

the cradle uttered a blessing, promising the child that he should speak of mortal and material loveliness and of pastoral places in the accent of Theocritus, and he should cajole men into a sympathy with unhappy, far-off things. But immediately after, the Genius of False Rhetoric entered and whispered that she should lead the writer to say things coarse and ugly, not even recognizing them to be so; and to rage over matters that demand philosophic calm, and to spoil fine writing with pedantry and incoherency to a point at which he would plague his fondest admirers. And Gosse concludes with the statement, "...and ever since, his imagination, noble as it is, and attuned to the great harmonies of nature, is liable at a moment's notice to give a shriek of discord."<sup>27</sup> The passage is a most discerning summary; Hardy, at times, is pedantic to a point of naivete; he makes almost a virtue of his incongruity; yet both characteristics are a substantial part of his style--it would be difficult to imagine the Hardy style without them. The most commented-upon sentence in the novels, doubtless drawn in for the sake of literary impressiveness, is in disharmony with his basic metaphysic. To have the President of the Immortals making sport of Tess is to contradict the blind, unconscious condition of the Will; Chapman sees the famous metaphor only as "grossly theatrical."<sup>28</sup> Yet Hardy, while he is making constant allusions to names of little known painters, to intimate details of science and history,

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27 Edmund Gosse, "Mr. Hardy's New Novel," Cosmopolis, 1:69, January, 1896.

28 Frank Chapman, op.cit., p. 27.

is never merely displaying his learning, but seems to be endeavoring to enable the reader to see as clearly as he, himself, saw; he was probably surprised to learn that he had often clouded the vision. Eustacia's mouth is not too easily pictured when described as forming "with almost geometric precision, the curve so well known in the arts of design as the cima-recta or ogee."<sup>29</sup>

The gamble between Diggory Venn and Wildeve in the Return of The Native presents a scene which only Hardy could have done. The two men are engaged in a desperate game; both have reached a point of high excitement. They are alone in a little hollow on the heath; it is nearing midnight, and because their candle has gone out, they have resorted to the strange expediency of using the light cast by a number of captured glowworms. The incongruity is almost incredible; the soft luxuriant fern covering the ground, the "pale phosphoric shine" of the glowworms which have been placed on a large foxglove leaf, the great brooding silence of the ageless heath, and against this background there is thrown the intrusive rattle of dice, the ring of money, the restless excitement of the players. It is a bold picture, but not unconvincing.

The opening passage of the same book, the description of the heath, once accepted as the crowning achievement of Hardy's power, is lately more seriously regarded in a lesser light; there is a straining after grandeur, a repetitious, ponderous, drawing-out of

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29 The Return of the Native, p. 76.

what might have been with pruning a simpler but stronger passage of beauty. "It takes the whole of The Dynasts," says Dr. Zabel, "to overcome the ponderous effect of the first chapters."<sup>30</sup> This attempt to reach impressiveness by heavy, indirect method is characteristic; it is too forced and laborious to admit of strength. Hardy is not incapable of power; he is powerful on many occasions, especially when dealing with the simple life of the rustic, when relating some highly personalized experience in some of his better poems, or when linking the present transient moment fast to eternity; it is when he allows inappropriate, if learned details, scientific and philosophic nomenclature, to burden him, that he loses strength. It is quite possible that his tendency to pedantry is responsible, at least in part, for much of the philosophic phraseology, which invites analysis, even though he probably used it with no great depth of meaning.

Hardy's reaction to Cardinal Newman reveals a more serious incongruity in his mind; he was always desirous--indeed, demanding--of intellectual conviction, while his own mental life was largely dependent upon emotion; even his reaction to philosophical stimuli was mainly emotional. Yet he finished the Apologia with the remark "...there is no first link to his excellent chain of reasoning and down you come headlong..."<sup>31</sup> William Rutland remarks upon this strange paradox in Hardy: "The outlook upon life of his mature man-

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30 Morton Dauwen Zabel, "Hardy in Defense of His Art: The Aesthetic of Incongruity," The Southern Review, Hardy Centennial Number: 137, Sept. 1939.

31 Florence E. Hardy, The Early Life of Thomas Hardy, p. 64.

hood was almost wholly due to emotional reactions against suffering and injustice; but he sought for intellectual explanations of the universe in the writings of philosophers."<sup>32</sup>

Without pressing unduly a subject which Hardy himself did not openly mention, it is well to view momentarily the developing relationship between him and his first wife, "The woman I loved so, and who loyally loved me."<sup>33</sup> In 1896 Edmond Gosse asked in a review of Jude what Providence could have done to Mr. Hardy that he should rise up in the arable land of Wessex and shake his fist at his creator.<sup>34</sup> There will probably never be a conclusive answer, but it is noteworthy that about this time Hardy's work takes on a more personal touch; the suffering and unhappiness, which he had remarked in the universal plan, had become localized. That a division of mind had worked out between the writer and his wife is gathered from a poem composed after her death, in which he thinks of her as wishing to speak to him.

What have you now found to say of our past--  
Scarned across the dark spaces wherein I have lacked you?  
Summer gave us sweets, but autumn wrought division?  
Things were not lastly as firstly well  
                        With us twain, you tell?  
But all's closed now, despite Time's derision.<sup>35</sup>

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32 William R. Rutland, Thomas Hardy: A Study of His Writings and their Background (London: Blackie and Son, 1938), p. 112.

33 "Beeny Cliff", Collected Poems, p. 330.

34 Edmund Gosse, op.cit., p. 68.

35 "After a Journey", Collected Poems, p. 328.

They had loved each other greatly at first, but the basis for constant companionship was not there. Mrs. Hardy came from a family of clerics and entertained strictly orthodox views; her husband was often unorthodox and notoriously unconventional. He found her more limited outlook irritating, just as she found his radical views, especially when uttered in the presence of company, increasingly distasteful, so the situation must have been strained. There are in Hardy's writing, especially in Tess of the D'Urbervilles and Jude, remarks of an offensive nature which his wife may well have questioned. The author's consideration of the marriage question dates from this time; it first emerges in The Woodlanders, and is further developed throughout the succeeding short stories until it reaches its recognized climax in Jude. It is true that the Parnell case had influenced England to such a degree that weighing of the marriage vow had become almost a popular movement; but Hardy's preoccupation seems sufficiently intense to have been the result rather of personal experience.

While Hardy declared in 1912, "My opinion was what it is now, that a marriage should be dissolvable as soon as it becomes a cruelty to either of the parties,"<sup>36</sup> yet his own, while often painful, was hardly a cruelty. The marriage caused pain because of the deep love that had once reigned, but it also brought a sense of security; the union must have been a stable one--it lasted for thirty-eight years, and up to the death of Mrs. Hardy, the two bicycled together, entertained,

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36 Thomas Hardy, Life and Art (New York: Greenburg and Company, 1925), p. 120.

and were entertained. However, their mutual relationship had changed radically since the fair days of long ago, and Hardy was left with much personal disillusionment. After her death he seemed to forget the intervening years and remembered his wife mainly as the grey-eyed young rider of Cornwall who had loved him with a depth of love. Some of the most distinctive love lyrics in the language come from the heart of Hardy in the two years following her death. There is a lightness in the "Poems of 1912-1913" which has not been seen, except, perhaps, momentarily, for some time. "Rain on a Grave" ends with a charming verse:

Soon will be growing  
 Green blades from her mound,  
 And daisies be showing  
 Like stars on the ground,  
 Till she form part of them--  
 Ay--the sweet heart of them,  
 Loved beyond measure  
 With a child's pleasure  
 All her life's round.

Every man is to a varying degree the product of his age, and Hardy for all his independence of mind was very much the child of the despoiled nineteenth century. The Origin of Species, with its incredibly far-reaching implications, was published when the author was nineteen; his second wife has recorded, "As a young man he had been among the earliest acclaimers of The Origin of Species."<sup>37</sup> The following year Essays and Reviews appeared. This collection of

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<sup>37</sup> Florence E. Hardy, The Early Life of Thomas Hardy (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928), p. 198.



opinions upon theological subjects presented such views of Scripture as were at that time, and coming from ordained Anglican priests, decidedly revolutionary. Hardy, biased in favor of the book by Horace Moule,<sup>38</sup> must have been deeply influenced; he was at this time considering the ministry, and was keenly alive to matters pertaining to the Church and to the Bible. In 1865 when he was testing his own religious beliefs preparatory to deciding on the Anglican priesthood, John Stuart Mill's famous treatise "On Liberty" appeared and Hardy has himself recorded the fascination he felt for the man whose work he was almost memorizing; his decision that he could not become a minister of orthodox Christianity was made at a time when he was repeating to himself, "No man can be a great thinker who does not recognize that, as a thinker, it is his first duty to follow his intellect to whatever conclusions it may lead."<sup>39</sup> So Hardy began at twenty-four to follow his intellect, and was led by his quest to conclusions that left him confused and disappointed and often resentful. It was during the following years that his dissatisfaction with the universe developed rapidly; he was just twenty-six when he wrote "Hap," a poem as characteristic of his position as any that his mature philosophy produced; it is the Hardy cry against Crass Casualty that will run implicitly throughout the greater novels,

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38 Ibid., p. 43.

39 Florence E. Hardy, The Later Years of Thomas Hardy (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1930), p. 119.

and very often openly through much of the poetry. Chapman looks upon Hardy's background as forming the necessary code and framework in which he was to work. "Thirty years later he could not have been so sure of himself, and could not have formulated any satisfactory response to contemporary problems."<sup>40</sup>

The subsequent years saw a strengthening of his complaint against the universal plan, and Hardy turned to philosophic reading. Conscious of the loss of his religious belief, and depressed by the apparent lack of system in the world, it was only natural that he should turn to those who he felt had gone straight at the problem of existence; and so he turned for solace to the alleged thinkers of the time, the scientific materialists who so colored the thought of the late nineteenth century. What Hardy took from those men whom he was reading will come under consideration later; what is pertinent now is that it be noted that in the materialistic or idealistic monisms, in the mechanistic theories with their rule of law, their causal rigours, and their determinism, he failed to find an answer which might provide any degree of comfort. On the last day of the year 1901, he reflects as follows: "After reading various philosophic systems and being struck with their contradictions and futilities, I have come to this: Let every man make a philosophy for himself out of his own experience. He will not be able to escape using terms and phraseology from earlier philosophers, but let him avoid adopting their theories if he values his own mental life..."<sup>41</sup> Those are tragic words for any man to utter and a few years

<sup>40</sup> Frank Chapman, *op.cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>41</sup> Florence E. Hardy, *The Late Years of Thomas Hardy*, p. 91

later Thomas Hardy wrote even still more tragically, "We have to sing 'My soul doth magnify the Lord', when what we want to sing is 'O that my soul could find some Lord that it could magnify.'"<sup>42</sup> So evidently what he took from philosophers and scientific materialists, instead of clearing his vision, only clouded it the more. And for a man as sensitively fashioned as Hardy, the realization of his vacuity must have been intense.

Hardy had the great heart of the artist for whom human life is tremendously important; he developed the intellect of the nineteenth-century scientist, for whom man was of no consequence, and it was this dilemma in which he found himself that forced from him the bitter cry of protest that underlies all his tragedy. If man was unimportant in the plan, then it was intolerable that he should be capable of feeling and suffering. It is the "intolerable antilogy of making figments feel" that runs throughout all Hardy's greatest work; in the novels implicitly, in many poems and in The Dynasts explicitly. The story is always the same: it is sensitive, aspiring, desiring man pitted against the indifferent, impassive, predetermined sum of forces called universe; it is the individual will against the circumstantial; Eustacia against Egdon, Tess against Society, Jude against his own nature.

In his preface to Two on a Tower, Hardy described the story as "the outcome of a wish to set the emotional history of two infinitesimal lives against the stupendous background of the stellar universe, and

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

to impart to readers the sentiment that of those contrasting magnitudes the smaller might be the greater to them, as men." Hardy, the man, knows which magnitude is more important; he knows within himself that the smaller--diminishing to mere nothingness when thrown against the ghastly spaces which astronomy offers--is of far greater meaning to the human heart; and yet, the tragedy is that in reality the passion and suffering of all humanity are as nothing in the scale of the universe. In speaking of the Earth's shadow in "At a Lunar Eclipse," Hardy asks,

How shall I link such sun-cast symmetry  
With the torn troubled form I know as thine,  
That profile, placid as a brow divine,  
With continents of moil and misery?

There is room for resentment that an earth so stained with human blood and tears should, by universal plan, be permitted to cast a shadow "placid as a brow divine."

Thomas Hardy has been accused of including inconstant, shifting, tentative elements in his world view, and there is substantial ground for the accusation. But the Hardian metaphysic itself, rests upon a great, staple, fundamentally unchanging basis, inconsistent indeed, but still constant. And it is the very intolerability of this basic belief which has forced its dissatisfied creator to varying, half-querulous complaints. It is the belief that conscious, feeling man, is placed in the terrible situation of struggling futility, against a blind, directive force, whose predetermined, rote-restricted ways can of their very nature take no heed of this protesting, critical, sensitive being into whom too highly developed an intellect and sense of law and order have somehow strangely entered.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE PLACE OF HIS METAPHYSIC IN HARDY'S WORK

It is only natural for man to have a philosophy of life, a mental attitude toward the universal scheme of which he, sometime or other, suddenly realizes himself a part. The appalling contrast that he sees between his own achievement and the splendid destiny that his imagination conceives brings home to him an uneasy sense of his own frailty. His gregarious instincts make him apprehensive of standing alone in so vast and uncontrollable a universe, so he becomes desirous of constructing a thought system or a philosophy which will make him feel that he is intimately associated with some force more significant and more powerful than himself. His quest begins, and it is then that he gradually realizes the problematic character of the meaning of life; and he will by his very nature seek a solution explanatory, not only of the universe itself, but also of his relation thereunto. His solution may bring pleasure to others; it may bring offense.

To deny that Thomas Hardy is a scientific philosopher is to speak truly, for he will in no sense live as the founder of a thought system; to deny that he is a disciple is legitimate, for he borrowed too promiscuously and too tentatively; but to deny him the liberty of conceiving for himself a philosophy of life is to refuse him a natural right--the right of seeking solace for a restless mind. Hardy was not a deep thinker and substantially took things as he found them. He protested frequently that he made no pretense of being a philosopher, but the liberal blame bestowed upon him is due to the fact that his pro-

testation is seldom accepted; he may have been sincere in uttering it, but his work partakes too deeply of a cosmic character for critics to believe that he was not, consciously or unconsciously, trying to propound a theory of the universe. The most casual reading of Hardy almost invariably creates the impression that here is a writer who not only possesses, but employs to a rare degree, the philosopher's power of touching all hearts by evoking from trivial things a general truth; one who almost naturally penetrates straight to the universal in things. Nor can it but be realized that Hardy seems to be satisfying an innate demand of his very temperament when he struggles with metaphysical explanations of the great enigma of life.

The question arises, Has every man a right to express, in writing which he intends shall be turned over to the public, his own interpretation of a problem whose solution is as vital as is that of the problem of existence? The answer is obviously in the negative, for, while some personality must be allowed to the individual equation in any man's writing, yet no man liveth to himself, and in a social order no man can speak or act exclusively at his own risk. The belief that a cosmic theory may have an invigorating effect upon the moral code of others does not justify its promulgation, however inspiring it may personally be. Even allowing for the sincerity and good will of the creator, there is far too much at stake of what is most precious to the lives of others--the loss of which must bring blighting despair--to countenance the unbridled a priori "misologies" of every type of mind. However, if Hardy's denial of philosophizing be accepted, then his

cosmic view must be regarded only as an aesthetic metaphysic, harmless in itself, a mere device by which he presents imaginative concepts; then whatever blame he may incur, must be only insofar as he fails to keep his metaphysic subject to the strict control of art, for it would be only in violation of that control that he could permit grossness or extremes of any nature.

But his protestations of posing as a philosopher are usually, for obvious reasons, rejected by readers; then the question of whether or not Thomas Hardy has offended humanity in projecting his own reaction and solution to the great problem, must be decided only by establishing to just what conclusion his world outlook pointed. It is hardly a question of whether or not he succeeded in affronting philosophy; his theory is a little too romantic to bother the sage, but it did have its effect on literature. The general concensus is, of course, that Hardy's was a melancholy, pessimistic philosophy heavily weighted with the burden of man's inability to control or circumvent the laws of nature; and which, if followed to its logical conclusion, would necessitate a denial of the very will to live.

Adcock sees a grim, stoical philosophy of life implicit alike in Hardy's poetry and stories, giving a strange consistency to all he has written; his men and women, says Adcock, are neither masters of their fate nor wards of a beneficent deity.<sup>1</sup>

Sager, who regards Hardy as an unfavorable influence states, "As

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<sup>1</sup> A.St. John Adcock, Gods of Modern Grub Street (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company), p. 6.

a spectator of human history, he sees life as a vast tragedy, with men and women emerging from nothingness, suffering acute mental and physical sorrow, and then passing into nothingness again."<sup>2</sup>

Grant C. Knight, in his survey of the English novel, states that Hardy had his share in developing the spiritual dismay and the sense of hopelessness so characteristic of moderns.<sup>3</sup>

"Hardy is in agreement with an immense audience," remarks Cross, "who in the ferment of ideas in these closing days of the century, in their hasty adjustment of the new conceptions of science and experimental philosophy to life, have either openly or tacitly accepted pessimism."<sup>4</sup>

Edmund Gosse, a friend of Hardy's, wonders that the novelist did not choose suicide as a possible better to living this life. Gosse casts the Hardian metaphysic in extreme form when he accuses Hardy of holding that "abandoned by God, treated with scorn by nature, man lies helpless at the mercy of 'those purblind Doomsters', accident, chance, and time, from whom he has to endure injury and insult from the cradle to the grave."<sup>5</sup> And Elliott can parallel Schopenhauer's and Hardy's systems as a complete explanation of that belief that only death constitutes relief from the pain of life.<sup>6</sup>

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2 S. Sager, "Hardy Did Harm", The Catholic World, 156:614, February 1943.

3 Grant C. Knight, "Thomas Hardy," The Novel in English (New York: Richard R. Smith Company, 1931), pp. 233-248.

4 Wilber L. Cross, "Thomas Hardy", The Development of the English Novel (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927), p. 275.

5 Edmund Gosse, "The Lyrical Poetry of Thomas Hardy", Some Diversions of a Man of Letters (London: William Heinemann Company, 1919), p. 247.

6 Albert P. Elliott, Fatalism in the Works of Thomas Hardy (Philadelphia: University Press, 1935), p. 27.



Almost all critics see in the Wessex literature a definite slant toward pessimism, even though Hardy himself, philosophically speaking, was perhaps not a pure pessimist. The suggestion of meliorism is considered, by the majority of those who discuss it at all, as a mere "tag,"<sup>7</sup> hung on as an afterthought, and too slight and unheralded to represent anything but a passing whim.<sup>8</sup> Obviously, according to these types of interpretation, Hardy, if a promulgator of a philosophy of life, is deserving of indictment.

But there is an evaluation of Hardy which employs an entirely different system in deciding his relative worth; this opinion holds that the apparent defeat and humiliation which beleaguer man, and which ostensibly are suffered for no sensible reason, really are in themselves the very means by which man is destined to emerge from his present low estate into a splendid future, an emergence in striking analogy to the gradual liberation of the universe itself, which is laboriously and painfully dragging itself out of its present unconscious condition into a future of enlightenment and ultimate perfection. In Dr. Zabel's words, "The vindication of man implies the vindication of purpose in the universe."<sup>9</sup> According to this interpretation, Hardy would seem to slant directly away from pessimism; indeed, once the frustrations and defeats, so bitter and humiliating as to challenge endurance, are seen as providing a severe

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7 Lascelles Abercrombie, Thomas Hardy (London: Martin Secker Company, 1912), p. 206.

8 Joseph Warren Beach, The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1936), p. 517.

9 Zabel, op.cit., p. 141.

but salutary test which conditions the future of the individual, the Wessex novelist seems headed towards optimism--optimism hard won, but existent.

Abercrombie sees justification for Hardy's pessimistic outlook, even though it be necessary that the justification be made in a somewhat perverted manner. The mood, he states, governing the novels is one of fierce revolt against the evil it conceives.

To accuse the measureless injustice of man's state in the world, is certainly to confess tacitly that it is worthwhile having a sense of justice. And it is good---good for life and for the consciousness of life. For even while existence is being arraigned as an unjust evil, the sense of justice is thereby impassioned to a flame of activity, profoundly enjoying itself and its own warmth and sending the glow of its indignation through the whole consciousness that contains it. <sup>10</sup>

The critic obviously feels that the Hardian conception cannot be pure pessimism since it does some good to the sense of life.

Thus Thomas Hardy as a writer may be interpreted in various ways: he may be considered as working only in the field of art--art which is strengthened by the presence of a metaphysic; he may be interpreted, as he is, by a vast majority of readers, as an exponent and propounder of a pessimistic philosophy; or he may be judged as one who tries to work his difficult way from the doubt and negation urged upon him by his temperament and by the thought of his age to a position of hard-won faith and hope.

Duffin freely admits Hardy's "unreasonable pessimism", yet light-

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10 Abercrombie, op.cit., p. 143

ens his pronouncement by stating that "No modern writer aims so deliberately and so effectively at the effect of that rigid "katharsis", the purging by pity and terror (though Hardy's prescription may be too drastic to suit the modern constitution)." <sup>11</sup>

Just exactly to what extent Hardy himself was affected by the views and speculations he was fond of entertaining, would be hard to state; his protestations that he had no desire to propound a final solution to the great riddle of life were almost unceasing. Jude was simply an endeavor to give shape and coherence to a series of seemings, or personal impressions, the question of their permanence or their transitoriness being regarded as not of the first moment. In the preface to The Dynasts he warns his readers that the supernatural characters are to be regarded as "contrivances of the fancy merely, whose doctrines are but tentative and are advanced with little eye to a systematized philosophy." <sup>12</sup> In the well-known letter to Alfred Noyes, Hardy expresses surprise that anyone should regard such definitions as 'some Vast Imbecility' and others found in the same poem, as manifestations of his creed. <sup>13</sup> But, at the same time, he feels that those metaphysical concepts he was wont to hold, possess not only a degree of possibility, but even of probability. In a letter to The New York World in December, 1920, he writes that "the

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11 Henry Charles Duffin, Thomas Hardy (Manchester; University Press, 1937), p. 252.

12 The Dynasts, Pt. I, p. VII

13 The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, p. 218.

assumption that intelligent beings arise from the combined action of unintelligent forces is sufficiently probably for imaginative writing...<sup>14</sup>  
 When, back in 1904, he is defending his metaphysical machinery he complains that it is just because he has chosen a scheme which "may or may not be a valid one" that the critics lift their brows;<sup>15</sup> if he had chosen a fantastic frame-work it would have been accepted.

Hardy considers his theme "sufficiently probable for imaginative writing"; he is enough of an artist to know that aesthetic formation demands of its metaphysic, if there be one at all, credible correspondence between perceived existence and the conceived absoluteness of reality; so the question of whether Hardy was inclined to believe his own speculations, or whether he speculated merely for the enjoyment afforded his imagination, will probably never be conclusively settled. It may be that a partial cause of his protest against the accusation of working earnestly with philosophic material, arose when he himself perceived the inconsistencies and vagaries in the thought process he had built up, and when he began to realize in what direction the public was going to react. He consoles himself, at any rate, with the consideration that perhaps he has projected a system for which the world is not mature enough, and by over-stepping the boundary set up by the proctors of the age, he has thrown back his chance of acceptance by many years.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 219.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>16</sup> Loc.cit.

Creative literature divides itself into two types; that in which a metaphysic is fitted to experience, and that in which experience is fitted to a metaphysic. Hardy literature is of the latter type. The novelist was still protesting in 1917 against the imputation of scientific philosophy, and was again stating that it was the heart arguing rather than the head when he repeated what he had said years before, that his views are seemings, impressions only. Although he was ever concerned with applying ideas to life, nevertheless, he never becomes the life he deals with, but, rather, forces it to become himself, to square with his particular manner of judgment. While Hardy's interpretation of life has been made intellectually from observation, instead of instinctively from experience, yet the novels are never mere logical deductions arrived at through philosophic formula. He is always depicting what has been forced upon him, and if his conclusions are not gay it is because what he has had to observe could not be interpreted by him in any other way. But while the observation of phenomena is made intellectually, the interpretation is emotional always.

Even when handling a metaphysic which has been emotionally, or ethically struck, a writer must maintain a balance. The metaphysic must stay in the background if art is to remain; when the metaphysic becomes intrusive, art recedes, and the reader is offended. It is precisely at those moments that he allows his philosophical lucubrations to appear that Hardy fails most as an artist; his contrivances become

obvious, and his characters assume puppet-like characteristics. The Return of the Native, for all its architectural beauty, is rendered almost artificial by the frequency of forced happenings; in the latter half of the story there is created a strong suspicion that things have been too deliberately handled. Yet Hardy's attitude of mind, his metaphysic, serves superbly as a background; it gives a powerful sense of unity, so much so that any tale or happening seems but a particular instance of a constant and a very individual way of regarding life; it provides the atmosphere of universality that gives so strong a cosmic glow to slight, particular happenings. Indeed, it is Hardy himself at his most characteristic, and has vast artistic and dramatic value.

While weakness in the art is apparent each time the Hardian metaphysic obtrudes, it is equally obvious that the writer's strength is greatly dependent upon the underlying presence of his sombre philosophy. The background is essential to his highest power; the farther he pulls away from it, the more he suffers as a writer. His greatest scenes are instinct with metaphysical solicitude; the pressure of fate is, at such times, as important as are the characters themselves, and is usually studied by the reader with more apprehensiveness; and yet even then it is still the background of the drama.

Both Alcock<sup>17</sup> and Chapman<sup>18</sup> call attention to the generally neglected

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17 Alcock, op.cit., p. 6.

18 Chapman, op.cit., p. 32.

observation that even the earlier pastoral comedies and tragi-comedies have their roots in the characteristic Hardian belief that men and women are neither masters of their fate nor wards of a beneficent deity, but "Time's laughingstocks," victims of heredity and environment, enjoying small comedies or stumbling into tragedies shaped for them by some creative spirit of the Universe that is indifferent to their misery or happiness, and as powerless to avert the one as to prolong the other. Happiness must be seized and held, for tragedy may be very near. Even the pastoral Under the Greenwood Tree closes on no note of confidence; as her fond husband remarks on the beauty of their mutual confidence, the new little bride is thinking of a secret she could never tell if their future is to bear possibility of happiness; it is the ironic touch once more. The Trumpet Major is not a tragedy, yet the essential background is there in the form of the apprehension that pervades the land of Wessex when Napoleon is threatening an invasion. Then, too, the suspicion running through the story that the less deserving man is going to win the hand of the very fair girl supplies implicitly the conviction that becomes fully expressed in Jude--things just never come right.

Frank Chapman, a most discerning critic of Hardy, states that the writer has two claims to greatness, firstly, his philosophy of life and tragic world outlook, and secondly, his powers of characterization exemplified chiefly in the rustics.<sup>19</sup> The second virtue is admitted by all; it may be added here that the rustics are at their best when remarking on the fatalism that necessitates their accepting "things as they be,"

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19 Ibid., p. 22.

or when noting with their own naive philosophy the relation the trivial bears to the universal.

It is the first, the tribute that Chapman pays to the philosophy of life held by the Wessex writer, that is frequently assailed. However, if Hardy did harm, it was probably not through his metaphysical concept which is too obviously a mere romance in the realm of pure philosophy to exert any great influence. It is true that the slightest reader of one of the stronger Hardy novels, whether he will it or no, repeatedly finds himself deeply immersed in the tragic atmosphere so powerfully created, and, on the whole, so skilfully maintained; but it is an emotional reaction.

Critics agree that one of the largest conditions of art is the sincerity of the artist--the greater or less force with which the artist feels the emotion he transmits. When the writer seems to be creating for his own pleasure, the reader is happy; when the writer is creating, not for himself, but for the sake of the recipient, resistance immediately springs up. Hardy is at his best when he is most sincere, when he is himself absorbed in the great tragic philosophy of existence that seems, for the moment, to be threatening all men. But when he obtrudes himself lest the symbolism be not comprehended, then indeed resistance does arise. Admiration for Hardy's major claim to greatness, his tragic world outlook, even when judged as an aesthetic metaphysic, must always be a qualified admiration; the metaphysic is erected on so large a scale of grandeur as occasionally to escape entirely from Hardy's control; he is caught in his own machinery, and then the friction and "shrieks



of discord" are audible. But judging the writer from the whole of his output, no Hardy student can but realize that the mastery of the touch is due in great part to the handling of the metaphysics.

It is the nature of his philosophy--essentially tragic--that requires that the handling be sensitive; the tragic can so easily become the ludicrous if a proportion and restraint are not rigidly maintained. Little Father Time becomes by his words and actions almost a distorted failure of what he was intended to symbolize--the embodiment of all the frustration and defeat in the life of Jude, as well as, in a larger sense, the despair and decadence of the end of the nineteenth century. Every word and deed arbitrarily attributed to the child tend to dehumanize him further, until, by his final act, he becomes an abnormality far outside the strict realm of tragedy. Then, too, the execution of Tess is a little on the stark side, and, following so close upon the Theocritan beauty of the dawn at Stonehenge, shows once again the propensities of incongruity in Hardy. Instances where the unrestrained prevents the dignity essential to the nature of the tragic are easily multiplied; they serve to show what can so easily happen when a writer chooses to traffic with tragedy.

But, on the whole, Hardy handles his chosen theme with a masculine strength. Duffin remarks well how Hardy has succeeded in maintaining dignity when dealing with high passion...

What opportunities for raving, shrieking, moaning are offered by such scenes as Yeobright's accusation of Eustacia, the christening of Sorrow the Undesired, the

finale of The Woodlanders, the death of the children of Jude and Sue, and a dozen others. Yet nowhere is there a suspicion of rant, or sensationalism, or noise of any sort. Jude, the most agonisingly, desperately tragic of all the novels, is the coldest of all in its narration. <sup>20</sup>

Hardy's philosophy of existence has been well called a tragedy of existence; his conception of the Prime Cause is an intensely personal translation of the prevailing ideas of the time. It is the mechanical idea of the universe, transmuted in the mind of Hardy, into a blind, unconscious, rote-restricted force, itself as dependent upon the laws of the universe as are those creatures which it has produced. An impersonal, indifferent deity whose activity is as absolutely directive as it is purposeless, seems to postulate the acme of tragedy; yet there is a higher degree: the essential bitterness of the whole scheme lies in the additional pain that some of the creatures have, through a strange and unintended evolution, become possessors of the terrible faculty of consciousness, which brings with it vast desire. So now the tragedy is full-blown; the main process of existence cares nothing, in working itself out, for the needs and aspirations of the individual; it has directive control of all these creatures who are unfortunate enough to believe that their desires have some creative value which should guide, to a degree, the main current, and who continue to dream and to plan, never knowing the utter futility of either.

The actual, proportionate place this tragic metaphysic occupies differs with the author's need. It is implicitly stated in the novels,

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20 Duffin, op.cit., p. 157.

where it exists mainly as a philosophic attitude and, except where it obtrudes, gives both strength and unity to the work; it is really the fatalistic Hardy mind itself with its intense sense of the pressure of doom, and it gives a depth of seriousness to the larger novels. It serves splendidly as a background, and lends the touch of universality and grandeur necessary to high tragedy.

In the poems that are strictly philosophic or mechanistic, the metaphysic is, naturally, the theme and is explicitly, if inconstantly, stated. It is fundamentally the same philosophy that supports the novels, although here, distilled and concentrated, it can be seen in all its varied forms. Even in that poetry which relates highly personalized experiences the same suspicion is there--the suspicion of a thwarted purposing, and of mismanagement at the controls.

It is almost exclusively in his love poems that Hardy admits that life, after all, may be worth caring greatly about. In these poems Hardy's pessimism is greatly softened, just as his frigid mechanism thaws into warmth with the occasional suggestions of "a pale yet positive gleam low down behind"<sup>21</sup> which may yet enlighten all the way. The wistfulness which is recurring in all the poems keeps one ever mindful that the poet is himself not satisfied with what he has fashioned.

The Dynasts is a complete summation of the significance of the novels; it deals explicitly with what they only suggest. The force that thwarted the dreams of Diggory Venn, and Jude, and Winterborne, and that seized in its grasp Tess, and Eustacia, and Henchard, is seen

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21 Collected Poems, p. 309.

here like a great dramatic machine at work. There is an essential difference, however, in both the conception and the execution of The Dynasts; the metaphysic which served well as a background for the novels, but which grew obtrusive when drawn into sight, is here an organic part of the fabric out of which the work is woven. It is presented, not abstractly as in the prose, but through direct characterization. The spirit of Hardy which conceived the great novels, which arraigned so passionately the Cause of Things, is here dramatically projected as the Spirit of the Pities; and it is allowed to speak with all the passionate protest which has been clamoring for complete utterance since Hardy first began to realize himself a cosmic creature.

## CHAPTER IV

### NATURE OF THE METAPHYSIC: THE NOVELS

The metaphysic of Thomas Hardy, as manifested in the novels, is essentially of a tragic nature; as has been seen, his metaphysic is the resultant of many forces. One important contributing factor is the depth of melancholy inhering in the temperament of the man, and predisposing him to pierce to a universal significance in ordinary mishaps. One of the chief causes of the tragic outlook is the profound scepticism and disillusionment arising from the contrast Hardy saw between the lavish promises made by nineteenth-century science, of an inevitable, mechanical progress toward perfection, and the observation forced upon him by experience, both of the quandary into which man has been brought by the discrepancies in natural law, and of the developing decay increasingly evident in the cast of the modern mind. The pressure of fate seemed to lie with a great weight upon the mind of the novelist.

By fate, or destiny, Hardy seems to mean the course of a man's life as determined by all the antecedent conditions in the causal chain.<sup>1</sup> The seeming arbitrariness and malignity of the governing power is merely an illusion of man; it over-rules his will simply because in its large and impersonal working, it has no reference to his will. Circumstances are the conditions under which man lives, and of which he is most conscious when they manifest themselves as unfavourable. Throughout the creative work of Hardy emphasis is thrown, both by author and characters, on those elements of circumstance which seem unfavourable to man's hopes.

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<sup>1</sup> J.W. Beach, The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1936), p. 511.

As the sage workman in Desperate Remedies concludes, "There's a backward current in the world, and we must do our utmost to advance in order just to bide where we be."<sup>2</sup> This was contained in Hardy's first novel; soon after in A Pair of Blue Eyes, he wrote, "A fancy some people hold, when in a bitter mood, is that inexorable circumstance only tries to prevent what intelligence attempts."<sup>3</sup> And along toward the end of Tess, "So the two forces were at work, here as everywhere, the inherent will to enjoy, and the circumstantial will against enjoyment."<sup>4</sup>

The poetry, too, is well-filled with evidences of this attempt to show the hostility of circumstances to man's desires. Satires of Circumstances and Times Laughing-Stocks represent entire volumes devoted in great part to the exemplification of this basic element in Hardy's metaphysic.

Hardy's attitude toward the world, his tragedy of existence, partakes of the philosophic to a greater degree than does that of most writers, but there is an obvious reason. The difference between the Hardian tragedy and the Shakespearean is well stated by William Rutland.<sup>5</sup> To Shakespeare, tragedy is an exceptional calamity; it chooses exalted position and is usually one of greatness. Hardy's tragedy is one of man, and its power lies mainly in its symbolism; it may seem the calamity of a common individual who is slowly worn by little cares and by petty vices,

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2 Desperate Remedies, p. 431.

3 A Pair of Blue Eyes, p. 245.

4 Tess of the D'Urbervilles, p. 365.

5 Rutland, Thomas Hardy: A Study of His Writings and Their Background, pp. 346-350.

but that calamity is representative and inclusive of all the little unremembered tragedies of the daily life of every man. With Shakespeare, the pain and suffering which befall the unfortunate hero are not only something which happened to him, but are also something caused by him; Hardy's main interest throughout his creative writing lies in the tragedy which befalls human beings, but in the causation of which they have little or no part. In Shakespearean tragedy the conflict occurs mainly in the souls of the heroes; in Hardy, the catastrophe is imposed from without, and is dealt by blind destiny.

Rutland points out the difference between the Greek handling of calamity and the Hardy manner. The formulation of tragic fact is, in the former, broadly in ethical terms. The tragedy, permeated with the idea of justice, is observed and its awful, mysterious characteristics noted, but sentence is not passed on the agents, nor is the relative justice of the catastrophe questioned. But in Hardy this further step is taken. The whole of his most mature and significant work is a passionate arraignment of the injustice of the ultimate power in the universe toward its creatures.<sup>6</sup> The Dynasts is the culmination of this arraignment. It is this tendency to blame, not the individual but the scheme of things for the tragedies of life, that renders a consideration of Hardy metaphysical from the very beginning.

The early formation of Hardy's intimacy with the phenomena of nature influenced deeply his interpretation of life. Egdon provided an

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6 Ibid., p. 351.

atmosphere of pagan grandeur and a knowledge of the beauties and secrets of the woodland, none of which was wasted on the sensitive mind of the young Hardy. The unvarying and inexplicable mutability governing all things developed in the writer an ever-increasing conviction of the permanence and inscrutability of Nature's forces. He saw the glory and joy of nature and gladly expressed it in a number of his poems and well-known prose passages; but more frequently he saw the pain and sorrow so evidently a part of the plan, and a consciousness of the cruelty of cosmic forces began to form. Then, as the realization of the defects of natural laws--those laws which touch the whole universe in its unified harmonies and tendencies--grew stronger, Hardy saw that the greater tragedy was not the victimizing of nature, but rather that of man; to him man now became a being born for submission, like all other forms of life, but his greater capacity for suffering rendered the situation more acute; and from this consideration springs the solitudes which form the basis of Hardy's view of human life. The early-formed sense of the ironic position of man--a being endowed with a passion for the infinite and with creative powers operating in the direction of self-determination, yet subject to a universal law which identifies this operation with frustration and pain--was soon to become thoroughly immersed in the mechanical doctrines of the time, and to issue in the fully developed Hardian metaphysic, based always on the elemental antinomy of man against the unknown.

Nineteenth-century mechanism, in its extreme form, derived its name from its supposed analogy to a machine. According to A.E.Taylor,



the thorough-going exponents of the doctrine hold that the physical order is a mechanism which is (a) self-contained and self-acting, and (b) entirely devoid of internal purpose.<sup>7</sup> Obviously, both assumptions are founded on perversion; a real machine is never self-acting--there is a man behind it somewhere. And a machine is not only possessed indirectly of internal purpose, it is always the incarnation and typical embodiment of the conscious purpose of some sentient being. However, the evident character of this reflection did not prevent the metaphysicians of the century, not yet recovered from the intoxication of the science cult, from drawing strange and sweeping inferences. Hardy was influenced to the point of accepting the broad terms of mechanism, but his interpretation was made in the usual Hardy manner. He was far too conscious of the daily allotment of pain and suffering in the universe to be impressed by the smooth working of its laws; indeed, the friction present in the functioning of those laws impressed him to so great a degree that his acceptance of mechanism at all seems an anomaly. While he professed to hold to a conception of a purely impersonal force "loveless and hateless"--undeserving of the name even of 'Power', as "power can be suspended or withheld,"<sup>8</sup> and best designated as "It"--yet he very often attributed personal characteristics to his mechanical force.

It is the unqualified sweep of Hardy's indictment of the universe that has been the basic argument against ever accepting his pessimism as

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7 A.E.Taylor, Elements of Metaphysics (London: Methuen and Co., 1912), pp. 236-237.

8 The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, p. 274.

a systematic philosophy. Philosophy results from an objective, disinterested view of things; Hardy's metaphysic is infused with a personal, unconscionable warp. Duffin has said that Hardy idealizes his world; he makes it almost ideally cruel.<sup>9</sup> There are, of course, finer concepts in the Wessex literature than the bitter farce of life, but it is because the writer keeps it so constantly before him, and because he is so thoroughly impregnated with it, that it cannot but be recognized as the most characteristic feature of his "impressions."

It is difficult to realize that his impressions are not convictions; his accusation of Fate is too comprehensive to be based only on imagination; it must have had a basis in a reasoned conception of the unconscious principle of the universe as antithetically factored with man and challenging him at every turn. His tendency to personalize what he intellectually believes is a mechanical force, is present everywhere in the novels, so much so as to seem as underlying element of his metaphysic. The determined, remorseless working of the rote-restricted power is at times so ironically cruel as to seem rather the capricious willing of a perverse and arbitrary Will. Hardy is speaking when Yeobright tells Eustacia, "It's no use hating people. If you hate anything you should hate what produced them." "Do you mean Nature? I hate her already,"<sup>10</sup> is the response.

The novelist is correct in feeling that affliction makes an opposing force loom anthropomorphous; and as he aggravates and intensifies

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9 Duffin, op.cit., p. 184.

10 The Return of The Native, p. 219.

the force he has created, his resentment grows more and more bitter, and his attack, more personal. It seems at times a loss that so great a venom of satire should be wasted by Hardy on an impersonal Cause; and so it is fitting that the Cause should be personalized in order to appreciate it.

The complaint over Eustacis evokes a suspicion that Hardy thought it at least possible that he had some type of listener:

The gloomy corner into which accident as much as indiscretion had brought this woman might have led even a moderate partisan to feel that she had cogent reasons for asking the Supreme Power by what right a being of such exquisite finish had been placed in circumstances calculated to make of her charms a curse rather than a blessing. <sup>11</sup>

The Mayor of Casterbridge attacks the Cause of Things with more personal rancor than any other, and this despite the fact that he of all Hardy characters has more of the cause of his unhappiness within his own makeup; usually it is the external blows dealt by blind destiny which frustrate and break the individual, but in the case of the Mayor, the conflicting force is provided mainly from within. Yet he is most ready to blame another; it is when he is driven to utter despair that the opposition and frustration that are stalking him seem necessarily the plan of some malignant being vitally concerned with destroying him.

He looked out at the night as at a fiend. Henchard, like all his kind, was superstitious, and he could not help thinking that the concatenation of events this evening had produced was the scheme of some sinister intelligence bent on punishing him. <sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 305.

<sup>12</sup> The Mayor of Casterbridge, p. 144.

When Henchard has realized the final bitterness of his career, the idea of a new start presents itself:

But the ingenious machinery contrived by the gods for reducing human possibilities of amelioration to a minimum-- which arranges that wisdom to do shall come pari passu with the departure of zest for doing--stood in the way of all that. <sup>13</sup>

Along toward the end of Far From the Madding Crowd, Troy intrudes once more upon Boldwood's happiness:

Even then Boldwood did not recognize that the impersonator of Heaven's persistent irony toward him, who had once before broken in upon his bliss, scourged him, and snatched <sup>14</sup> his delight away, had come to do these things a second time.

Instances are easily multiplied and are well-known to Hardy readers, and, while it may be argued that any writer has a right to personification as a stylistic device, yet it is noteworthy that Hardy's lavish use is very often in the direction of personifying the Fundamental Cause as a capricious, arbitrary force. He speaks of Nature's treacherous attempt to put an end to Knight; of an unsympathetic First Cause which allowed Tess but one chance for life; and of countless other anthropomorphous weaknesses which seem out of place in a mechanistic philosophy. Their inclusion is explained only by the depth of Hardy's own resentment of any system which works at so great a cost of human grief. An impersonal system may be thought responsible, but no impersonal thing can with any degree of satisfaction to the accuser, be bitterly and sweepingly arraigned; so Hardy's tendency to invest his deity with sentience on occasions

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 369.

<sup>14</sup> Far From the Madding Crowd, p. 433.

when upbraiding is necessary, seems almost logical to one of his metaphysical bias.

An interesting contrast is provided by the conversation between Sue and Jude, when Sue, descended from her intellectual position, fancies herself and Jude fleeing from a persecutor:

"We must conform!" she said mournfully. "All the ancient wrath of the Power above us has been vented upon us, His poor creatures, and we must submit. There is no choice. We must. It is no use fighting against God!"

"It is only against men and senseless circumstance," said Jude. <sup>15</sup>

From this, Sue would seem a fatalist, but Jude is probably, as is Hardy, a determinist. There is obviously much in the creative work of Hardy that is fatalistic; he seems to have felt more strongly than most English novelists the strength of the forces against which men have to make their way, and the many chances of failure which threaten. For Hardy, the world is not a place where only the brave deserve the fair, and where courage and intelligence are backed by the forces of nature; but rather is it a battleground whereon the forces are either hostile to men, or too indifferent to be won over. Fatalism is the mental attitude of one who feels that what happens to us, or even what we choose to do (choice itself is merely an illusion), is necessitated by the decree of some mysterious power over which we have no control. It is an attitude which develops in those who have done their best in the struggle, and who, despite their well-doing, experience defeat and who finally cry

out with Jude, "Nothing can be done. Things are as they are, and will be brought to their destined issue."<sup>16</sup> But there was none of the religious exultation of the true fatalist in Jude's surrender--it is merely a hopeless yielding to the force of necessity.

J.W.Beach distinguishes well between the fatalist and the determinist in his consideration of the technique of Thomas Hardy. Both determinist and fatalist are equally impressed with the helplessness of man in the grip of strange forces, physical and psychical. But the determinist is distinguished by his concern with the causes that are the links in the chain of necessity. Determinism is the scientific counterpart of fatalism, and throws more light on destiny by virtue of its diligence in the searching out of natural law. While both agree in the helplessness of the individual will against the will in things, there is a difference of conception: the determinist sees the circumstantial will as the sum of the natural forces against which man must cope, but the fatalist tends to a more religious interpretation of that will as an arbitrary, personal force.<sup>17</sup> The personal interpretation which Hardy often allows his characters is doubtless a kind of bitter comfort permitted to those seeking relief from crass causality; as when poor Henchard, in thinking over the events of the evening, sees some sinister intelligence bent on punishing him. "Yet," says Hardy, "they developed naturally."<sup>18</sup>

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16 Ibid., p. 409.

17 J.W.Beach, The Technique of Thomas Hardy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922), p. 228.

18 The Mayor of Casterbridge, p. 144.

The determinist is perverted by the initial metaphysical blunder of taking rigid mechanical determination of events by their antecedents in accord with the principle of causality, as an actual fact. For him there are no exceptions to the principle, and the action of conscious being is as subject to law as are all purely physical processes. Hardy seems definitely deterministic; he was deeply influenced by the universal working of the laws of cause and effect. "That she had chosen for her afternoon walk the road along which she had returned to Casterbridge three hours earlier in a carriage, was curious--if anything could be called curious in a concatenation of phenomena wherein each is known to have its accounting cause."<sup>19</sup>

The novels abound in examples of the inexorable chain that connects a tragic end with a slight beginning. It is again Hardy's sense of the ironic that is at work; it seems, at times, that he deliberately creates a series of situations--ironical because of the insignificance of the act which precipitates the series--and then subjects some helpless being to the necessary results. But this would accuse him of deriving joy from the futility of the aspirations and struggles of humanity, and this is untrue--his sympathies are always on the side of man. But the irony does, as far as Hardy can see, actually exist. His mind has always been impressed by the necessity of the result, the unbroken concatenation of cause and effect which so often ends in disaster. Hardy's sense of symbolism is alive again; what the average mind passes by as lacking in

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19 Ibid., p. 235.

meaning, contains for Hardy a depth of significance; the trivial circumstances are symbols of a general truth, which, when once revealed, is acknowledged by all.

It is true that every story of plot must have a first link, an inciting incident, but in most stories the subsequent incidents do not seem to follow as necessarily as they do in Hardy; with him the first slight move is the disturbing of the pebble which causes the landslide. Anyone familiar with Hardy has undoubtedly undergone the experience of finding himself apprehensive and regretful over some apparently meaningless incident in the beginning of a story: it is because the first link in the chain is forged, and sad experience in the world of Hardy has taught that the chain is always worked out to its finish. That very feeling of apprehensiveness seems a cogent proof that the Hardian metaphysic observed a causal law with undeviating and inexorable rigour.

Many examples of slight but significant incidents will recur readily to the Hardy student. Probably as typical and as ironic as any is the valentine episode in Far From the Madding Crowd; Bathsheba's sending the token was a meaningless, impulsive, and thoroughly girlish move, but it turned the placid stream into which Boldwood's life had worked out, into an uncontrolled torrent which very nearly swept both to destruction. Giles Winterborne's trivial act in refusing the road to Felice Charmond was the beginning of a series of bitter frustrations and losses which resulted in the bitterest pain of all--that of seeing the girl he loved won by an unworthy man. Tess would have been permitted to live happily



at home until such time as worldly wisdom was hers, had not her mother been stirred to errant aspirations by the vicar's thoughtless greeting to her husband. Arabella's first advance to Jude was a deed fraught with meaning, and terrible in its consequences; it points clearly the probable way that the visionary dreamer will travel.

A consideration of the causal law in the work of Hardy involves what is very often a disturbing element in the metaphysic of the novels--the lavish use of chance and coincidence. The nonchalant and apparently illogical simplicity with which they are introduced into a fatalistic or deterministic universe, supposedly frozen in time and space, would make the novelist seem incredibly inconsistent, were not his purpose understood. Duffin remarks that coincidence is so frequent in Hardy that there is some danger of its being regarded as a mannerism, or even as a pusillanimous device for bringing about a crisis or a denouement.<sup>20</sup> But Hardy had a purpose in his use of contrivances, and while it weakens the structure of the novels, it is really not unnatural in one of his peculiar philosophic bent. He is always impressed with the ironic tendency of circumstances to thwart the intentions and desires of man, and seems to feel that a collaboration of character with circumstance is quite necessary for the creation of tragedy. The difficulty arises with the reader when an attempt is made to include both chance and necessity in an harmonious union. Brennecke is of some help in noting that the only means of avoiding bewilderment in the apparent lack of logic is the

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20 Duffin, op.cit., p. 118

realization of the Schopenhauerian idea that chance and necessity are not mutually exclusive and contradictory terms, but that chance is the manifestation of necessity.<sup>21</sup> Hardy's very early poem "Hap" expresses this idea of the essential malignity of chance and circumstance, coupled with the deterministic tendency of thought. Hardy himself earlier stated what Brennecke recast, and he made his universe almost incredibly deterministic when he said that the very long odds against these conjunctions of circumstances may be almost a proof of their being chance at all. Which would mean that all the contrivance in Two on a Tower, The Return of the Native, Tess, and even the bizarre recurrences of identical situations in The Well Beloved, are simply manifestations of a strictly determined naturalism; and the slipping of Tess's letter under the rug is as much a part of the vast universal design as is Napoleon's defeat at Walcheron.

For those who believe that the pain and failure of man are a necessary phase of his emergent exoneration, the presence of chance is a most significant contrivance. Dr. Zabel states the case thus:

He contrives his defeats and frustrations as a means of reducing to its final and minimal condition the saving heroism, dignity, and integrity of his characters; his use of every known portent, accident, and coincidence of chance destinies is notoriously excessive. The impression that survives such buffetings of the reader's patience corresponds, no doubt intentionally, to the indestructible essence of human worth and dignity with which his characters manage to survive, Greek-like, their havoc of ruin and defeat.<sup>22</sup>

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21 Ernest Brennecke, The Life of Thomas Hardy (New York: Greenberg and Company, 1925), p. 124.

22 Zabel, op.cit., pp. 140-141.

The interpretation differs from other explanations, most of which are content merely to give chance and contrivance a logically justifiable place in the Hardian metaphysic; and unless a critic saw in Hardy's idea of meliorism a substantial theory of emergent evolution, he could not hold with Dr. Zabel in his interpretation.

McDowall calls attention to the fact that even in this fatalistic setting of Hardy, wherein the pressure of doom is seldom relieved, our own acts are often made to seem the fatal shadows. In the novels, action and circumstance are forged into the tenacious causal chain that in reality must paralyze human effort, but which in Hardy seems the result of human choice. It is extraordinary, and yet it seems natural; it is most threatening in Jude where the experience is plainest and darkest; or where, as in The Dynasts, there is a strange but naked vision of the prime cause at work.<sup>23</sup> Here the pressure of doom, or of fate, absorbs the entire action. Yet Hardy's work was merely the embodiment of the thought of his time. The atmosphere of nineteenth-century science is there; the deification of law with its uniform regularity and its determinism, pervades the novels and is seen faithfully mirrored in their inexorable sequence of cause and effect. Hardy's apparent belief in the rarity of freedom of choice is reflected there.

One who is impressed with this remorseless uniformity of the causal law, is constrained, naturally, by the necessity of the causal relation. In fact, Hardy's whole tragedy is the conflict of the con-

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<sup>23</sup> Arthur McDowall, Thomas Hardy (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1931), p. 31.

scious with the unconscious, the terrible revolt of man against an implacable law of Necessity which controls his instincts and aspirations. The problem of free will is immediately involved. Expressive freedom and interaction are incompatible with the creed of the necessarian. Hardy may or may not have believed in the power of free will in man; if consciousness can be shown to have been derived from unconscious matter, then mechanical determinism may be naturally inferred; and Hardy, in 1920, stated that he had felt in conceiving The Dynasts that the assumption was "sufficiently probable" for imaginative writing.<sup>24</sup> The assumption is the very essence of the drama, the will "emerging with blind gropes from impercipient." Whatever he believed of free will, he did realize that too rigid determinism would stultify his art. The Dynasts is the summation of his deterministic philosophy and strikes a daring degree in picturing all humans simply as lobules of one brain; but at the same time the Spirit of the Years attempts to overcome the inevitable stultification by introducing a convention to disregard it. "But this no further now. Deem yet man's deeds self-done." For Hardy was artist enough to realize that even if free will is not necessary, belief in it is necessary for both life and art. In regard to the characters, we are warned that in order to enjoy their drama we must just pretend them to be "not fugged by one Will, but function-free." Hardy is at least logical in realizing that free will can have no place

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<sup>24</sup> The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, p. 219.

in rigid monism, but he also knows that it is necessary for human interest that the appearance of it be there.

And so his characters are great just in proportion as we feel them "function-free"; Eustacia and Henchard appear as the most independent of all, and this, probably because they seem to have all the elements for the struggle between the Circumstantial Will and the Individual Will burning within their own hearts, and therefore supposedly within their own control. It is true that Eustacia was fatally misplaced on the sweeps of Egdon, but one wonders whether with her imperious nature and stormy passion, she could have found happiness under the sun. The same is true of the Mayor; it is his independence, the grandeur of his scorn of fate, that lends interest to him, whether he be fugged by one will or no; at least he gives the impression of handling his own destiny and inviting his own frustrations, even when misfortune stalks him. But, on the other hand, Tess appears as a creature inviting only pity and a great depth of commiseration merely because she seems so definitely at the mercy of a fate which is deliberately heaping tragedy upon her when she is not free to resist. The interest appeal in Tess is mainly that of sympathetic indignation for a thwarted, helpless fellow-creature; one seldom wonders what Tess will do; rather is it a process of wondering what will be done with her. In Jude the deterministic philosophy has reached even a fuller application, and it is this that makes the book for all its powerful writing less great

than Tess. Determinism must have developed rapidly from then on in the mind of Hardy, for the human characters in The Dynasts are not even remotely, as Jude was at least in part, responsible for the experiences they undergo. It is the Spirit characters which supply the great deficiency in the epic drama--a necessary addition, for great literature will never be made with puppets; even their sentence cannot save puppets--at least the semblance of free will is needed.

It is Hardy's vast power of character portrayal that saves the novels from failure. He has done here a seeming impossibility; he has built great stories from human beings whose individual wills and desires are merely special manifestations of a universal power which has possession of everything in them, with the solitary exception of self-consciousness. So we have been made to feel what in reality is not there, and what is necessary for passionate human action--the play of free will.

It is also to be noted in connection with free will that just as truly as any attempt at self-assertion is made, so also will suffering follow. Strictly speaking, self-assertion is impossible in this rigid, monistic universe of Hardy's, but the consciousness that has come "un-meant" permits the luxury of rebellion, and the personal determination to frustrate the movements of fate; it is their unconsciousness of the futility of defiance that renders the characters pathetic. And it is the very ones who assert to any degree their own wills against the universal will, who suffer the greater mishap. Eustacia and Henchard again come quickly to mind as the most self-willed of the Wessex folk. Jude's

sufferings began as soon as his conscious will tended to operate in the direction of self-determination, and the more freely he walked in that direction, the more tragedy he encountered. Bathsheba found happiness, but only after she had learned the folly of resistance, and the wisdom of renunciation. Those who, like Bathsheba, submitted before the end, might be forgiven and saved; but those who attempted to oppose their will to that of a greater power, and who held out with the hard courage of desperation, were broken in the conflict. The indifferent fate they mistook for a malign power did indeed turn itself into malignity, and pursued them to their death; in the Hardian metaphysic, tragedy is the remorseless answer to personality's self-assertion against the impersonal First Cause.

Where rebellion brought disaster, acquiescence might have won reward--and this despite the indifference of fate. Giles Winterborne, Marty South, Gabriel Oak, are supreme examples of what Hardy could do for those he loved. It is true that vast sacrifice was asked of them--of Giles, the sacrifice of his life; of Marty, unrequited love; of Gabriel, relegation until need spoke in his behalf--but it is also true that they all invariably have the reward of winning real affection and a great depth of admiration. In Tess, the author is attempting to show that moral victory is more important than that temporary recognition a time-serving philosophy would celebrate. Although Tess is regarded by many readers as a pitiable woman whom experience neither teaches nor strengthens, such a concept was far from Hardy's mind. He saw her as the embodiment of purity and beauty of character, representative of the

individual will sentenced to a Promethean struggle, but sent into the conflict unarmed. To Hardy, Tess remains pure and beautiful, and grows steadily stronger until she finally triumphs over the relentless forces opposing her by a death accepted with dignity and submission. It is worth noting in Jude that the unfortunate visionary never lost sight of the ideals he had early formed, and went to his unattractive death bitterly resenting the degradation he had at least helped to cause. Hardy has throughout a deep appreciation of human nature and its powers of endurance. This belief in the worth of patience and submission is of great import in the Hardian philosophy; it protects the writer from an inclusive charge of pessimism. It is his point of reconciliation with the indifferent, ironic power of the universe.

Tess held a place of her own in the heart of Hardy. The novelist has at all times a great pity for his poor creatures tossed about by an indifferent fate, but for Tess he has a vast, if powerless, fervor of charity; he seems always greatly desirous of protecting her against the merciless procession of crushing events which his own imagination is creating. It is true that he is powerless to help her, once the concatenation of cosmic forces is set in motion; arbitrary interference in a fated and deterministic universe is impossible, and Hardy can but watch with sorrow as his heroine goes slowly down to destruction.

Tess's story is merely a history of "the inherent will to enjoy, and the circumstantial will against enjoyment."<sup>25</sup> It is the most tragic

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25 Tess of the D'Urbervilles, p. 365.



of Hardy histories because Tess is the least offending of the characters. "Her will to enjoy" is no more than a humble desire for the happiness which her instincts seem to promise; but it is for those very instincts, implanted in her by nature, that she is painfully destroyed. From the metaphysician's view, it is once again the struggle axiomatic in Hardy's world view, the individual will against the circumstantial. Hardy, doubtless, felt he had made compensation to Tess when he awarded to her what he considered was the moral victory. Tess is a novel whose bitter burden is the thwarting of the perfectly natural instincts of a pure woman by relentless laws of cause and effect, which can be controlled or directed by no existing power.

While Jude is caught in the same hopeless web of determined events, yet his history is less tragic, because he has more consciously than Tess begun the causal process which ends in apparent destruction. Jude's sin against the universe is, of course, that of aspiration; his tragedy is less bare than Tess's, since aspiration can be blameworthy, where desire for reasonable happiness seems only natural. In Jude the instrument of destruction is, as in all Hardy's great novels, love. As Rutland points out, this novel shows very clearly what Hardy was so often attempting to show: the wrecking of the individual, conscious life by the unconscious, universal Process through the inevitable instrumentality of love.<sup>26</sup> Arabella symbolizes the physical, Sue, the spiritual and intellectual in love. Hardy's tragic idea seems to be that love is the

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<sup>26</sup> Rutland, Thomas Hardy: A Study of His Writings and Their Background, p. 255.

imposition of means to ends which are not the ends of the individual. It is the same struggle repeating itself--the individual desire against the universal.

Naturally, Jude's transformation from a simple visionary into a cynic, by the particular means imposed, gives great scope for discussion of social conventions and of the marriage-law. Any deep significance of the marriage question in the novel has been challenged by Hardy himself. He said that he could see no reason why the novel should be considered a "manifesto" on marriage, since out of the five hundred pages there were not more than a half-dozen treating of the "general" marriage question.<sup>27</sup> However, there is enough of personal rancor and deliberate challenge to conventional views in those half-dozen pages to create the realization that the novelist was writing with his heart in his work.

It is in Jude that the metaphysic tends to grow more intrusive; the art loses control occasionally and permits an exaggerated view to prevail; the novel shows Hardy in an intense mood, but at times the mood escapes from the art and cries out uncontrolled; it is offensive simply because form has given way. In philosophy the "denial of the will to live" may bring solace to those who find therein the solution of life; to others it may mean a cowardly evasion of the conflict; in art it grows utterly sterile--it can product nothing but paralysis.

However, Hardy does present worthy considerations in the not too

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27 The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, p. 40-41.

pleasant history of Jude; Frank Chapman feels that the novel as a whole has been generally misinterpreted: the message he sees embodied throughout the story is "the wages of sin is death." Jude's unhappiness with both Arabella and Sue was decided only when relations became physical.<sup>28</sup> The tragedy further implies that frustration of the highest aspirations may result from instinct uncontrolled by reason; that a natural force within the heart of man compels self-abnegation; that religion can be a solace to suffering hearts; that--and this is obvious throughout Hardy--error is followed by retribution.

Sue is by far the most complex of Hardy's characters; to her the world resembled the projection of a dream--the result of a First Cause working "automatically like a somnambulist, and not reflectively like a sage."<sup>29</sup> She is reluctant to meet the world and to accept the conditions that life prescribes for womankind, and she suffers fearfully for her evasion. Her own philosophy of life is such a perversion as to permit strange inferences: the Christian ideal of purity, the chastity of the saints, disgusts her; she prefers the pagan ideal, the unquestioning acceptance of life neither denying nor concentrating upon the passions. Her reparation is as unreasonable as was her fall; it is an idea that having caused her destruction, she must add to it, if possible; she is too deeply absorbed in a killing passion of remorse to realize that she is leaving Jude to certain despair.

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28 Chapman, op.cit., p. 35.

29 Jude The Obscure, p. 413.

Where Sue's offense is mainly that of evasion, Eustacia's is an offense of rebellion against the prescriptions of the universe. While Eustacia and Clym are, in their unhappiness, inseparable bound--it is the impact of their equally large but utterly dissimilar natures out of which tragedy rises--yet Eustacia has come to scorn life before she ever meets Clym. Placed beneath the white stars of Egdon, 'mid sweeps of primal grandeur, her wild heart should have found kinship with the windy skies and the boundless range of untamed beauty; but Eustacia has allowed a naturally strong sensuousness to develop to devastating proportions--that it was a refined, epicurean sensuousness did not soften its force, and it has given rise to an inclusive discontent which is to be the undoing of the "Queen of Night." There was on lovely, lonely Egdon nothing that could satisfy the beautiful, fiery Eustacia; even Clym--on Egdon--is utterly disappointing; she had expected him to give release from solitude, and a realization of ambitious dreams--and he has given only his heart.

There is great conflict between Clym and Eustacia; both are peers in largeness of personality, in self-determination and resolve, but they are bitterly mistaken when, at the beginning, they consider themselves complementary. Even the material from which their dreams are fashioned is hopelessly ill-matched; Eustacia has long harbored a vision of active city life, lived 'mid a whirl of gaiety and brilliance; Clym has returned from the city with gladness and relief, eager for

the solitudes of Egdon, and desirous of launching his altruistic scheme of tutoring the rustic folk. Eustacia's is the narrower mind in that she can brook no opposition and refuses to accept misfortune of any kind; Clym's mind is large enough to take in mishap as well as good fortune, though Clym fails miserably in his inability to comprehend Eustacia at a moment when largeness of understanding would have averted the final tragedy.

Clym pays heavily for his lack of vision, but his destruction is not so crushing that he cannot salvage enough to rebuild, sorrowfully but steadily, a new life of service and peace. But Eustacia pays the complete price that self-assertion demands; there is in her none of the stoic acquiescence that marks so many Hardy characters who feel, with Jude and Clym, that what must be, must be. With Eustacia, what must be, must be converted, and her rebellion is high and long. In a personality of dimmer magnitude such fearless defiance of fate and nature would seem only childish, but in the high-handed Eustacia there is a touch of mingled grandeur and pathos. When all her splendour is suddenly dimmed and her lofty resistance snapped, she lays, with her characteristic inclusiveness, all blame upon the shoulders of some great Prince of Darkness who has framed her lot.

Eustacia, in her feminine helplessness and in her ready cries of protest, gives Hardy larger scope for an indictment of the universe than does Henchard, the Mayor of Casterbridge, who bears his punishment

with a steely determination. Henchard is undoubtedly the largest masculine character in Hardy, probably made to seem so by his elemental disparity: in other cases, the circumstantial will against enjoyment is an objectified, external circumstance, against which man must struggle and over which he can have no possible control; in the Mayor, the two main elements which form the basis of all struggle in Hardy, can be found existing within Henchard himself. The antinomy, instead of being modified, is rendered the more bitter. Henchard seems Shakespearean rather than Hardian; the conflict, arising at times to a point where total destruction threatens, takes place always within the suffering soul of poor Henchard; the tragic elements, instead of being provided by personality and by the circumstances controlling personality, are provided by the impetuous stream of unconscious vigor which flows through him like a current of electricity, fatally undoing his conscious aspirations. And so because the conflict is well under way, it requires incidents apparently small and petty to effect the downfall of a great man; naturally the tragedy then partakes of the ironic. Failure is the very atmosphere of the book--failure recurring and battering until at last it beats down the last shred of resistance; and the most hopeless utterance that was ever formed by despairing man comes forth from the crushed heart of the one-time Mayor of Casterbridge.

Henchard has hated fate so consistently and for so long a time, that

hatred has turned to positive and unflinching scorn. He cannot even vaguely consider the possibility of another attempt at living for the "ingenious machinery contrived by the Gods for reducing human possibilities of amelioration to a minimum--which arranges that wisdom to do shall come pari passu with the departure of zest for doing--stood in the way of all that.<sup>30</sup>

Henchard's accentuated dualism of nature makes him a notable variation on the general Hardy theme; the personal and impersonal forces are so intensified within him that the circumstantial will is but the objectification of his own nature. The Mayor's tale seems the bitterest of all; where the other characters are puzzled at the play of untoward circumstances, and dismayed at their lack of control over the external forces which are harrying them, Henchard's dismay is caused by the growing realization of his inability to control his own nature, and he is puzzled at his failure. The forces of his unconscious vigour seem to break loose periodically, and before their relentless sweep all the higher impulses of his conscious desires are borne to bitter loss; he is filled with remorse at the havoc he is steadily causing for himself and for others, but he seems tragically powerless to prevent it.

Tess, Jude, Sue, Eustacia, Clym, and Henchard are those great characters of Hardy who best exemplify what has become axiomatic in the great

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30 The Mayor of Casterbridge, p. 369.

stories, the struggle of the conscious against the unconscious, the individual against the circumstantial. But none is as completely large as the simple Giles Winterborne who has learned the bitter but necessary lesson of renunciation; it is the very lack of this knowledge, necessary if one is to placate a hostile universe, that caused the great suffering of this tragic company. All have offended against an inexorable force, wittingly or no, and all must settle the bitter debt incurred; in the Hardy world, ignorance is almost as culpable as sin, and is as subject to punishment; retribution is the ruthless answer to self-assertion.

Hardy's appreciation for the beauties of natural phenomena is well known; it is interesting to consider what part nature played in his metaphysical development. It would naturally be supposed that his remarkable aptitude for the perception of beauty, his Wordsworthian range of vision and observation of detail, should lead him, as it did the earlier Romanticists, to seek solace and comfort on the breast of nature. But in view of the Hardian tendency to a melancholy interpretation of the mysteries of birth, life, and decay, it is not surprising to find the writer insensible, not to the beauty, but to the imagined sympathy of nature. In fact, there is seen in Thomas Hardy a violent reaction against the poetry of egotistic optimism which had ruled the romantic school in England for over a century. On the whole, Nature has none of the cheerful and mystical significance that it had for Wordsworth



and Shelley, and later for Swinburne and Meredith. Instead of seeking comfort from Nature, Hardy at times finds it necessary to console her as he sees her equally victimized with man; more often, he tends to blame her for the obvious maladjustments of life.

But Hardy's blame is seldom unmitigated, because he is not just sure where the ultimate responsibility for this sorry scheme lies; the poem, "Nature's Questionings", shows that Nature herself is in sad need of an explanation which she cannot give. Too, it is only reasonable that anyone with as finely developed a sense of beauty would at times feel comfort and alleviation from pain, as the beauties and splendours of Nature present themselves. However, Hardy could never accept Wordsworth's all-including harmony that fitted man and nature into one exquisite order. He did see an inexplicable unity of creation, but in his concept there were always inevitable discords among the creatures; and these finite discords could not be resolved in the harmony of the Prime Cause for that was but a blind force that unfolded into the many disharmonies. And so the friction and the presence of opposing elements impressed themselves upon the writer with greater intensity than did the idea of the unity of being.

Hardy has been repeatedly accused of attaching inconsistent and confusing meanings to the word "Nature": sometimes she is cruel, victimizing man, who then feels a justifiable resentment against his creator; now she is kindly, offering harborage to those whom society

is exploiting; sometimes, she is a fellow-sufferer, mistreated even as is man; again, she is a conscious Power, or merely a term used for designating the unity of process and the directing control of the world. There is ample room for the accusation of inconsistency, but a survey of both poetry and novels would show that the Wessex writer is rather consistent, at least, in his feeling that nature either will not, or can not, help man to any appreciable extent.

The only time that Nature seems at all sympathetic toward human kind, is when a conflict arises between natural impulse and the restriction imposed by convention and social codes; otherwise, Nature is usually teeming with cruelty, the very social codes themselves being an outgrowth of Nature.

In Tess, this championing of Nature against the exactions of conventions is most apparent; society is arraigned for framing laws and conventions which run counter to Nature; where these social demands conflict with natural impulse, the argument is thrown on the side of the latter. When Tess is beginning to fear her love for Angel Clare, Hardy argues, "Every see-saw of her breath, every wave of her blood, every pulse singing in her ears, was a voice that joined with Nature in revolt against her scrupulousness."<sup>31</sup> Her misery is "based on nothing more tangible than a sense of condemnation under an arbitrary law of society, which had no foundation in nature."<sup>32</sup> Social conventions make

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<sup>31</sup> Tess of the D'Urbervilles, p. 228.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

crime of what otherwise would have been for Tess a liberal education.

Yet this indictment of human nature in general, visible also in Jude, is not nearly as characteristic of Hardy as is his quarrel with Nature as the embodiment of all the cruel forces in the universe. Even in this same novel, Tess, wherein he has been championing Nature against society, he reverts from time to time to his more characteristic view. He questions Nature's 'holy plan'; he speaks of our earth as a blighted world; he remarks on "the ill-times execution of the well-judged plan of things."<sup>33</sup> In noting the frequent harshness of men and women to those they love, he continues in his accustomed strain, "And yet these harshnesses are tenderness itself when compared with the universal harshness out of which they grow; the harshness of the position towards the temperament, of the means towards the aim, of today towards yesterday of hereafter towards today."<sup>34</sup>

Jude speaks of the scorn of nature for man's finer emotions; and in the same book, Phillotson feels that cruelty is the law, "pervading all nature and society; and we can't get out of it if we would."<sup>35</sup>

In Two on a Tower, astronomy appears only as a sad scanning of the unknown. And when questioned as to the number of stars visible to the naked eye, Swithin remarks on the far greater number that are invisible, and concludes that whatever the stars were made for, they are very

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33 Ibid., pp. 48-49.

34 Ibid., p. 436

35 Jude The Obscure, p. 384.

obviously not intended for the pleasure of man. The youthful astronomer adds, rather too bitterly for one who has not yet known adversity, "It's the same with everything. Nothing was made for man."<sup>36</sup>

So it would take little reading in Hardy to cause the realization that, while temporary inconsistencies appear in his concept of Nature, none are abiding enough to make a rift in the larger holding--a feeling that Nature has little to offer in the way of genuine consolation or joy; as far as the novelist can see, there is no more room for confidence in the visible earth than in the invisible. It is true that some readers have seen Hardy's sense of the evolutionary process as a wholly mitigating force, but the idea is a little hard to accept in view of the persistent blows he rains upon whoever or whatever is responsible for the scheme of things.

The abiding conclusion that Hardy holds, that Nature may be a malign and cruel power, brings logically the inference that whatever gods there be, must be of a lower morality than men--a concept which, while it seems to be given no appreciable space, is definitely enough stated as to be a positive element in his metaphysic and is one of the real blots upon it. In The Return of the Native, Clym, always thoughtful, is rendered more so by the loss of both the women he loved:

He did sometimes think he had been ill-used by fortunes, so far as to say that to be born is a palpable dilemma, and

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36 Two on a Tower, p. 32.

that instead of men aiming to advance in life with glory they should calculate how to retreat out of it without shame. But that he and his had been sarcastically and pitilessly handled in having such irons thrust into their souls he did not maintain long. It is usually so, except with the sternest of men. Human beings, in their generous endeavor to construct a hypothesis that shall not degrade a First Cause, have always hesitated to conceive a dominant power of lower moral quality than their own; and, even while they sit down and seep by the waters of Babylon, invent excuses for the oppression which prompts their tears. 37

The implication is, of course, that the First Cause really is of a lower moral quality; and there seems to be a suggestion that it is a weakness in man that prompts him to "invent" excuses; it is only the stern man who is able to face facts, and acknowledge what all must know is true.

In the same book, we are told after the death of Mrs. Yeobright that Eustacia "instead of blaming herself for the issue...laid the fault upon the shoulders of some indistinct, colossal Prince of the World, who had framed her situation and ruled her lot."<sup>38</sup> The division of blame is not quite fair; Mrs. Yeobright's death, while the outcome of a series of ironic events none deliberately meditated, was yet the result of procrastination, dilatoriness, and obstinate pride; and a good deal of culpable negligence is obvious to all except those prejudiced against fate.

It was probably this same sentiment--the feeling that a lower moral code must guide the gods--that led Hardy to champion Eustacia against the Supreme Power which had placed "a being of such exquisite finish...

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37 The Return of the Native, p. 455.

38 Ibid., p. 353.

in circumstances calculated to make of her charms a curse rather than a blessing."<sup>39</sup>

In Tess is found a "morality good enough for divinities, but scorned by average human nature."<sup>40</sup> And again, "To her and her like, birth itself was an ordeal of degrading personal compulsion, whose gratuitousness nothing in the result seemed to justify."<sup>41</sup>

All through his work the tendency to blame the First Cause for malignity, or blindness, or lack of understanding, shows that Hardy believed, at least implicitly, that man is in many ways a superior being, but placed in a position of disadvantage. "Man," he said at one time in his journal, "has done more with his materials than God has done with His."<sup>42</sup> According to the strict Hardian metaphysic, the Prime Cause has no moral faculty at all; it is indifferent to, because unaware of, the sufferings and happiness of the sentient beings it has indirectly created. There is a poem, "Plaint to Man," wherein God complains that man has reached so high a degree of conscious intelligence as to have generated within him a critical faculty which he turns back on his very creator. In "New Year's Eve," God frankly confesses his inability to explain his logicless labors, and he grows querulous over the ethic tests imposed by man. Hardy's conclusion that man has developed farther than was intended is stated in his journal as early as 1883: "We human beings have reached a degree of intelligence which Nature never contem-

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 305.

<sup>40</sup> Tess of the D'Urbervilles, p. 91.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 456.

<sup>42</sup> The Early Life of Thomas Hardy, p. 295.

plated when framing her laws, and for which she consequently has provided no adequate satisfactions."<sup>43</sup>

In the familiar open letter of Hardy's, dated 1902, wherein he challenges Maeterlinck's apology for Nature based upon the suggestion that perhaps Nature practices, in her seeming injustice, a scheme of morality unknown to man, it can be seen that it is the old problem of pain that is again disturbing the Wessex writer. Nature cannot be both just and omnipotent; either she is blind and not a judge of her actions, or she is an automaton and unable to control them. The bare possibility of Nature's practicing a morality unknown to man would be a worthy holding if one were able to admit it; the belief that indifference to morality is beneath her greatness would be greatly comforting.<sup>44</sup>

It was during the middle years of his life that Hardy turned to philosophy for possible solace. However, it was probably with a biased mind that he studied the explanations to cosmic problems that others were offering, for he has noted in 1886, "these venerable philosophers seem to start wrong; they cannot get away from a pre-possession that the world must somehow have been made to be a comfortable place for man."<sup>45</sup> It does not seem to have occurred to Hardy that his own bent of mind would provide a bias sufficiently effective as to render disinterested philosophical survey an impossibility.

Hardy read Darwin with enthusiasm, and seemed quite impressed with

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 213

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Hardy, "Maeterlinck's Apology for Nature," Life and Art (New York: Greenberg Publisher, 1925), pp. 131-132.

<sup>45</sup> The Early Years of Thomas Hardy, p. 234.

the implications involved. The shifting of "the center of altruism from humanity to the whole conscious world collectively"<sup>46</sup> had rather a sentimental effect on the writer who, in making no allowance for the addition of conscious intelligence as a psychologically intensifying factor in the degree of pain, saw the sufferings of both man and animal as of precisely the same depth. An ethical significance was marked by the novelist who wrote, in 1910 to the Humanitarian League, stating his deep regret that so few people perceived that the theory of evolution involved a readjustment of altruistic morals by enlarging the application of the Golden Rule to the whole animal kingdom.<sup>47</sup> The implication of the theory which would affect his philosophy was the idea of a progressive or evolutionary principle; the effect of that principle on Hardy's writing has been subjected to various interpretations: some saw it striking the death blow to the idea of teleology and harmony in nature, since blind or luckless chance was the sole guide of the development; and to them "Thomas Hardy sounds the death-knell of the old nature-poetry."<sup>48</sup> But others saw it as the underlying hope of the whole Hardian metaphysic--the gradual but sure development of consciousness in the unconscious Will. The progressive principle as derived from Darwin is best seen in the philosophical poetry where the metaphysic is working in the open.

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46 Ibid., p. 138.

47 Ibid., pp. 141-142.

48 Beach, The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry, p. 521.



Hardy had been doing some reading in Schopenhauer, and though his affiliation with the German philosopher is now recognized as of lesser magnitude than was earlier thought, yet there is no reason for ignoring obvious philosophical reading admitted by Hardy himself.<sup>49</sup> The influence could not have been great, for Hardy states in speaking of The Dynasts, "My pages show harmony of view with Darwin, Huxley, Spencer, Comte, Hume, Mill, and others, all of whom I used to read more than Schopenhauer."<sup>50</sup> Yet the Schopenhauerian phraseology is there, and is naturally a substantial reason for Hardy's being considered a disciple of the pessimistic thinker. The most familiar example is Jude's report to Sue of the doctor's explanation of the unnatural deed of little Father Time; it is the "beginning of the coming universal wish not to live."<sup>51</sup>

Hardy himself must not have especially favored his being linked with Schopenhauer, for in Weber is stated the following:

To one writer who had criticized Hardy for making Pitt give utterance to Schopenhauerian ideas of the Immanent Will, Hardy pointed out that he had used Pitt's actual words, his last published ones, uttered before Schopenhauer was ever heard of.<sup>52</sup>

The doctrine of the Immanent Will does, undoubtedly, owe a debt to both Schopenhauer and von Hartman, the latter of whom Hardy was also familiar with.<sup>53</sup> But John Stuart Mill, in the second of the essays on

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<sup>49</sup> Helen Garwood, An Illustration of the Philosophy of Schopenhauer--Thomas Hardy (Philadelphia: John C. Winston Company, 1911), pp. 10-11.

<sup>50</sup> Florence E. Hardy, The Later Years of Thomas Hardy

<sup>51</sup> Jude the Obscure, p. 406.

<sup>52</sup> Carl J. Weber, Hardy of Wessex (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), pp. 203-204.

Religion, combats the argument of those who use Will as synonymous with Personality, and rejects Will as Prime Cause. He states that the assertion is that physical nature must have been produced by a will because nothing but will is known to us as having the power of originating the production of phenomena; and that nothing can consciously produce Mind out Mind, is self-evident, being involved in the meaning of the words; but that there cannot be unconscious production must not be assumed.<sup>54</sup> This theory of the production of conscious mind by an unconscious process is, as has been stated, the very heart of The Dynasts. Hardy had early been fascinated by the words of John Stuart Mill, who was to him a light in the ranks of obscurantism.

It is von Hartman who holds that the one reality is "The Unconscious", which gradually comes to awareness by "will" and "idea," and projects the image-individuals which we call the various world objects. The idea of the unconscious developing into consciousness must have appealed to Hardy and combined with the creative principle implied in Darwin's evolutionary theory to produce the element of "evolutionary meliorism." Hardy, though acknowledging familiarity with von Hartman, claims the idea of the developing consciousness of the Will as an original idea. "That the Unconscious Will of the Universe is growing aware of Itself, I believe I may claim as my own idea solely--at which I arrived by reflecting that what has already taken place in a fraction of the whole (i.e., so much of the world as has become conscious) is likely to take place in the mass..."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> John Stuart Mill, The Utility of Religion and Theism (London: Longman, Green and Company, 1923), p. 152.

<sup>55</sup> The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, p. 168.

But his confessed acquaintance with Von Hartman would lead one to think that he found, in that philosopher, substantiation at least.

Those for whom Hardy alleged a partiality--Spencer, Huxley, Darwin, Hume, Hartman, Comte--are all immanentists, and it is only natural that the novelist should be thoroughly taken up with an idea which was the prevailing atmosphere of the day. His dependence upon Spencer is witnessed by his confused reaction to a letter written him in respect to the agnostic's doctrine of the Unknowable, stating that it "is doubtful if there is a single philosopher alive today who would subscribe to it." Hardy was an old man at the time and could not change a concept which had long been basic with him; he recorded, "I am utterly bewildered to understand how the doctrine that, beyond the knowable, there must always be an unknown can be replaced."<sup>56</sup>

Hardy found the philosophy of Bergson highly attractive, although he felt himself too much a monist to advance agreement with his concept, the elan vital, which is eternally engaged in developing reality. "You will see," wrote Hardy to Dr. Saleeby in 1915, "how much I want to become a Bergsonian (indeed I have for many years). But I fear that his philosophy is, in the bulk, only our old friend Dualism in a new suit of clothes."<sup>57</sup> Hardy explicitly declares himself a monist (although he implicitly breaks with monism very often), when remarking on Bergson's suggestion that a line of demarcation be traced between the inert and the living: "Well,

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<sup>56</sup> Florence E. Hardy, loc cit.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 271.

let us to our great pleasure, if we can see why we should introduce an inconstant rupture of order into uniform and consistent laws of the same."<sup>58</sup> The Dynasts, according to the creator's wish, was to be conceived in rigid monism; but this "It", this Will, implies the same dualism so clearly symbolized in the poem, "Doom and She."

It is obvious in reading Hardy that, while there is large scope for consideration of his general metaphysic, yet to attempt a fine analysis of his holdings--so often tentative--can lead only to confusion. Philosophic phraseology interested him and he employed it frequently, just as he did scientific nomenclature, with the youthful pedantry so characteristic of his style. Helen Garwood feels that he must have done a great deal of philosophic reading, "partly because he mentions the names of so many philosophers in his books, partly because it seems natural ... for a man who is so oppressed and depressed by the lack of system in the world."<sup>59</sup>

Hardy may have read a good deal, but it is rather doubtful if he did any appreciable weighing of the material. Frank Chapman remarks discerningly that The Dynasts, the most direct expression of Hardy's beliefs, does more than anything to show that his was not a truly philosophic mind, and that he was incapable of any real thought.<sup>60</sup> Anyone reading the drama with a view to establishing the philosophy that

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58 Florence E. Hardy, loc.cit.

59 Garwood, op.cit., p. 10.

60 Chapman, op.cit., p. 33.

prompted it, would readily agree with Chapman, as the usual inconsistencies are pulled into relief by the unveiled sight of the Immanent Will.

It was about the close of the 1870's that there came over Hardy that deep and sombre nostalgia that was never to lighten. The first wave of enthusiasm over the evolutionary theory had worked itself out, and was giving way to a profound disillusion. For men like Hardy, science had utterly destroyed the basis of religion and had not left the consolation of a mechanical perpetual progress. There were those who were despairing of the human race: Edward Fitzgerald beautifully sang his sorrow in The Rubaiyat; Thomson produced his dark City of Dreadful Night in the pain of the same disillusion; Swinburne did what he could to console, and suggested, in faultless music, a few temporary expediences; and Thomas Hardy began then writing of the "defects of natural laws." Hardy had never been a gladsome creature; The Return of the Native shows not only a deepening of the tragedy, but bears a philosophical tinge of universality not seen in earlier work. It bears evidence of the strange idea that took hold of the novelist's mind--the conviction that the modern mind is showing evidence of decay, even developing to such a point as will change the very standards by which beauty and truth are established. In the opening chapter is stated a rather unusual consideration:

The new Vale of Tempe may be a gaunt waste in Thule: human souls may find themselves in closer and closer harmony with external things wearing a somberness distasteful to our race when it was young. The time seems near, if it has not actually arrived, when the chastened sublimity of a

moor, a sea, or a mountain will be all of nature that is absolutely in keeping with the moods of the more thinking among mankind.<sup>61</sup>

Yeobright is described as already showing "that thought is a disease of flesh, and indirectly bore evidence that ideal physical beauty is incompatible with emotional development and a full recognition of the coil of things."<sup>62</sup>

This strange idea of Hardy's would reach its full significance in the child, Father Time, of whom the doctor said, "There are such boys springing up amongst us...the outcome of new views of life. They seem to see all its terrors before they are old enough to have staying power to resist them."<sup>63</sup>

Hardy had eaten so freely of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge as to ask unhappily in 1880, in the person of young Swithin, "So am I not right in saying that those minds who exert their imaginative powers to bury themselves in the depths of that universe merely strain their faculties to gain a new horror?"<sup>64</sup> By 1885, Hardy had advanced to such a point that he could speak, in the conclusion of The Mayor of Casterbridge, of happiness being but an occasional episode in the general drama of pain.

The Woodlanders shows the earliest traces of Hardy's philosophical reading. When Fitzpiers is first attracted to Grace, he relates, "I thought, what a lovely creature! The design is for once carried out.

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61 The Return of the Native, p. 5.

62 Ibid., p. 162.

63 Jude the Obscure, p. 406.

64 Two on a Tower, p. 34.

Nature has at last recovered her lost union with the Idea!"<sup>65</sup> The young doctor, Fitzpiers, is described as being "not a practical man, except by fits, and much preferred the ideal world to the real, and the discovery of principles to their application."<sup>66</sup> It is through him that Hardy relays his philosophic reading; the doctor is ever intruding his disconnected metaphysical speculations into prosaic thought.

The idea that life is what it is because the intention behind it has never been fulfilled, was an outgrowth of Hardy's study. The evidence, as far as the writer was concerned, pointed to this conclusion irresistibly; whatever Power had created the universe did not carry through to their finish the processes it had initiated. At one time he said he found an added interest in "the perception of the FAILURE of THINGS to be what they are meant to be."<sup>67</sup> In his more bitter moments this "unfilled intention," which carried a suggestion that time may bring fulfillment, became a "thwarted purposing" and Hardy saw then no possibility of happiness at any time. On the other hand, he made a remark that seems contradictory in suggesting that probably the development has already gone farther than the intention postulated:

It may be questioned if Nature, or what we call Nature, so far back as when she crossed the line from invertebrates to vertebrates, did not exceed her mission. This planet does not supply the materials for happiness to higher existences. <sup>68</sup>

A number of the novels--The Woodlanders, The Return of the Native,

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65 The Woodlanders, p. 154.

66 Ibid., p. 135.

67 The Early Life of Thomas Hardy, p. 163.

68 Ibid., pp. 285-286.

Tess, and Jude--are somewhat analogous in that each presents an exotic personality working havoc among simple country people; all show a favorite device that Hardy used in the creation of a tragic situation, the disastrous result of self-detachment from natural surroundings. This tendency to effect tragedy by the intrusion of people or ideas from the outside world substantiates the feeling that the writer was most appreciative of the essential quality of village life, and the struggle that ensues when there is contact with more modern life. Chapman notes that the struggle between Farfrae and Henchard is symbolic of the inevitable passing of the old order. Henchard, he says, possesses more vitality than any other character because of his representative function, and the knowledge Hardy had of what he represented. By this symbolic quality of both Henchard and Farfrae, the main catastrophe seems to be less forced and less dependent on the arbitrary "Immanent Will."<sup>69</sup>

The question of matrimonial divergence is introduced in The Woodlanders, but there is no solution offered to the problem. It is very prominent in the short stories of the late 'eighties and early 'nineties, and it reaches its climax in Jude. There is the note of personal bitterness and full absorption with the topic that inevitably leads to the suspicion that it is his own disappointing married life that is prompting the feeling. His metaphysic is based on tragedy, and it is when Hardy is most concerned with his tragedy that he is writing a love story. He is in line with Schopenhauer when he feels, as he so manifestly does in

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<sup>69</sup> Chapman, op.cit., p. 30.



Jude, that man is essentially of a dualistic nature; he is subject to the eternal conflict existing between his own compulsive force--the demands of passion; and his attraction toward the transcendence of idea--the aspirations of the intellect. This conflict comes to full vigour in the problems arising from the mutual attraction of men and women, the focal point of all human conflict. In the wrecking of the individual life by the universal Process--the basis of Hardy art--the part of the universal is played by love far more often than by anything else. So Hardy's greater tragedies--with the exception of The Mayor of Casterbridge--are stories of love, and necessarily for his purpose, unfortunate, thwarted, unwise, love; and then the elemental conflict burns to incandescence and gives Hardy large opportunity for inveighing against the nature of things. In Jude, the primal disparity between intellect and instinct is aggravated by the unusual strength and peremptoriness of both, and the conflict grows too great for Jude to handle.

It is but natural that the remark made to Hardy in 1915 regarding Spencer's decline from glory should greatly shatter his confidence, for he had long since accepted the theory concerning the Unknowable; the assumption of the inscrutability of existence had provided some anchorage for his conception of life, so it is little wonder that he is confused at finding himself, after all these years, drifting as aimlessly as ever on the high seas of doubt and negation.

Hardy has, with his sweeping eye, viewed the long march of humanity

and the growth and decay of peoples and nations; he has noted the changes the passing of the years have effected and has concluded that, on the one hand, the law of mutability that governs Nature is working also in man as he readjusts and adapts himself to change; but he has noted, also, a law of permanence governing the elemental passions and he knows that essentially man has changed not at all. There have been, from time to time, those who have spoken what they felt were new ideas, but "what are called advanced ideas are really," as Clare reflects, "...but the latest fashion in definition, a more accurate expression, by words in 'logy' and 'ism', of sensations that men and women have vaguely grasped for centuries."<sup>70</sup>

What Hardy has seen down through the dim ages of the world is the struggle between men and Inscrutable Energy or Will; he has observed the facts presented to him and has found them often unhappy; yet in his presentation of them he gives a great proof of his sympathy and pity. Hardy says his novels are "simply an endeavor to give shape and coherence to a series of seemings, or personal impressions, the question of their consistency or discordance, of their permanence or transitoriness, being regarded as not of the first moment."<sup>71</sup> He does not tell what he considers is of the first moment in his art; he does not define, or dogmatize concerning a better world, although his dissatisfaction with what he conceives to be its present condition is obvious always. He simply takes

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<sup>70</sup> Tess of the D'Urbervilles, p. 160.

<sup>71</sup> Preface to Mellstock Edition, 1921, cited by Morton Dauwen Zabel, op.cit., p. 137.

as they are forced on him--their brighter threads dulled always by his temperamentally dark glasses; but despite the slight use of high lights to relieve the too sombre monochrome of his art, he does succeed in handling his material very well--and it is not easy material to handle. He is wonderfully understanding of man and his primal instincts, and he has a large and lasting sympathy for him. If anything is of first moment in his art, it were well if it be the charity with which he reveals the dignity of human life brought into conflict with cosmic forces; Hardy has taught that dignity is a matter of the soul, not of the social position. The words of Marty could be said of many of his sons of the earth, "You were a good man and did good things." <sup>72</sup>

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72 The Woodlanders, p. 144.

## CHAPTER V

### POETRY

A survey of the metaphysical concepts in the work of Hardy is more easily handled in the poetry than in the novels, for here the underlying philosophy is drawn into clearer view. However, even with the more explicit enunciation, a complete solution to his metaphysic is hardly arrived at, because he is still protesting in his preface that he makes no pretense of solving the problem, and because his views are more shifting than ever.

To attempt to trace any progress of thought in the work is equally impractical, since the poems were not published in the order of writing, and are, in large number, undated. Anyway, what development there was, seems to have been of no radical order; naturally, views are modified, and new tendencies appear, but the basic metaphysic of "mood" seems to remain rather constant throughout. Frank Chapman compares "Neutral Tones," written in 1867, with "After a Journey," dated 1911, and finds the two poems might be "interchangeable"; he, likewise, finds no essential difference between the underlying views of the first great novel and the last.<sup>1</sup>

It is important to note that, although the philosophy is more definitely stated in the poetry, yet, on the whole, pessimism permeates the bulk of the poetry less thoroughly than it does the prose; as far as the actual number goes, Hardy is justified in his protest against

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1 Chapman, op.cit., p. 25.

what he felt was an exaggeration; but the intensity and irrefutability of those philosophic and pessimistic poems which are included, do much to weaken his protest. He complains bitterly in the preface to Winter Words, that the critics had pronounced the previous volume "wholly gloomy and pessimistic."<sup>2</sup> He did have some grounds for his complaint, because that book in question, Human Shows, is remarkably free from the pessimism that is so evident in the volumes from Wessex Poems to Satires of Circumstances. "Perhaps it is only natural that the reflections should show traces of a less positive age,"<sup>3</sup> is the comment made by McDowell concerning the later work of Hardy generally; but, while the next three volumes are lighter in tone, the last, Winter Words, is again touched with a chill that is at least verging on pessimism. In regard to the earlier poems, Brennecke notes that all the darker impulses of the Hardy heart are there.

The poet has considered the universe and has found it to be lawless; he has thought of the Higher Power and has discovered that it is malignant, or indifferent, or unconscious; he has experienced human emotions and has concluded that good impulses are transitory and that passion is a snare.<sup>4</sup>

Even apart from the philosophic or mechanistic poetry, there is substantiation for the charge of pessimistic tendencies. Just as in the journal the occasional jottings show a mind interested in bizarre, unnatural, ironic events, so here do the narrative poems indicate that

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Hardy, Winter Words (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928), p.v.

<sup>3</sup> McDowell, op.cit., p. 29.

<sup>4</sup> Brennecke, op.cit., p. 143.

Hardy was attracted by cruel and tragic happenings. It would be hard to parallel such situations as are presented in "The Vamparine Fair," "The Brother," "A Sunday Morning Tragedy," "Her Second Husband Hears Her Story," and in any one of the fifteen title-poems in Satires of Circumstances. In all these poems, the human heart, as far as Hardy can see, seems hopelessly rooted in faithlessness--a conception which manifests itself in his narrative poems in a mode so extreme as sometimes to approach melodrama.

Besides his choice of unattractive events as subject matter for the poetic tales, he reveals a definite perversion of mind in his lyric or reflective poems. "A Meeting with Despair" sees the total annihilation of hope when the poet, standing on the "black lean land" watches the last gleam of glory inexorably swallowed up by all-inclusive night. "To Life" casts human existence into an ironic and ugly mould:

O Life with thy sad seared face,  
I weary of seeing thee,  
And thy draggled cloak, and thy hobbling pace,  
And thy too-forced pleasantry! 5

The Schopenhauerian "I Said to Love" fails simply by overstatement; the extinction of love must be realized even though it mean the extinction of man himself. "Shut Out That Moon" is an attenuated protest against the sentiments that stirred...

When living seemed a laugh, and love  
All it was said to be.

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5 Collected Poems, p. 107.

The complaint closes with a cry so attractively melancholy as to hearken back to "The Rubaiyat":

Too fragrant was Life's early bloom  
Too tart the fruit it brought!<sup>6</sup>

There is little need to multiply instances; anyone familiar with Hardy poetry is ready for the worst at the mere mention of such titles as "The Dawn After the Dance," "Her Confession," "The Coquette and After," "The Inconsistent." "The Pink Frock" is hovering on the maudlin rather than the tragic; and "Revulsion," written in 1866, is but another wish for extinction, and this time by a youth, who although possessing too little of life to speak with justification, is already preferring that his name pass into oblivion; "For winning love we win the risk of losing" comes very near to a cowardly negation of the chances life offers. Speaking of this poem, Brennecke remarks that the poet hints at a conscious renunciation of life as being unworthy of the pain and distress encountered in living it; and "this is the very essence of his early pessimism."<sup>7</sup>

While the narrative and lyric poetry reveal much of the bent of Hardy's mind, it is naturally in the philosophic or semi-philosophic poems that his attempts to arrive at some satisfying solution of the problem are most easily discerned. The indictment of the universe, originating as always in his conception of life as generally and usually unsatisfactory, is definitely expressed in a number of poems. Hardy once

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6 *Ibid.*, p. 201.

7 Brennecke, *op.cit.*, p. 127.

states that he preferred poetry because he could talk freely about the Prime Force in that particular medium without causing the uproar that argumentative prose occasions. "If Galileo had said in verse that the world moved, the Inquisition might have let him alone."<sup>8</sup>

McDowall reminds us that the fundamental ground of these "philosophic" poems is not a speculative idea, but a feeling. "It is," he says, "the tragic sense of necessity; of what must be."<sup>9</sup> Hardy is looking for some place to lay the blame for the whole maladjusted scheme by which man must live; the blame is thrown, with the indecision characteristic of the amateur philosopher, upon Nature, upon God, and finally, in a last extremity, upon an impersonal, unconscious but aggravating "It." The first stanza of "To Life," already quoted,<sup>10</sup> presents rather succinctly the Hardian mood at its starkest. The poem, "A Meeting with Despair," is a further negation of promise. To the poet, alone on a moor and calmly soliloquizing, "There's solace everywhere!" there appears, as if to defend its position, a hideous, joyless Thing, croaking its rebuttal and killing the slight semblance of hope that was springing to life. The message of the poem seems to be that night is all-engulfing, and will eventually absorb the last ray-lit cloud, however long it linger.

The pessimistic outlook, very strong in "I Said to Love," where extinction of life is contemplated as an acceptable condition for the ex-

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8 The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, p. 58.

9 McDowall, op.cit., p. 159.

10 Page 116



inction of love--"Mankind shall cease. So let it be, I said to love"--  
is intensified in "Before Life and After," when negation actually appears  
as something far better than this "disease of feeling"...

ere nescience shall be reaffirmed  
How long, how long? 11

The culmination of hopelessness seems to be struck in the final  
stanza of the first part of "In Tenebris"...

Black is night's cope;  
But death will not appal  
One who, past doubtings all,  
Waits in unhope. 12

Warnings against definitively interpreting the Hardian metaphysic  
may be quite in line, ("...its changing forms are enough in themselves  
to warn us not to press it too hard," says McDowall),<sup>13</sup> but it is diffi-  
cult to see how one could avoid labeling the mind that produced this  
verse as anything but pessimistic. Even if he were often writing "with  
his tongue in his cheek,"<sup>14</sup> half intending to disturb the complacent,  
or sometimes, perhaps, in zealous admiration of Swinburne, yet he reverts  
so often and so wholeheartedly to his theme of disillusion that one can-  
not but feel that he is always happy to find an occasion to insert it.  
When a man will declare himself as one who is so far beyond all doubtings  
that he merely awaits a death that has lost its power to appal, he would

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11 Collected Poems, p. 260.

12 Ibid., p. 153.

13 McDowall, op.cit., p. 159.

14 Rutland, Thomas Hardy: A Study of His Writings, p. 89.

be expecting a lot if he should desire that his public accept him as anything other than one with pessimistic leanings.

It is true that Hardy has written poetry that is wonderfully engaging; apart from that bearing a definitely melancholy strain, there is much that is beautifully expressed on love, on animal life, on nature. Macy says, "Hardy is a great romantic with a taste for pretty girls, moonlight, heroes and dragoons...He takes Tess to the Druidical stones on Salisbury Plain because he dearly likes that kind of moonlit anti-  
quity."<sup>15</sup> His power of piercing to the universal, which power identifies him to a degree with the true poet, is hard at work in all his poetry. His nature poetry breathes the air of the English countryside; his highly personalized poetry is electric with feeling; he reveals his power at such times as when he is writing,

I idly cut a parsley stalk  
And blew thereon towards the moon;  
I had not thought what ghost would  
walk  
With shivering footsteps to my tune.<sup>16</sup>

The love poems, written immediately after the death of his first wife, are among the tenderest and finest in the language; Hardy's love poetry can always soften the charge of pessimism. Murry feels that Hardy, as seen in the love poems "of 1912-13 is not a man giving way  
to memory in poetry; he is a great poet uttering the cry of the universe."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> John Macy, "Thomas Hardy," The Critical Game (New York: Boni and Liveright Company, 1922), p. 201.

<sup>16</sup> Collected Poems, p. 415.

<sup>17</sup> J. Middleton Murry, "The Poetry of Thomas Hardy," Aspects of Literature (New York: Alfred Knopf Company, 1920), p. 128.

And Duffin says of him, "Only does his appreciative sense of that part of life which is love, sometimes make him admit that life may be worthy of man's living after all."<sup>18</sup>

Hardy is noted for the powerful economy manifested in such poems as "A Broken Appointment," or "Boys Then and Now," the last telling of the little boy who used to think there was just one cuckoo

Who came each year  
With the trees' new trim  
On purpose to please  
England and him:

And the small boy, now grown a man, in telling his own son of his childhood's belief, echoes the ironic Hardy voice...

And his son--old already  
In life and its ways--  
Said yawning: "How foolish  
Boys were in those days!"<sup>19</sup>

No one could miss the simple beauty of "Weathers," "At Day-Close in November," and "Before and After Summer," the last beginning with the familiar

Looking forward to the spring  
One puts up with anything.

Hardy's own choice, "When I Set Out for Lyonesse" has a charm and a lilt not often reached even in high poetry, and sings its own way into one's consciousness.

Hardy's sense of humor, which when coupled with his melancholy outlook so often leads him on to the ironic, is readily seen in "Afternoon

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18 Duffin *op.cit.*, p. 340.

19 Winter Words, p. 107.

Service at Mellstock", "The Homecoming," "The Three Tall Men," and "An August Midnight"; "An August Midnight" sees the meetings of the long-legs, the moth, the dumbledore, the "Sleepy fly that rubs its hands," and Thomas Hardy, whose cosmic sense is registering again as he sees the particular moment linked fast to eternity. In consideration of this scene, Powys notes that one of the favorite occupations of Hardy's genius is his "power of imparting to the dim consciousness of lives other than human his own sombre reactions."<sup>20</sup> And Murry says, "...he has the quality of life that is vocal, gathered into a moment of time with a vista of years."<sup>21</sup> The same cosmic sentiment is strong in "The Comet at Yalbury of Yell'ham" and in "Clasped Skeletons."

Hardy is right in stating that the poems which concentrate on his world outlook are in the minority; all are willing to admit the obvious fact and to give all due credit to one who at times revealed the possibilities of a great and thoroughly likeable poet; but at the same time it must be admitted that there is also ample room for a justifiable consideration of the philosophy he revealed from time to time in certain of his poems. Chapman, although feeling in general that the inferior poems are those intended to illustrate Hardy's so-called philosophy, thinks, nevertheless, that they do reveal the habitual bent of the artist's mind.<sup>22</sup>

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20 John Cowper Powys, "Thomas Hardy," Visions and Revisions (New York: G. Arnold Shaw Company, 1915), p. 216.

21 Murry, loc.cit.

22 Chapman, op.cit., pp. 23 and 33.

Harold Child makes the following observation:

Many of these lyric poems must inevitably pain those whose faith in the human spirit, whether within or without the pale of revealed religion, flames high; but for those who are seeking closer knowledge of the mind which gave us the novels and The Dynasts, they remain documents of profound interest.<sup>23</sup>

Elsewhere he states that the novels cannot be fully appreciated without a knowledge of the poems; but there is, he feels, a sense in which the novels only lead up to the poems. For the poems offer an intenser and by some degrees a more personal expression of the ideas and experiences upon which the novels are built.<sup>24</sup>

In blighting contrast to the lightsomeness of the love poems and the nature poems is a group that tend to reveal the rather complete pessimist; "The Dead Man Walking" is the gradual "inching" to death and not the sudden killing moment that the poet, conceiving himself as dead, experienced; a fiery Troubadour-youth, he rambled with Life for lyre, until the perception of the goal of men chilled him, and soon after, death came; now he is only walking, talking, smiling, not living at all but simply wearing the time away.

After life has been thus starkly drawn, Hardy begins to look whereon to lay the blame. Nature is not directly arraigned, but she is at least studied and questioned. Poems of the Past and the Present contains a number of considerations all of which are of high interest in

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<sup>23</sup> Harold Child, Thomas Hardy (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1916), pp. 90-91.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

surveying the world views of the poet. In "The Mother Mourns," Nature herself is complaining in dirge-like refrain that Mankind in these late days has grieved her by holding her perfection in doubt and disdain. She protests that she had never proposed that there should develop a Creature excelling all else of her kingdom in "brightness of brain" to such an extent that he is now reading her defects and her flaws, and even reckoning her teaching ignoble and immoral. This unintended Creature has gone so far as to declare that, given the matter and means the gods allot her, his brain could certainly evolve a creation more sanely conceived and executed. Nature grows resentful to the point of declaring, in rather lovely verse, that she will return to the primal Reasonless, Vision-less, uncritical forms of life. Hardy's jotting in his journal, "Man has done more with his materials than God has done with his," comes naturally to mind.<sup>25</sup>

Symons sees this poem as a "strange, dreary, ironical song of science" in which Nature laments that her best achievement, man, has become discontented with her in his ungrateful discontent with himself.<sup>26</sup>

In "The Lacking Sense," questions are put to Time in regard to the grievous wounds dealt promiscuously by the Mother. The answer is given sympathetically, and completely exonerates her of any blame in stating that, in her mothering, it is due to her sightless eyes that she sets wounds unwittingly on those she loves. An appeal is made to man to lay

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<sup>25</sup> The Early Years of Thomas Hardy, p. 95.

<sup>26</sup> Arthur Symons, "A Note on the Genius of Thomas Hardy," Figures of Several Centuries (London: Constable and Company, 1916), p. 209.

blame sparingly, for there is no note of malediction in the hand that will not press for long; and to be of any assistance possible for creaturely dependence." Brennecke calls attention to the fact that the notion of Time, thus presented as an assistant and abettor of circumstances, is an idea that Hardy strongly emphasized in his early career, but did not stress in the maturer poems and novels--with the possible exception of The Woodlanders, and the title Times Laughing-stocks.<sup>27</sup>

"Doom and She" is a rather horrible humanizing of Nature. She is conceived as a creator, blind but pitying, and fearful that she hears a groan of "multitudinous moan" from the clay-made creatures produced only by touch. Doom, her mate, is omniscient, but strangely unfeeling, indifferent to, because hardly recognizing, the distinction between right and wrong. He questions Nature as to the meaning of "Feeling," but refuses an answer to her anxious queries concerning the happiness of their off-spring about whom she greatly worried:

Some say they have heard her sighs  
On Alpine height or Polar peak  
When the night tempests rise.<sup>28</sup>

There is, in this somewhat depressing suggestion, clearly implied the usual indictment of life--the dissatisfaction, the conviction that it must be a blind or an indifferent or an unmoral Force that is at the helm; that the cries of man must go unheeded, that his desires are

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27 Brennecke, op.cit., p. 125.

28 Collected Poems, p. 109.

entirely without creative value. It is a conception that must have failed completely to satisfy its creator, casting about as he was for solace and comfort.

In the poem, "God-Forgotten," the poet, conscious only of the desolate state of man, imagines himself in the presence of the God of orthodoxy, and acting as spokesman for his people. God at first cannot even remember creating the Earth, but after thinking a while does dimly recall having built some such tiny sphere mid millions of like shapes; but concludes that surely by this time it must have passed into extinction. When told that it is not only existing, but suffering, and greatly desirous that God should heed its cry, the Deity is moved to exclaim how strange it is that Earth's race should presume to think that one whose word frames, daily, shining spheres of flawless stuff, should heed their tainted ball. There is a suggestion of kindness in this God who has not neglected so much as forgotten the Earth he made. A promise of better days is given:

Thou should's't have learnt that Not to Mend  
 For Me could mean but Not to Know;  
 Hence, Messengers! and straightway put an end  
 To what men undergo. <sup>29</sup>

But the chilling touch is again dealt when Hardy adds, in regard to man's accepting the promise as trustworthy, "Oh, childish thought!"

The sufferer in "The Bedridden Peasant" wonders, rather than protests that his "Mother" should be so long unmindful of him, for even



nurses eye their charges occasionally to see if they mourn. But his reasoning is kindly done; some disaster must have cleft the scheme and torn apart the Creator and his creature, so that no cry can cross, for so mild a God would not if He knew, permit the suffering of the lame, starved, or maimed, or blind, but would heal them all with quickest care. And so the pain-racked peasant, sublimely trusting will praise God for all the mercy He would show if He but knew the need.

The poem "By Earth's Corpse," creates a God of great pity and remorse, but still of unconsciousness. The Earth has finally died, and God's grief appears incomprehensible, because now that humankind is gone, the condition has reverted to that of pre-creation and there is no further need of regret. But God cannot forget the bitter sufferings that were caused by His unconscious hand, and which provide a bitter memory that never can be effaced, and He must forever mourn, "That I made Earth, and life, and man, It still repenteth me!"<sup>30</sup>

McDowall's observation that when Hardy found it necessary to invent a god he could invest him with mercy and with pity,<sup>31</sup> seems particularly applicable to this group of poems; it is a manifestation of the nostalgia for an impossible faith deserving of love and admiration that is evidenced in "The Christmas Oxen," "The Darkling Thrush," and "The Imprecipient." Although G.K.Chesterton did charge Hardy with having created a God for

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<sup>30</sup> Collected Poems, p. 115.

<sup>31</sup> McDowall, op.cit., p. 28.

the mere purpose of proving how unnecessary and undesirable He is,<sup>32</sup> yet one is inclined to think that there was a deeper reason prompting Hardy's "invention." It is true that he did go to excessive lengths in indicting his "God", yet the reason seems to be the personal dissatisfaction and loneliness for old associations that only faith can give, rather than an exclusive desire to deny or condemn; although such poems as "God's Education" would lend substance to Chesterton's charge, at least, if considered in isolation.

In "God's Education," the deity is asked if he is ever stealing the light from the eye, the flush from youth, and sprightliness from the soul, in order that he may hoard them for some glad later day, but the answer is that indeed God has no use for these things; he merely bids Time throw them carelessly away. When informed that such is what poor mortals would call cruelty, God is thrown into a reverie, musing for the first time that, perhaps, though he men's master be, "Theirs is the teaching mind."

In "A Dream Question," the "Lord" professes himself utterly indifferent to the censure of man, and bids his manikins sneer, rail, blaspheme the livelong day if they desire, because they can neither add to nor subtract one little bit from his joy or grief. However, in "New Year's Eve," we find God, not only admitting his complete inability to explain his logicless labours, but tired of man's questioning, and im-

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32 G.K.Chesterton, The Victorian Age in Literature (London: Thornton Butterworth, Ltd., 1931), p. 44.

patient over the ethic tests he is presuming to impose on his creator. Having expressed his irritability, he begins the New Year "in his unwitting way," weaving away only by rote.

The poems here surveyed have all their share of bitterness and satire, despite the occasional condescension that presents God with a suggestion of virtue. The problem of suffering has biased greater minds than Hardy's, but has probably urged none to more dissatisfied, more querulous utterance. The satire here is intended, doubtless, for those who still believe in the God of orthodoxy, Who weaves a providential web, its every detail designed for the good and ultimate comfort of man; whether or not the satiric fling is aimed at God himself, if he should happen to exist, is hard to tell; but there is a great deal of personal bitterness expended for some reason. Duffin suggests that in some of the poems the satire seems two-edged: the foremost idea is intended for those whose conception of the government of the universe is represented by the word "God," but the other is "left keen for that God himself."<sup>33</sup>

Alfred Noyes said Hardy's philosophy presented the power behind the Universe as an "imbecile jestor."<sup>34</sup> Hardy responded that such an interpretation was an absurdity; that such words as "Time's Laughingstocks" are of a piece with thousands of like expressions in poetry; that "New Year's Eve," "His Education," and "A Young Man's Epigram," are but fanci-

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<sup>33</sup> Duffin, *op.cit.*, p. 341.

<sup>34</sup> The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, p. 215.

ful impressions of the moment; the phrases like "some Vast Imbecility" are merely fanciful alternatives and should be considered as such instead of being used "as if these definitions were my creed." He ends with the statement that it is best that the Scheme of Things is incomprehensible; for "Knowledge might be terrible."<sup>35</sup>

The conception of God begins to assume a more impersonal nature; in "A Plaint to Man," some one speaking in the role of the First Cause, is wondering why man ever felt the unhappy need of creating an anthropomorphic form of deity. Assurance is given that no real lifting of the burden results when man turns his loaded heart above the gloomy aisles of this wailful world, and that the better part would be to forget this being that the deicide eyes of seers are already dissolving; a closely bonded brotherhood is suggested as more productive of loving kindness than this foolish conception of a personal God.

There follows a group of poems wherein the Cause of Things becomes a vaster, more incomprehensible being than either "Nature" or "God" would imply. The idea of the Cause as an impersonal, unfeeling being seemed to appeal to Hardy, on the whole, far more readily than did the conception of a God regretful, or resentful, or questioning, and, although he did play around with these various anthropomorphic characteristics in some of his poetry, the very variety of his theories shows his lack of conviction.

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35 Ibid., pp. 216-218.

In "The Subalterns," the faculties of Nature, instead of having power to soothe, are seen as equally victimized with man. A willingness on the part of the elements to spare him, and on the part of sickness and death to refrain from striking, is checked by laws in force on high. The poet derives some slight comfort from the knowledge that he is not alone in his pain--the elements, sickness, and death, are mere passive instruments in the hands of a power which is not named, but which seems to be neither God nor Nature.

Another poem that reveals the poet's inability to decide on the kind of power governing the world is "Nature's Questioning." There is no answer given to these queries except that Nature herself is unable to give the necessary explanation. "This implies," says McDowall, "that she is no longer the ultimate fact that she was."<sup>36</sup> Hardy had been wondering just what the prime force behind phenomena might be; there is little solution offered here; the mere look of cowed pool, field, flock, and lonely tree would indicate a vaster power than Nature, but what it is, Hardy is unable to say. It may be that some Vast Impecility has "framed us in just, and left us now to hazardry." Or perhaps we come of an Automaton, unconscious of our suffering; or we may be, says Hardy in most unusual metaphor, "live remains of Godhead dying downwards, brain and eye now gone"; or we may be only, in some high, incomprehensible Plan, the "Forlorn Hope over which Achievement strides."<sup>37</sup> The poem is, obviously, what some of the others must also be, simply a projection of

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36 McDowall, op.cit., p. 158.

37 Collected Poems, p. 58.

temporary ideas and feelings; the forms suggested are changing enough to indicate imaginative, rather than adopted or speculative forces. As Child reminds us, a mind reveals itself through its imaginings no less than through its deliberate beliefs and denials, and these imaginings must take their place among "the unadjusted impressions."<sup>38</sup>

In "An Inquiry," this "It" is still the forethoughtless, impersonal being that annoyed Hardy so frequently; when questioned as to why death should possess such absolute power over life, It answers simply that the giving of the power was an utterly meaningless act, lacking in intent or purpose. The nature of this Power that is subjected to a questioning is still not clear, but its lack of personal solicitude is again stressed. The strange thing about Hardian metaphysic is that, while he stripped his First Cause of all morality and personality, yet he never succeeded in really acquiring the impersonal attitude toward that Cause which would naturally be expected. In one of his most distilled expressions of bitter resentment, "The Blow," he appears as anything but the disinterested surveyor of a mechanical, rote-restricted, passionless, Cause. The blows of fate are felt as if they were very real blows, dealt by a malignant hand. An implication of a lower morality is again suggested in "ways below the lowest that man assays"; but the poet is hoping only that the blow could not have been that of any "aimful author", but rather of the Inscrutable, the Hid, the Immanent Doer that does not

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<sup>38</sup> Child, op.cit., p. 87.

know what It does, but

Which in some age unguessed of us  
 May lift Its blinding incubus,  
 And see, and own:  
 "It grieves me I did thus and thus!"<sup>39</sup>

The poem is rather in contradistinction to "Hap," a very early poem of Hardy's wherein he more characteristically wishes that the cruelty could be attributed to a hating, vengeful God intent on inflicting pain, instead of what he knows to be the real cause, sublime indifference. Punishment personally and deliberately dealt out can be borne with proud scorn and assumed indifference, but that which results from impersonal, necessitated ways permits not even the luxury of defiance. These purblind Doomsters had as readily strown blisses about our pilgrimage as pain.

"Yell'ham-Wood's Story" makes none of the half-formed conjectures that other earth creatures are offering, but states straightforwardly what Hardy fears is the truth:

It says that Life would signify  
 A thwarted purposing:  
 That we come to live, and are called to die.  
 Yes, that's the thing.<sup>40</sup>  
 "Life offers--to deny!"

The idea of an unfulfilled intention or a thwarted purposing is again seen in one of the later poems, "A Philosophical Fantasy." Although the guarded title might tend to invalidate metaphysical imputations, yet all the old ideas are there. The First Cause outlines the relations between Earth and Itself, and goes far in summarizing its own

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<sup>39</sup> Collected Poems, p. 449.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 280.

characteristics. It can afford to give but partial eye to frail Earth--  
 "life-shotten ere long, extinct, forgotten!" It admits both Its creature's  
 ability to read Its limitations, and Its own lack of forethought. When  
 It gives him an opportunity of voicing his thought, man, after confessing  
 his habit of designating the Cause with the sexless pronoun, "It," im-  
 mediately asks why the intention implied in creation has ever been un-  
 fulfilled to the extent of thwarting the very aim, and thus diminishing  
 the Cause's glory. After assuring Its creature that "It" is a perfectly  
 acceptable name--little it differs, anyway, what a pigmy calls his  
 planner--the Prime Cause goes on to state Its willingness to be consider-  
 ed but "dream projected" or "blind force persisting," for indeed such  
 conceptions may not be too far from truth. However, It fails to see the  
 world as "unfulfilled intention," for, after all, that world is composed  
 of but malleable material, "stuff without moral feature" and subject to  
 no consideration of right or wrong; but It does state Its willingness to  
 be a "learner." Its own unconsciousness prevents Its having intention  
 at all, so the question of not fulfilling it is pointless. However, It  
 reveals that something did happen which

...acted to compel me  
 By that purposeless propension  
 Which is mine, and not intention,  
 Along lines of least resistance,  
 Or, in brief, unsensed persistence,  
 That saddens thy existence  
 To think my so-called scheming 41  
 Not that of my first dreaming.

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41 Winter Words, p. 124.



The Hardian metaphysic is not found completely expressed until The Dynasts is considered. In general, the metaphysic of the poetry is the same as that of the prose, though vaguely shifting projections of thought and feeling are found expressed more frequently in the poetry; but this greater frequency of apparent inconstancy would be expected here, since briefly concentrated poems may bear an entire theory within a few lines, whereas the effect of a novel is necessarily cumulative. The Prime Cause, as observed in the poems, is essentially unconscious and impersonal; it admits itself incapable of attaching any meaning to terms right and wrong, and likewise admits its inability to explain its logicless labours. It is indifferent to the sufferings and happenings of the sentient being it has indirectly created simply because it is unaware of conditions. The appearance of malignity is a naturally developing illusion when misfortune makes the opposing force loom anthropomorphous; the illusion is strengthened because the consequences are--or seem--more often unpleasant than pleasant. This would really be due to man's natural tendency to be conscious of circumstances only when they are unpleasant; though in Hardian literature, the unattractive circumstances actually are those more often handled. If the directing of the activity of man really were motivated by neutrality resulting from indifference, or unconsciousness, the law of averages should produce a truer balance. But there is, in reality (according to Hardy) an absence of malignity as well as of benevolence, this necessarily in view of the unconscious nature of the Cause. In the poetry, this Cause is represented as occasionally annoyed

at unexpected results in its "touch system"; especially is it resentful at the development of consciousness and critical faculties in man.

Then, having darkened all the skies of life, Hardy did begin to look for some ray by which to walk. A survey of The Dynasts will bring in a consideration of the suggestion that the poet made, that perhaps there really is an ultimate Wisdom at the back of things. The suggestion of meliorism is found in poems both before and after the first World War, despite Hardy's alleged despair after that generally disillusioning event. The volume Poems of the Past and the Present, published in 1902, has at the end a decided turn toward more hopeful days. The suggestion is that perhaps there is a chance

That listless effort tends  
To grow percipient with advance of days,  
And with percipience mends. <sup>42</sup>

The same poem sees occasionally a wrong dying as of self-slaughter; "whereat I would raise my voice in song." That is quite an admission for Hardy.

In the strange poem "God's Funeral," dated the year after the publication of The Dynasts, the loss of faith suffered by his surrounding fellow-men is realized as a great tragedy, but nothing can be done by the poet to relieve the pain, for he, too, is mourning for that which he long had prized. But at length, to his gazing eye there appears "a pale yet positive gleam low down behind." When he questions the crowd, "See you

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<sup>42</sup> Collected Poems, p. 172.



The stanza does bear likeness to a song of faith; but if taken in chorus with the bulk of the entire Hardian literature, it would be drowned in the swell of contrasting sound.

In Winter Words the poem "A Philosophical Fantasy", dated "1920 and 1926," goes a long way to deny the "new promise," yet, even here, the tentative position is again indicated; the Cause, "It," speaks of

that purposeless propension  
Which is mine, and not intention,  
Along lines of least resistance,  
Or, in brief, unsensed persistence.

Yet, in the same work, the light flickers again for a moment,

Which state, though far from ending,  
May nevertheless be mending. <sup>46</sup>

Hardy seems to remain in the same mind as he was seen in "God's Funeral"; he senses the bitterness of loss, is cheered somewhat when he sees--or imagines he sees--the "pale, yet positive gleam low down behind;" but when finding that none else can glimpse it, he hesitates momentarily between the gleam and the gloom, then turns his back on the flickering light and mechanically follows the crowd drifting into the darkness. Hardy has for a long time been torn between the gloom and the gleam, but has so often decided on the former, that he is by now naturally, if wistfully, walking the valley of shadow.

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<sup>46</sup> Winter Words, p. 119.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE DYNASTS

The Dynasts was once acclaimed the greatest of Hardy's works, but it has, in later days, been suffering a diminution of glory. It was never considered a truly philosophic poem--at least in the Lucretian way; Hardy was not intent upon interpreting a system through poetry, but was concerned rather with employing ideas and sentiments that would enforce his tragic sense of destiny. His suspicion that all was not well with the world is implied throughout the bulk of the prose; the significance of the prose--powerfully effective, but generally suggestive--has in The Dynasts found audible utterance; the piece-meal philosophic bits found recurring through the poems are now worked into a single large mosaic. "A long, ineluctable misgiving, a deep and real fear, have been gathered into one tremendous image."<sup>1</sup>

That Hardy's thoughts have been for some time circling around the point struck in The Dynasts is evident from the passage near the end of Jude, when Sue is reflecting that the "First Cause worked automatically like a conambulist"; and that "at the framing of the terrestrial conditions there seemed never to have been contemplated such a development of emotional perceptiveness among the creatures subject to those conditions as that reached by thinking and educated humanity;"<sup>2</sup> and also from a poem

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1 McDowall, *op.cit.*, p. 167.

2 Jude The Obscure, p. 413.

in The Poems of Past and Present to the "Willer masked and dumb."<sup>3</sup> Brennecke is stating the obvious when he says that many of the conceptions upon which the philosophy of The Dynasts was built up can be found "to exist in embryo in his first writings, however much they became enriched and mellowed through the intellectual and real experiences of the writer."<sup>4</sup>

Rutland says that Hardy wrote the epic drama to make us see a vision of the universe and of all living things striving and suffering, appearing and vanishing.<sup>5</sup> Hardy was always intrigued by Napoleonic lore, but he is here, despite his interest in the mortal events, definitely not writing history. He does wish us to see historical events, and he wishes us to see them as they really happened, but only insofar as is consistent with their being at the same time scenes in the drama of the Immanent Will. Hardy seems to have been striving to summarize his metaphysical ideas, and he does succeed in presenting the great bulk of his views far more explicitly than he did in the novels, and more comprehensively than in the short poems. What was background in the novels, has not only been drawn out into relief, but has become the action of the drama. The Phantom Intelligences are not merely an unearthly framework, as were the antique mythologies of the Greek literature, but are the vital substance. It is for them that the human play is acted.

The entire piece is a creation of a new form in literary technique;

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<sup>3</sup> Collected Poems, p. 171.

<sup>4</sup> Brennecke, op.cit., p. 144.

<sup>5</sup> Rutland, Thomas Hardy: A Study of His Writings and their Background, p. 326.

there is placed a drama within a drama, and the more important action is not that provided by the mortal cast. All the incidents on the human stage are but "one flimsy riband" of the whole Web of Being:

---Web enorme  
 Whose furthest hymn and salvage may extend  
 To where the roars and plashings of the  
                   flames  
 Of earth-invisible suns swell noisily,  
 And onwards into ghastly gulfs of sky,...<sup>6</sup>

The Pities, Ironies, and Years, are by no means there in order to provide a supernatural atmosphere, or an "enlightening gloss of reflective generalization of the rages of the Napoleonic wars;"<sup>7</sup> in fact, it is quite the contrary: the "predestined plot" is worked out in order to provide these phantom spirits with some entertainment and with matter for speculation.

Hardy himself was not writing history; he was not even attempting an artistic presentation of material borrowed from a fascinating era of history, material exaggerated to a supernatural significance by the supposed interest taken in it by a group of hovering spirits. There is little doubt but that Hardy was fulfilling two desires when writing The Dynasts; he had long cherished an ambition to do a large-proportioned work on that particular turmoil of the Revolution days;<sup>8</sup> and he had so long and so imaginatively speculated on the problem of being, that an attempt to summarize his holdings in artistic exhibition seems, for a writer, a natural outcome; that the latter should engulf the former is

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<sup>6</sup> The Dynasts, Pt. III, p. 349.

<sup>7</sup> Abercrombie, op.cit., p. 187.

<sup>8</sup> The Early Years of Thomas Hardy, pp. 140 and 150; The Later Life of Thomas Hardy, p. 57.

due, doubtless, to that peculiar bent of the Hardy mind which always found metaphysical solitudes of vital significance. In 1881, Hardy wrote in his Journal:

Mode for a historical Drama. Action mostly automatic; reflex movement, etc. Not the result of what is called motive, though always ostensibly so, even to the actors' own consciousness. Apply an enlargement of these theories so, say, 'The Hundred Days'!<sup>9</sup>

Florence E. Hardy adds, "The note is, apparently, Hardy's first written idea of a philosophic scheme or framework as the larger feature of The Dynasts, enclosing the historic scenes."<sup>10</sup>

Abercrombie states that the drama "with its opportunities of discoursing at large, easily avoids the fault noted in the corresponding lyrical poems, the fault of affronting philosophy."<sup>11</sup> That is quite true; the general idea of existence as considered in the play is too much a romance in the field of philosophy ever to be considered offensive. Macy remarks that Thomas Hardy effected no revolution in theology by use of the pronoun "It" to designate the Prime Being.<sup>12</sup> Whether or not the idea, even as an artistic metaphysic, is strong enough to support the weight of the nineteen acts of The Dynasts has been questioned, and later critics deny that it is of sufficient substance to last through the lengthy play. Chapman holds "this philosophy is far from adequate to the function assigned it in the construction of an epic;"<sup>13</sup> and Rutland

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9 The Early Years of Thomas Hardy, p. 191.

10 Loc.cit.

11 Abercrombie, op.cit., p. 188.

12 Macy, op.cit., p. 201.

13 Chapman, op.cit., p. 33.



feels that it is better to think of Hardy as an artist, as "his stature as an artist is so much greater than as a thinker."<sup>14</sup>

The greatest charge to be leveled against The Dynasts is that its philosophy is as clearly and succinctly stated in a bare fifty lines as it is in the entire drama. Near the beginning the Spirit of the Years reveals to the Pities the feelers and ramified nerves of the Will carrying Its current through all humanity; and, while from time to time in the course of the work this revelation is repeated, yet on the last occasion--which is a long way from the first--nothing new has been added. Chapman sees only that the "vision of the Will serves to job the reader's attention now and then to remind him that there is a moral to be drawn from this versified history."<sup>15</sup> Yet from Abercrombie comes, "The relation of known and unknowable is matter for emotion rather than for reason; and what this poem achieves is the presenting to the emotion of a metaphysical idea held in some consistent and noble shaping."<sup>16</sup> A reading of The Dynasts with a view to pronouncing on the relative value of the metaphysic as a device would tend to throw one on Chapman's side; yet Abercrombie was writing when enthusiasm for the lengthy play was running so high that it could be paralleled in its "conceptual poetry" with Faust and Prometheus Bound.<sup>17</sup>

While our concern at present is with the nature of the philosophy

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<sup>14</sup> Rutland, Thomas Hardy: A Study of His Writings and Their Background, p. 350.

<sup>15</sup> Chapman, op.cit., p. 33.

<sup>16</sup> Abercrombie, op.cit., p. 188.

<sup>17</sup> Loc.cit.

rather than with its ability to support the work, yet it is of interest to remark that if The Dynasts does fail--and it seems on the whole as a piece of great poetry to be failing, though it has its high moments--it is because the same metaphysic, which served so splendidly throughout the novels and much of the personalized poetry, but which grew obtrusive when pulled into relief, has presumed here to assume full control of the art, and it is not a grand enough concept for so sensitive a critic as art to serve.

Hardy realized the difficulties to some degree and professed indifference to his inconsistencies because, he held, the work was not intended as a system of thought but as a poem.<sup>18</sup> Yet in the fifth paragraph of the preface to his play he not only reveals a desire for the intellectual acceptance of his work, but includes a warning to believers in a personal Deity, telling them that they are intellectually out of date. "...the abandonment of the masculine pronoun in allusions to the First or Fundamental Energy seemed a necessary and logical consequence of the long abandonment by thinkers of the anthropomorphic conception of the same."<sup>19</sup>

The essence of tragedy in The Dynasts is the "conflict between the limited and fallible, but conscious and directed will of the individual towards ordered wellbeing; and the unlimited and all-powerful, but unconscious and senseless urge of an 'Immanent Will' to continuing, but

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18 The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, p. 219

19 The Dynasts, Pt. I, p. viii.

purposeless existence."<sup>20</sup> It is again the tragedy of the whole of Hardy literature--the contrast between man's destiny to feel and suffer, and a universe unconscious as a whole. As McDowall well says, "This contrast of the conscious and unconscious...is almost the nerve, hidden or exposed, in his tragic sense of life."<sup>21</sup>

The Immanent Will is Hardy's attempt to comprehend the force which rules the universe. The background of the novels is an indifferent universe whose forces are living in human beings. The theme of The Dynasts, "Life's impulsion by incognizance," draws the unseen background into focus and gives it an embodiment. The Will does resemble Schopenhauer's "Will," although, as Helen Garwood--who has done a thesis on an illustration of Schopenhauer's philosophy in Thomas Hardy--admits, the Wessex writer has not deliberately and consciously set out to give artistic expression to the Schopenhauerian philosophy; however, Miss Garwood feels that he does constantly "suggest" it.<sup>22</sup>

Schopenhauer's belief, as briefly summarized from Fatalism in the Work of Thomas Hardy by Elliott (who holds that Hardy "pictures for us in a startlingly poetic way the very essence of Schopenhauer's thinking")<sup>23</sup> is that all the phenomenal world originates in the will-to-live, an all-inclusive force which unites everything in nature. Unfortunately, it cannot take such a multitude of forms without inviting conflict among

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20 Rutland, Thomas Hardy: A Study of His Writings and Their Background, p. 348.

21 McDowall, op.cit., p. 33.

22 Garwood, op.cit., p. 10.

23 Elliott, op.cit., p. 27.

its individual parts. Herein, continues Elliott, lie Hardy's conflicting conceptions of Fate in Nature. The very universality of the Will in Schopenhauer and the inevitability of these conflicts implies the conception of an irrational world, a world in which pain must invariably result from conflict.<sup>24</sup>

William Rutland, who has done an investigation of the background of Hardy's work reminds us that the two dominant ideas of the world of Hardy's youth were that the Prime Cause was immanent in the universe, not transcendent to it; and that the individual human was of very small significance in the scheme of things. These two ideas, as Rutland points out, dominate Hardy's work. He read Schopenhauer and Von Hartman later, but it was the sixties that shaped his personality.<sup>25</sup>

Rutland claims that scarcely any of those who have attempted to examine Hardy's thought have even glanced at the thought of that age in which he came to maturity.<sup>26</sup> After a pointed presentation of the prevailing ideas of that period, and a consideration of the thinkers for whom Hardy stated a preference, the critic concludes that it was Spencer and Mill, the former with his theory of an immanent, unknowable First Cause,<sup>27</sup> the latter with his holding of the possibility of the production of conscious mind by unconscious process,<sup>28</sup> who most deeply influenced the

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24 Elliott, loc.cit.

25 Rutland, Thomas Hardy: A Study of His Writings and Their Background, p. 56.

26 Ibid., p. 48.

27 Ibid., p. 57.

28 Ibid., p. 69.

writer. He feels that Schopenhauer and Von Hartman affected him only after his basic holdings were already formed.

Hardy himself gives some idea of what he intended that the Immanent Will should signify when he writes to Mr. Edward Wright, "I quite agree... that the word 'Will' does not perfectly fit the idea to be conveyed--a vague thrusting or urging internal force in no predetermined direction."<sup>29</sup>

Bates states, "His ultimate, though he calls it Immanent Will, is not Will in any very meaningful sense of the word. It might more accurately be called Tendency, for it acts without either emotion or conscious design."<sup>30</sup>

It is this purposelessness of existence in his belief that makes critics tend to link Hardy with Schopenhauer. (Brennecke holds that "The Dynasts would have been impossible without contact with Schopenhauer.")<sup>31</sup> Hardy did conceive the drama in rigid monism, though we must be ever conscious of his implicit break with that paralyzing philosophy. Monism, has, as a necessary result of its holdings, a final uselessness of existence, since a monistic world can effect nothing outside itself. (There is, of course, always this exception--the world can make something of itself). This "uselessness of existence" is the whole crux of The Dynasts. At the very beginning of the play, the Spirit of the Years

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29 The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, p. 124.

30 Ernest Sutherland Bates, "The Optimism of Thomas Hardy," International Journal of Ethics, 15:472, July, 1905.

31 Brennecke, op.cit., p. 114.

states the idea:

It works unconsciously, as heretofore,  
Eternal artistries in circumstance,  
Whose patterns, wrought by rapt aesthetic rote,  
Seem in themselves its single listless aim,  
And not their consequence. <sup>32</sup>

At the end of the grand melee, the same Spirit, "Old Years" as the Ironies call him, is still sceptical as to any use of it all:

O Immanence, that reasonest not  
In putting forth all things begot,  
Thou build'st Thy house in space -- for what? <sup>33</sup>

McDowall sees the underlying belief of The Dynasts as an assuming, on the part of Hardy, of the monistic view of things which brings the entire universe into one ambit; and since the "Will is without mind or purpose this amounts to an uncompromising naturalism." <sup>34</sup> Elliott, on the other hand, interprets the Immanent Will as a concept which philosophers call "Idealistic Monism"; it is, he says, a "manifestation of Determinism in a transcendental rather than a mechanistic form. It refuses to accept a dualism of spirit and matter, as well as a materialistic concept. Spirit, for Hardy is all..." <sup>35</sup>

The idea of an idealistic metaphysic as applied to either Hardy or Schopenhauer is challenged by J.W. Beach. According to their concept, the behaviour of the universe as a whole and in all its parts in the expression of an inherent, and as we might say, protoplasmic nature, an inner urge, and not merely the result of impulsion from without. In

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<sup>32</sup> The Dynasts, Pt. I, p. 1.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., Pt. III, p. 353.

<sup>34</sup> McDowall, op.cit., pp. 165-166.

<sup>35</sup> Elliott, op.cit., pp. 53-54.

this sense the "system of Schopenhauer, and Hardy after him, is idealistic." But Hardy's and Schopenhauer's are both different from other idealistic concepts in that they do not imply rationality. Hardy, anyway, does not attribute intelligence to the universal will, or assume the existence of any intelligent being lying back of, or explaining the Will. Consequently, the teleology of these men, Beach continues, is sharply distinguished from that of most idealists. Hardy's does not even remotely suggest that living creatures, including men, were destined for happiness; as in the eighteenth-century systems of Shaftsbury, Pope, and Wordsworth, in whom the particular dispositions, however unsatisfactory in themselves, may be conceived of as building up in a whole which is harmonious and good taken together.<sup>36</sup>

So the monism of Hardy has given rise to differing trends of interpretation. The poet himself realized here, as always, the necessity of freedom of expression if there were to be human appeal and stirring action. Abercrombie, consistently loyal, finds it interesting to note how Hardy, the artist, was so compelled by the logic of monism that "free will could have no place in his poem; whereas Nietzsche, the philosopher, cheerfully puts the two together."<sup>37</sup> One wonders, however, if Hardy was logical throughout in his execution; that he himself realized the need of at least the appearance of free will and the need of pro-

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<sup>36</sup> Beach, The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry, pp. 514-515.

<sup>37</sup> Abercrombie, op.cit., p. 189.

tecting himself against imputations of illogic, is evident in the Fore Scene, when the Spirit of the Years, in laying bare the action of the European scene issues a warning:

So may ye judge Earth's jackaclocks to be  
Not fugled by one Will, but function-free. <sup>38</sup>

But, as Rutland notes, even in the single character of Napoleon a difficulty in regard to freedom of action is created; Napoleon must be either a man with potentialities of largeness and of smallness, or else he is but a puppet of the Immanent Will, in which latter case he would be not morally responsible for his usage of Josephine any more than for his victory at Austerlitz. Hardy cannot have it both ways; and he does want us to feel that the Emperor is at fault.<sup>39</sup> And the same consideration extends to all his characters, and is but one of the dilemmas in which Hardy's philosophy landed him. Characterization is wholly incompatible with the doctrine that all humans are lobules of one brain, the Immanent Will's. Not even the introduction of the convention to disregard it compensates for the lack of free will. The deterministic philosophy which affected Tess and which grew to proportions in Jude has now taken over entirely.

England's part in the great European war is, of course, the most inconsistent touch of all. The turmoil is supposed to take place in a strictly frozen deterministic world, a world wherein good actions and bad are both little more than unconscious movements of the drowsing Will

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<sup>38</sup> The Dynasts, Pt. I, p. 9.

<sup>39</sup> Rutland, Thomas Hardy: A Study of His Writings and Their Background, p. 333.



which overrides all its parts, and forbids the slightest voluntary movement. So England's entering the war, at any hour, is an act no more deserving of praise or admiration than is France's, necessarily unwitting, precipitation of the whole grisly affair. In regard to Hardy's aim to show England's part, Nevinson asks, "...why stress one tiny family, if all are but blood vessels and ganglions in the unconscious brain which holds the stars and the universal void?"<sup>40</sup>

The drama is of notoriously oppressive length, yet the general idea can be stated rather briefly. There are, in the spectre family, three leading spirits, The Spirit of the Years, the Spirit of the Pities, and the Spirit of the Ironies, the first holding the central place and each having its group of choral attendants. The Ancient Spirit of the Years--"the consciousness of monism, of the single urgency driving all the manifold shows of being";<sup>41</sup> or, "the significance of the consciousness of the transience and insignificance of all human endeavor and suffering when seen in the scale of the past impersonal universe"<sup>42</sup>--is, undoubtedly, intended by Hardy as a psychological projection of the intellectual or scientific interest in the world; "the best human intelligence of their time," Hardy himself says in reference to his leading spirit.<sup>43</sup> The Years is without emotion or

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<sup>40</sup> H.W.Nevinson, "Thomas Hardy," Books and Personalities (New York: John Lane Company, 1905), p. 178.

<sup>41</sup> Abercrombie, op.cit., p. 199.

<sup>42</sup> Rutland, Thomas Hardy: A Study of His Writings and Their Background, p. 336.

<sup>43</sup> The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, p. 275.

feeling, composed supposedly of pure intellect, although in the After Scene this rugged spirit admits to idealism in its youth:

In the Foregone I knew what dreaming was,  
And could let raptures rule! But not so now. <sup>44</sup>

The Spirit of the Pities and The Spirit of the Ironies carry the other two leads. The Pities, with attendants, represent the full-blown significance of Hardy's quarrel with the sorry scheme of things, which quarrel had grown ever more vehement in the later novels; but where it was an abstraction in the novels, it has now become a personality. The passionate debates held by the Pities and the Years are concentrated manifestations of what had long been going on within the writer--it is once again the heart arguing against the head. The heart is wishing "it might be so"; the intellect, scoffing and sceptical, but never too sure of being right. The Pities are idealists to the end; they impose on the First Cause the same ethic tests that tried its patience explicitly in the short poems, and suggestively in the novels; they speak, here, more effectively than did Hardy, resenting in his own person "a morality good enough for divinities, but scorned by average human nature,"<sup>45</sup> when they cry out indignantly after Nelson's dying hours, "His thread was cut too slowly."<sup>46</sup> The Pities are a direct characterization of the resentment that conceived the novels and that runs bitterly throughout the Hardian literature, the intolerable antilogy of making figments feel.

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<sup>44</sup> The Dynasts, Pt. III, p. 353.

<sup>45</sup> Tess of the D'Urbervilles, p. 91.

<sup>46</sup> The Dynasts, Pt. I, p. 164.

The Ironic Spirits spring also from the very temperament of Hardy: they are the objectification of the writer's ever-present ability to see tragic humor in the maladjustments and maladroit delays that harry man. The Ironic Spirits are the height of perversion; where the Pities seek relief in unfounded but consoling idealism, these spirits find unnatural, cynical, amusement in the spectacle of a world which is, they believe, futilely striving against an infinite malice which controls it. The Spirit is seen in completely characteristic mood when watching one of the scenes of the war: the French and English, both exhausted from carnage, are drinking from opposite sides of a little stream and are clasping hands across the narrow water; to the Pities, it is a "sealing of their sameness as earth's sojourners," but to the Ironic Spirits it is actually humorous:

It is only that Life's mechanics chance to work out in this grotesque shape just now. The groping tentativeness Of the Immanent Will (as grey old Years describes it) cannot be asked to learn logic at this time of day! The spectacle of Its instruments, set to riddle one another through, and then to drink together in peace and concord, is where the humour comes in, and makes the play worth seeing! 47

The idea of the whole play is that these sets of spectres, all projections of man's mind, shall watch the affairs of earth for a while; the Pities are confident that a close-up of "these shapes that bleed" will compel the unfeeling Spirit of the Years to adopt their sentiments; and the Ironies are hoping that "old Years" will forget himself and

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47 Ibid., Pt. II, p. 173.

derive some amusement from the grim scene. The Spirit of the Years, who has watched the show through the centuries and knows he will be moved by these flesh-hinged mannikins to neither pity nor irony, agrees nevertheless to sit out a few acts of the human drama. And so the play begins.

The great complex toiling mass of humanity is presented as lobules of one brain, its every fibre charged throughout with a current of the Will. Nothing whatever acts of itself, but accepts of necessity the irresistible commands of the Will which has woven with an absent heed since life first was. Inanimate objects are little concerned over the drowsy blunderings that govern them, but the great tragedy of man is that he has developed "unmeant" that consciousness which makes him aware. As the Pities plead, "They are shapes that bleed, mere marionettes or no."<sup>48</sup>

In his novel Two on a Tower, Hardy has used the ironic contrast between the love in two human hearts and the ghastly, imaginable voids in the universe of stars. The contrast in The Dynasts has been well stated by Nevinson who notes that the insignificant and pitiful side of this contrast is in the continents and oceans of the world, the hosts of conquerors, the doom of kings, and the crowding populations of European empires. "The vision opens and we see them spread out before us like little toys. Queer little figures run about; they love and hate, they laugh and cry, and make a fine to-do. You would swear they were real."<sup>49</sup>

As the long march of events proceeds--or is propelled--it becomes

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., Pt. I, p. 6.

<sup>49</sup> Nevinson, op.cit., p. 176.

increasingly evident that the Will has no purpose other than to go on willing. But neither the Pities nor the Ironies can accept this, and herein seems to lie the essential conflict of the whole play. All through the presentation of the great French debacle there is the same recurring situation: after a particularly tragic or dramatic scene, the Pities renew their plea that the Years may condemn such gross injustice of making Life debtor when it did not buy; and the Ironies turn up each time with their characteristic desire to make "grey old Years" see the grim humor in the whole disordered scene; while the Spirit of the Years remains consistently indifferent to the seething mass, and so convinced by years of observation that nothing can swerve the action of a rote-restricted Will, that he freely permits both minor spirits all the speech they desire, "whose speech nor mars nor mends."<sup>50</sup>

The end of the drama finds the spirits in just about the same position as the beginning; Years is unchanged, but so also are the Pities and the Ironies. If there is any change at all, it is in the Pities who seem to grow, despite the discouraging remarks of the Spirit of the Years, even more idealistic.

The very fact that the Pities are given the final word, would indicate once more that their Creator will protest to the end against the system that he has himself conceived, with its purposeless, unconscious, senseless, Prime Cause in control. The closing passage of The

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50 The Dynasts, Pt. II, p. 187.

Dynasts is worn thin from over-use, but it is the only one wherein there is stated any indication that the hopes and dreams of the visionary Pities may actually materialize:

But--a stirring thrills the air  
 Like to sounds of joyance there  
           That the rages  
           Of the ages  
 Shall be cancelled, the deliverance offered  
           from the darts that were,  
 Consciousness the Will informing, till it  
           fashion all things fair! 51

The idea of deliverance from the sorry condition wherein creation travails is not stranger to the play, but it is presented elsewhere as an impossible, radical suggestion which none but inexperienced, youthful minds like the Pities' would accept; the Years with centuries of knowledge behind them ridicule the whole idea as not worth harboring, and the holding does not seem to have been anchored much more deeply in the mind that produced these Years. As Duffin states, the idea of meliorism was "not only discountenanced beforehand by the passionless insight of the Spirit of the Years, but was a thing of no strong growth, for it was destroyed by the outbreak of the World War." 52

"The war," writes Mrs. Hardy, "gave the coup de grace to any conception he may have nourished of a fundamental ultimate Wisdom at the back of things. With his views on necessitation, or at most a very limited free will, events seemed to show him that a fancy he had often held and expressed, that the never-ending push of the Universe was an

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51 Ibid., Pt. III, p. 355.

52 Duffin, op.cit., p. 344.

unpurposive and irresponsible groping in the direction of the least resistance, might possibly be the real truth."<sup>53</sup>

J.W. Beach sees the closing stanza of The Dynasts as "a mitigating concession made virtually without preparation at the end of a uniformly hopeless chronicle"; it is not, he says, to be seriously regarded as an element in Hardy's philosophy, as it is radically inconsistent with the general concept of the Immanent Will, which expressly rules out the notion of a spirit external to the universe, being conceived as the mere principle of action inherent in the behaviour of things.<sup>54</sup>

Mrs. Hardy states that her husband said he would probably not have ended The Dynasts as he did if he could have foreseen what was going to happen within a few years.<sup>55</sup>

However, the same idea of meliorism appeared, as has been seen in the poems, and here it was not withdrawn. But it is not there with any weight of assurance; in the last poem of the Past and Present volume there is the thought that "listless effort tends to grow percipient... and with percipience mends"; in "God's Funeral," there is a hint of a "pale yet positive gleam low down behind." In Human Shows, as late as 1925, the dead creeds are made to cry, "Out of us cometh an heir, that shall disclose new promise," and that "shall make tolerable to seers the melancholy marching of the years."<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, pp. 165-166.

<sup>54</sup> Beach, The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry, p. 517.

<sup>55</sup> The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, loc.cit.

<sup>56</sup> Human Shows, p. 54.

So with the shifting of his position it is hard to tell just how pertinent to his general philosophy was this late-coming idea of a gradual growth toward alleviation. Elliott feels it is "basic in Hardy's theory" that this unconscious planner may be evolving towards consciousness. Hardy feels, according to Elliott, that the day may come when this Force will realize the havoc it has wrought, and then perhaps set in motion some kind of machinery to bring the universe into harmony inherent in an "immanent plan of Justice."<sup>57</sup>

Acceptance of this interpretation would, of course, radically affect one's interpretation of the entire Hardian metaphysic; yet the irrefutably disproportionate place allotted to the melioristic modification makes it a bit hard for one to accept that modification as "basic in Hardy's theory." There is no reason why it could not have been given prominence had the poet so wished it; in fact, had it been basic in as emotional a temperament as that of Hardy, it is only strange that it did not manifest itself, invited or no, throughout the whole of such a work as The Dynasts where metaphysical speculation has become the sustaining force of the work.

Harold Child, who feels The Dynasts is the "flower" of Hardy's genius, states there is no consolation in the drama because consolation is outside the artistic business of The Dynasts, as it is outside the artistic business of the novels. There are, he states, "gleams of something that is nearly hope--far from an assured promise...but at least the recognition that there is no obligation to despair."<sup>58</sup>

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57 Elliott, op.cit., p. 54.

58 Child, op.cit., pp. 112-113.



It is, of whatever worth, clearly a manifestation that the God of The Dynasts, this man-made Immanent Will, gives small satisfaction to the parcels that are its parts. The desire of attention from the Prime Cause has long burned within Hardy; this suggestion of better times to come is the same old cry for solace and relief that was forced from the writer so many years before; whether or not its lack of weight here in this later work reveals anything of significance in the development of man's thought, seems to be depending largely upon the interpretation of the reader; it certainly reveals no great lightening of the disillusionment and pain resulting from the intellectual rejection of the old faith.

This fabricated deity is definitely a projection of the scientific speculation of the late nineteenth century. McDowall states, "Hardy's myth was meant to embody the thought of his time. And there is much of the atmosphere of 19th century science."<sup>59</sup> Elsewhere, he says, "Hardy deliberately adopts an idea and a machinery for The Dynasts that seemed to agree with the thought of the age....And the indifference of the universe is something that we feel to be central in his philosophy."<sup>60</sup>

In summarizing the theological reactions of Victorian poets, McCracken says of the Will,

The theory of the Immanent Will was in direct line with the evolutionary teaching of the day. Hardy did not arbitrarily separate man from nature as had been the practice. There was a oneness in the universe and Hardy set forth this essential nature of man as a product of the creative, germinative forces inherent in the very nature of the universe. The acceptance

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59 McDowall, op.cit., p. 31.

60 Ibid., p. 27.

of this cosmic theory based upon evolutionism, forced the poet to see the ruthlessness, the inhumanity of nature. <sup>61</sup>

The passionate debate that takes place between the Pities and the Years immediately after the death of Nelson, summarizes the entire theme of the play; it is a vigorous argument on the old problem of pain. The argument is that which has appeared in Hardy since the far days when Eustacia was young.

In The Dynasts, we see the Will in its nakedness; in the Native it is clothed in the garment of nature--Egdon Heath... vast, dark, imperturbable, eternal, slowly it crushes out alike indifferently the lives of heroes and dastards, and punishes with despotic irony all their efforts to escape their doom--every land has its Egdons. <sup>62</sup>

In every great Hardy tale, every land does have its Egdons: Tess, Jude, Sue, Eustacia, Clym, Henchard, were all in their human sensitivity, pitted against an impersonal, vast, incomprehensible fate which worked out its own designs deliberately and impassively and brought terrible suffering to this tragic company.

Without the heart of Hardy there could have been no Wessex literature, any more than without the Pities there could have been The Dynasts. It is the same old dilemma into which would be forced any one possessed of the intellect of the nineteenth-century scientist for whom man was of no appreciable consequence, and possessed also of the great feeling heart of the artist for whom simple human life was of tremendous import. The painful dying hours of Nelson have provoked the Pities, in

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<sup>61</sup> A.V. McCracken, The Theological Reactions of the Victorian Poets to the Natural Sciences and Evolution (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935), p. 11.

<sup>62</sup> Bates, op.cit., pp. 474-475.

this summarizing passage, to passionate revolt against a scheme--whether swayed by necessitation or no--that can include purposeless pain; there is once more the implication that the gods are of a low morality, this time paraphrased from Sophocles:

Such gross injustice to their own creation  
Burdens the time with mournfulness for us,  
And for themselves with shame.<sup>63</sup>

The Spirit of the Years, replying to the Pities, describes in a bare dozen lines, the character of this will that has unconsciously caused the whole human tragedy. The Will is purposive yet superconscious; it possesses a foreknowledge which necessitates its following a pre-ordained pattern, but It is unconscious of Its knowledge. Since the whole pattern of eternity must exist at once, then the cause must be the slave of the pattern, which would make the pattern the real ruler; the Prime Cause would have, then, as Duffin states, "as aesthetic faculty and, presumably, a moral one."<sup>64</sup> The consciousness of man --

The cognizance ye mourn, Life's doom to feel,  
If I report it meetly, came unmeant,  
Emerging with blind gropes from impercience  
By random sequence --<sup>65</sup>

is simply fortuitous; as also is that greater tragedy, man's ability to perceive it. The scene closes with the Chorus of the Years asking that judgment be suspended, that blame be withheld until "the last entablature of time" may reveal the answer to the eternal mystery.

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<sup>63</sup> The Dynasts, Pt. I, p. 165.

<sup>64</sup> Duffin, op.cit., p. 342.

<sup>65</sup> The Dynasts, Pt. I, p. 166.

There is a tendency to point to the obvious inconsistencies in the metaphysic controlling The Dynasts as if Hardy himself were unaware of logic; his very request in the preface, that his Phantoms be taken not too seriously, shows he was a little apprehensive of the system he had created; unfortunately for himself, he does modify this request in the same preface. The fundamental inconsistency is repeated from time to time. In one place the Chorus of the Years speaks thus:

Ere systemed suns were globed and lit  
The slaughters of the race were writ,  
And wasting wars, by land and sea,<sup>66</sup>  
Fixed, like all else, immutably!

Later, the Ironic Spirits chide the poor Pities:

O Innocence, can ye forget  
That things to be were shaped and set  
Ere mortals and this planet met?<sup>67</sup>

The whole idea is inconsistent; all creation is supposed to be caused merely by the blind will-to-exist of this Immanent Will; then, phenomena predetermined from all eternity is an impossibility.

Rutland makes a good exposition of the basic illogic when he argues that either everything is predetermined, or else everything is caused by the gropings of the Will. Either of these propositions may be true, but they cannot both be. It does not help much to say in Schopenhauer's language that the Will is not subject to the "principium individuationis," for pre-determinism involves subjection to time. If the events of 1805

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66 Ibid., Pt. I, p. 87.

67 Ibid., Pt. I, p. 197.

were, as said, "fixed like all else immutably" before the sun emerged, then the "unfortunate Will so far from being free to grope comfortably, is to all eternity, bound to follow the syllabus drawn up by Itself in an unspecified past." To ask us to believe that it drew up that syllabus and is capable of adhering to it indefinitely in the smallest details, while at the same time devoid of the least rudiments of intelligence, is to ask quite too much.<sup>68</sup>

S. Sager, who feels that "Hardy did harm", remarks that the writer "never made up his mind whether the Universe was designed or whether it just happened to happen; whether man was at the mercy of mere chance... or whether he was a victim of dark design." Man would be in a sorry pass in either eventuality, he continues, but it is not the same sorry pass, and Hardy tried to evade his dilemma by assuming that it was. Sager sees behind the Wessex novels (a background of mental confusion.)<sup>69</sup>

W.J.Blyton feels that Hardy's philosophy has a live interest for modern reading and thinking Catholics because his influence, thanks to his great art and his immense gallery of pictures, is going to live. He warns against pulling into a false prominence those "very few" sentences in all Hardy where he "seems to question the dispensations of Providence in a particular juncture."<sup>70</sup>

Lionel Johnson seems to have thrown the Hardian literature into

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68 Rutland, *op.cit.*, pp. 349-350.

69 S.Sager, "Hardy Did Harm," The Catholic World, 156:614-615, February, 1943.

70 W.J.Blyton, "Hardy After a Century," The Catholic World, 152:292 December, 1940.

just about the right perspective when he says,

I do not find his books quite free of anything that can hurt or distress; but I never find them merely painful. The pain they sometimes give is often salutary, even for those who still hold with Aeschylus to the truth of that ancient doctrine which makes the sorrow of the world a discipline. The Gods are upon their holy thrones; the grace of the Gods constraineth us. <sup>71</sup>

It is true that Johnson's estimate was made before The Dynasts was written, but there is no reason to suppose an inclusive estimate would differ. The drama is not entirely free of distress--the nature of the incidental mention of Christianity has made William R. Rutland, a rather consistently conservative critic, see the Westminster burial service with its hymn "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord" as wholly incongruous and to be accepted only because Hardy comes of a Christian nation. <sup>72</sup> However, there is no pain given by the celestial framework of the play; the metaphysic affronts neither philosophy nor morality, simply because it is too definitely an imaginative and wholly romantic concept; there is nothing exhilarating, on the other hand, about this "God" of Thomas Hardy's; it is probably more deserving of pity than blame, though in its unconsciousness, it would hardly appreciate either. The best commentary on the mind that created the deity is that it could find not the slightest satisfaction in its creation.

Hardy has considered the problem of pain and revolted against what

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<sup>71</sup> Johnson, op.cit., p. 276.

<sup>72</sup> Rutland, Thomas Hardy: A Biography (Glasgow: Blackie and Sons Company, 1938), p. 102.

he sees as intolerable injustice, and while he devoted the great bulk of his literature to voicing his resentment, yet he is never willing to adopt the final conclusion to which the evidence of useless suffering seems to point. In The Dynasts he expresses this unwillingness to go all the way:

The Tears that lie about this plightful scene...  
 Might drive Compassion past her patience  
 To hold that some mean, monstrous, ironist  
 Had built this mistimed fabric of the spheres  
 To watch the throbbing of its captive lives,  
 (The which may Truth forfend) and not thy said  
 Unmaliced, unimpassioned, nescient Will! 73

Canby says it is because Hardy loves life, the living thing, that he broods upon their frustrations. He sees clearly that the sufferer is more intelligible than his fate, and so is pitiful even when most ruthless in the depiction of misfortune. "Pity for the individual, not despair of the race is his motive."<sup>74</sup>

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73 The Dynasts, Pt. II, p. 273

74 Henry S. Canby, "The Novelist of Pity," Definitions (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922), p. 276.

## CONCLUSION

Thomas Hardy, the artist, will undoubtedly live; and he will find place among that group of writers whose creative work tends to sound forth strongly their own philosophy of life, their personal reactions to the universe. Hardy's philosophy falls far short of his art, but it is a factor that does contribute in no slight degree to the flowering of his genius. The philosophy is frequently unpleasant, and is basically inconsistent, and often caused solicitude among his friends; but it can only be recognized as a constant habit of mind derived from a radical quality of the Hardy make-up. Whether or not the projection of his world views was made with full consciousness, is a disputed question; that the projection could not easily have been avoided is attested to by the very temperament of the man.

Early influences further prepared the naturally sombre mind of Hardy for the disillusionment which to some degree must form a part of every life when confronted with the realization that this world was built not at all from materials which go into the fashioning of lasting cities; in Hardy the realization would take an exceptionally bitter turn. The writer's early life was spent upon the edge of the vast sweeping solitudes of Egdon; his early acquaintances were among the Dorset peasantry, a simple people in whom the current of fatalistic thought ran high. The stark, unrelieved tales related by this people had a strange attraction for the young Hardy; later contact with the Attic stage showed him what depth of feeling could be struck when un-



relieved tragedy is alchemized by the power of an artist.

Hardy's married life had at the beginning indicated lasting happiness but the basis for constant and prolonged companionship was lacking, and the pain of a shattered dream is reflected in his work; the vitality and force present in the vigorous treatment of the marriage question show that the disappointment must have eaten deep.

Hardy was born into the fold of the Anglican church and developed a lasting regard for the beauties and traditions of the old faith; his intellectual rejection of that faith, occasioned by the influence of the materialistic and agnostic exponents of the new science, was an added disappointment to his heart. The realization of spiritual vacuity brought regret and loneliness to the man whose depth of sensitivity could reveal to him the extent of his loss. He turned then for comfort to the philosophers of the day, but found only a greater disappointment and lack of solace, so that by 1901 he was writing that every man must "make a philosophy for himself out of his own experience." That he did just that is the tragedy of Hardy's life; experience unaided by faith is a joyless teacher.

Hardy's refusal to accept the pain in the universe as an inexplicable but purposeful element of life was responsible in large manner for the indictment of the universe which recurs throughout both prose and poetry. He had begun very early to equip himself with this philosophy, which is seen working effectively as a background, but somewhat futilely when drawn into relief. Hardy's metaphysic works gracefully when complementing his

art, but awkwardly when it tends to assume the control; it is observed in this less worthy role in the philosophic poems and in The Dynasts. The Dynasts is, of later years, regarded as an overly attenuated version of a static credo that is fully stated in the first few passages of the play and expanded not at all by the multiplied repetitions found throughout.

Fundamentally, Hardy claimed discipleship with Spencer, yet, for an agnostic, he outlined the First Cause so freely as to cause within himself an apprehension of results; so he protests frequently that his conceptions are but the fanciful imaginings common to a great part of creative work; but the imaginings partake largely enough of nineteenth-century theological assumptions that they are frequently suspected of pretentiousness.

Hardy's fabrication does indeed date him unmistakably in the history of world thought; it has been entirely immersed in the atmosphere of the dynamic Victorian period. The inevitability of the causal relation, the restricting habits of mechanism, the inexorability of the necessarian's creed, the liberal implications of evolution, are all found, implicitly or openly, embodied in Hardy's conception. Comprehended in its entirety, the Hardian metaphysic closely harmonized with the intellectual and scientific thought of the sixties and seventies. Naturally his holdings were modified by the years; contact with the German philosophers affected them, as did also the doubt and negation

of the later days of the century; but the dismay and confusion that Hardy evidenced when he learned that Spencer no longer commanded the mind of the materialistic thinkers, indicates that the Wessex writer had experienced no radical change from those earlier days of Darwin, John Stuart Mill, and Huxley.

Hardy saw the universe as essentially indifferent, yet, as Chapman remarks, he never attempted in his reasonings to penetrate into the meaning of that indifferentism. That is, he did not attempt to solve the place of indifferentism in nature.<sup>1</sup> It is this belief--that the universe of its very nature can be not at all concerned with man--that forms the basis of Hardy's tragedy of existence. The fact that man, in his failure to comprehend this indifferentism, continues to trust in the creative value of his desires and aspirations, renders the tragedy more acute and lends the touch of irony.

Deep-rooted tendencies are present in every temperament; it is because Hardy's tendencies have become prolonged and emphasized, and because they partake so constantly of the same character that they are spoken of as a philosophy. Hardy, in any age, would have leaned to the greyer side of life; in the disillusioning, disappointing nineteenth century he slipped often into unrelieved darkness. His tendencies are, on the whole, pessimistic; and, although some do see his touch of meliorism, despite its slight weight, as shifting the

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1 Chapman, op.cit., p. 22.

entire Hardian metaphysic in the direction of optimism, the generality of readers are inclined to see the "twilight view" as the more characteristic.

Probably every pessimistic philosophy has resulted from a conflict between ideals and reality; high ideals, whether aesthetic, moral, or spiritual, are always tried by intercourse with the world; experience has a tragic way, unless one admits the light from above, of contradicting ideals. It is this contradiction that seems to have been greater than Hardy could bear; he had darkened his days by denying the light of Christianity, and he seems often during the developing years to be groping unhappily in enveloping blackness. Hardy's is the bitter despondence that must result when man unreasonably convinces himself that he has been left to his own resources on an undeniably imperfect planet. Hardy has considered the problem of pain, and has revolted against the intolerable injustice of useless suffering; he has sought an intellectual explanation in philosophy, and has been dissatisfied with what explanation he could discover. His final solution must merge in the great chorus of the Spirits of the Years, asking only that judgment be suspended, that blame be withheld until "the last entablature of Time" may reveal some solution which has been, for some inexplicable but distressing reason, withheld from mortal sense. Hardy, out of his vast regard for his fellow-man, does catch the life-song of the centuries, but he has closed his ear to the divine undertone that will finally and surely resolve the discord and disharmony of a perplexing world in a universal and immortal symphony.

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APPROVAL SHEETS

The thesis submitted by Sister Mary Leo Hogan, B.V.M. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

Nov. 21, 1944  
Date

James J. Young  
Signature of Adviser