

THOMAS HARDY'S AESTHETICS OF THE NOVEL

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of English
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by

Robert C. Starkweather

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ABSTRACT

Thomas Hardy viewed novel writing as an extension of oral tale-telling and wrote more by instinct than by logical rules. His statements concerning fiction are relatively few and they are scattered, but taken together they afford some insight into Hardy's aesthetics of the novel. Much of what he wrote about the novel was a defense of his own novels and aesthetics against the attacks of both critics and readers.

Because Hardy viewed the novel as an extension of oral tale-telling, his statement about the novel can be grouped into three main headings: the author, the story, and the telling.

Hardy felt that the author (his temperament and personality) necessarily influences the story. Hardy's own personal views, especially his views of humanity, life and the universe, and tragedy, greatly influenced his novels. He had a deep regard for all men, recognizing their common origin, destiny, and passions. He felt that life was necessarily grim and harsh in an indifferent and impersonal universe. He felt that tragedy was the most fitting genre for his own personal views and the views of the Victorian age, which he saw as becoming increasingly melancholy and tragic. Tragedy could

result from three main causes: the universe, man's institutions, and man's passions. The story itself Hardy believed should possess three qualities: It should be interesting, it should be believable, and it should provide the reader with some moral or mental profit. To make the story interesting, he used an unusual plot; to make the story believable, he used characters that were true to human nature and therefore true-to-life. Hardy wanted to provide the reader with a lesson in life by showing him a picture of "life" in action. The lesson came from the narrative itself and not from didactic appendages to the narrative. This was accomplished by giving the general principle in a specific case (concrete universal) and appealing to the "emotional" reason.

The telling of a story to Hardy should be characterized by two qualities: candor and realism. Candor was that quality of truthfulness which enabled the novelist to present a true picture of life, including the relations between the sexes and all of man's passions. Realism for Hardy was the realism of illusion. He aimed at just enough detail to give the appearance of reality, but he always emphasized human feelings more than mere objects. In choosing and selecting those details the author needs to illustrate his theme, he distorts reality to bring out what would otherwise remained hidden.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Thomas Hardy's long life (1840-1928) and long writing career place him in the unique position of being considered both a "Victorian" and a "modern." Albert Guerard writes:

Historically speaking, Hardy the novelist is a major transitional figure between the popular moralists and popular entertainers of Victorian fiction and the serious, visionary, often symbolizing novelists of today. He stands massively between the talented but often compromising Victorian "giants" and the meditative and austere Conrad. The great movement from Victorian to modern is reflected, in fact, within Hardy's own novel-writing career. His first published novel, Desperate Remedies (1871), has much in common with the so-called sensational novel of the Victorians. But with Jude the Obscure (1895) we have entered both the more austere aesthetic of the modern novel, and the dark world in which we live.¹

Hardy is, however, usually associated with the modern period because after his last novel appeared in 1895, he spent some twenty years revising and polishing his novels, extending his efforts in prose well into this century; and, he is truly modern in spirit and temperament; we moderns consider him one of us.

Hardy is not important as a transitional figure only; his real importance lies in his achievement in his art. The nature and magnitude of this achievement has been variously

¹Albert J. Guerard, "Introduction," in Hardy: A Collection of Critical Essays, Twentieth Century Views, ed. Albert J. Guerard (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 3.

assessed, but nearly all agree that Hardy's is a prominent place in literature. It seems only proper to use the words of the foremost Hardy scholar Carl J. Weber to sum up Hardy's importance:

No author born within the last hundred years has made so deep an impression upon the minds and hearts of his readers. Hardy has been the most voluminously discussed writer of modern times, and a memorial publication might easily be justified if it did no more than offer a synthesis of the thousands of books, articles, dissertations, studies, critiques, and annotations which testify to the important position he holds in the modern world.²

Weber's statement was occasioned by the 1940 centennial of Hardy's birth, and repeated in 1965. If one may judge from the number of studies of Hardy made in the last five years, the statement is still valid. Interest in Hardy is still growing.

The first serious literary efforts by Hardy were in poetry. For a period of about two years (1865-1867) he read only poetry, having formed "the quixotic opinion that, as in verse was concentrated the essence of all imaginative and emotional literature, to read verse and nothing else was the shortest way to the fountain-head of such."³ This high view of poetry seems to have never left him, for he always regarded

²Carl J. Weber, Hardy of Wessex (2nd ed.; New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), p. vii.

³Florence Emily Hardy, The Early Life of Thomas Hardy (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928), p. 64. Early Life is the first volume of a two volume biography (the second volume is The Later Years of Thomas Hardy) which has recently been published in one volume as The Life of Thomas Hardy (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1962). Although issued under the name of Hardy's second wife, "almost the whole of this work was prepared by Hardy Himself" (F. B. Pinion, A Hardy Companion, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1968, p. 534).

poetry as a greater achievement than his novels. He firmly believed that "one can express things much better in poetry than in the novel."⁴ When Hardy was unsuccessful in having any of his poems published, he continued to write poems but resolved not to send any to the magazines.

Disappointed at not getting any of his poems published, Hardy turned to the novel. His first attempt, The Poor Man and the Lady, was never published, but it did earn him some advice from George Meredith, reader for the publishing firm of Chapman and Hall. Meredith advised the young novelist to abandon his initial effort and begin anew with a more complicated plot.⁵ The result of this advice was Desperate Remedies (1871), which was followed by thirteen other novels and numerous tales. Two of the later novels, Tess of the d'Urbervilles (1891) and Jude the Obscure (1895), earned Hardy some very severe criticism of both his morals and aesthetics. To one as sensitive as Hardy, such criticism was naturally disappointing and discouraging. A notebook entry for April 15, 1892, indicates his reaction:

Read review of Tess in The Quarterly. A smart and amusing article; but it is easy to be smart and amusing if a man will forgo veracity and sincerity....How strange that one may write a book without knowing what one puts into it or rather, the reader reads into it. Well, if this sort of thing continues no more novel-writing for me. A man must be a fool to deliberately stand up to be shot at.⁶

⁴Thomas Hardy, quoted by Rebecca West, Lectures Before the Chicago Woman's Club, December 5, 1925, in Van Meter Ames, Aesthetics of the Novel (2nd ed.; New York: Gordian Press, Inc., 1966), p. 195.

⁵Weber, Hardy of Wessex, p. 64.

⁶Later Years, p. 7.

The reception of Jude was even more bitter, and this was his last novel; he abandoned prose for this first love, poetry. "The misrepresentations," as the hostile reviews and personal attacks are called in the Later Years (p. 65), "turned out ultimately to be the best thing that could have happened; for they well-nigh compelled him, in his own judgement at any rate, if he wished to retain any shadow of self-respect, to abandon at once a form of literary art he had long intended to abandon." He hoped that he could express in poetry what he could not express in prose, and ceased writing novels.

Although Hardy considered poetry to be the highest form of literary art, he did, despite statements to the contrary, consider the novel an art form. He made several statements that give the impression that he had little respect for the novel and did not view novel writing as serious business. In 1920, he stated: "I never cared very much about writing novels,"⁷ and a year later stated: "It was a hand-to-mouth matter--writing serials."⁸ These are strange words to come from one who had for years been a well-known and successful novel writer, but a statement in the Early Life (p. 75) is even more strange: "Thus it happened that under the stress of necessity he had set about a kind of literature in which he had hitherto taken but little interest--prose fiction." Weber has shown that this statement simply is not true; Hardy had shown interest in the novel, and

⁷Vere H. Collins, Talks With Thomas Hardy At Max Gate--1920-1922 (New York: Doubleday, Doran, and Company, Inc., 1929), p. 42.

⁸Collins, p. 56.

it was certainly not necessity that prompted him to turn to novel writing.⁹ He was simply interested in literature and determined to get published.

Many of Hardy's disparaging remarks about his novels and novel writing were made either in despair (over the violent criticism) or during his later years (when his preference for poetry and his memories of the severe criticism of his novels were likely to influence his attitude towards his novels). But from his other more representative statements, and even more his actions, it is evident that Hardy took his novels seriously. He lamented the fact that the novel was "gradually losing artistic form, with a beginning and end, and becoming a spasmodic inventory of items, which had nothing to do with art,"¹⁰ and he labored over his prose, as Weber has noted, "line by line, word by word, with extreme patience."¹¹ After the last novel appeared in 1895, he continued to revise and improve the novels for a period of about twenty years.

And he did care what the critics said about his novels. He was from the beginning suspicious of any judgment passed on his work; his failure to get any poems published during his two year's devotion to poetry was later dismissed with the rationalization that he was not very eager to get into print and that the editors "probably did not know good poetry from bad."¹²

⁹Weber, Hardy of Wessex, pp. 64-67.

¹⁰Later Years, p. 65.

¹¹Weber, Hardy of Wessex, p. 220.

¹²Early Life, p. 64.

The fact is that Hardy was suspicious of and impatient with literary critics during his entire life, and was not merely one who became embittered at the violent criticism of his later novels. His attitude towards formal criticism is succinctly expressed in the preface which he wrote for an edition of William Barnes' poems in 1908: "But criticism is so easy, and art is so hard: criticism so flimsy, and the life-seer's voice so lasting....The history of criticism is mainly the history of error, which has not even, as many errors have, quaintness to make it interesting."¹³

One reason for his suspicion and distrust of literary criticism was Hardy's own nature and temperament. He considered himself socially inferior (with some justification), mainly because of his humble, but not peasant, origins and his lack of a university education. His first attempt at the novel, The Poor Man and the Lady, was concerned with the social hierarchy and satirized the upper classes. He also felt that he was unrefined and that his first wife Emma was accomplished; the result of this was that "when Mrs. Hardy denounced his uncouth lack of polish, he learned to keep quiet."¹⁴

From his feelings of social inferiority came a feeling of intellectual inferiority. He felt the lack of a university

¹³Hardy's preface to Select Poems of William Barnes, in Harold Orel, ed. Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings: Prefaces, Literary Opinions, Reminiscences (Lawrence: University of Kansas, Press, 1966), p. 81.

¹⁴Carl J. Weber, ed., Dearest Emmie: Thomas Hardy's Letters to His First Wife (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1963), p. 63.

education throughout his life, and it was with some degree of justification that he felt he was lacking in intellectual sophistication. Morton Zabel writes: "Hardy saw the growth of sophistication and critical intellection in art as evils at its roots. His scruples as a workman and his methodical seriousness as a student, even his systematic ambition for literary fame, were outbalanced by his sense of being an outsider to art's higher mysteries."¹⁵ He was never comfortable with literary theory. Collins notes that in his conversations with Hardy, the novelist "showed very little disposition to enter into any literary theories and principles"¹⁶ even though the chief topic was literature. It is also significant that Hardy never wrote reviews although prompted to do so.¹⁷

¹⁵Morton Zabel, "Hardy in Defense of His Art: The Aesthetic of Incongruity," in Hardy: A Collection of Critical Essays, Twentieth Century Views, ed. Albert J. Guerard (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 30.

¹⁶Collins, p. xiii.

¹⁷Some of Hardy's critical opinions, though not expressed in any formal or systematic review or other piece of criticism, have caused many to doubt his critical powers. For instance J. I. M. Stewart in Eight Modern Writers (London: Oxford University Press, 1963, pp. 20-21) writes:

"Artistic sophistication did not come easily to him, and his judgements upon some of his contemporaries are scarcely those of a critical intelligence. Meredith he seems to have been content virtually to dismiss. Henry James, although less unreadable, he declared to be occupied with subjects 'one could be interested in at moments when there is nothing larger to think of'--and as a man James owned 'a ponderously warm manner of saying nothing in infinite sentences.' Such popular commonplace is disconcerting."

More friendly, but probably less true and less characteristic is Edmund Blunden's belief expressed in Thomas Hardy (London: Macmillan, 1951, p. 62) that Hardy "was always a keen but not a voluble judge of literary question." Q. D. Leavis, in "Hardy

Hardy, as Weber has noted, was "never one to blame himself."¹⁸ Instead, he blamed the critics: they "probably did not know good poetry from bad," they did not understand his work, or they read too much into his work. For this reason he remained at odds with his reviewers throughout his life, and the especially bitter criticism of Tess and Jude merely widened the gulf that had always existed between him and his critics. The criticism which he received put Hardy on the defensive: he felt he must defend his work and his art. He did not do this by formal rebuttals, but he developed a set of aesthetic principles which were, for him, true and a defense of his art; these principles he expressed only at intervals--in a preface, in a notebook entry, or in a magazine article. They are isolated and random defenses of his art, but together they form a coherent picture of his aesthetics. Morton Zabel writes about Hardy's defense of his art:

He was...conscious throughout his life of the struggle in himself of a distressing opposition of faculties--of immediate personal sympathies and large intellectual ambitions--and in the face of the critical hostility that surrounded him through two-thirds of his literary career he struggled to formulate a defense of his talent and method. Thus he shaped a personal aesthetic for himself.¹⁹

His personal aesthetic was a set of principles, or ideas, which expressed his views and defended his art; thus, the principles were ex post facto to some extent, expressing what he had

and Criticism," Scrutiny, XI (Spring 1943), states that Hardy "had a remarkable acute grasp of literary theory and a most intelligent response to its practice" (p. 232).

¹⁸Weber, Hardy of Wessex, p. 54.

¹⁹Zabel, p. 26.

already practiced in his art. For this reason, Hardy's art perfectly paralleled his expressed ideas on art. Theory and practice were in accord.

Hardy's aesthetics of the novel is, then, not a formal doctrine but a series of opinions. Unlike his fellow novelists Henry James and E. M. Forster, Hardy is not usually associated with literary criticism and aesthetics of the novel. He apparently believed that the art of story telling is more influenced by intuition than by logical reasoning. Hardy's ideas about the novel are important nevertheless for the insight they give to his creed as a novelist and his intent in the Wessex Novels.

This study is an attempt to give some form and organization to Hardy's major ideas about the novel as revealed through his own statements, and to show how these ideas are exemplified in some of his major novels. It will not be a comprehensive examination of Hardy's creed as a novelist but will be confined to those principles which he himself has set down in writing. Although much can be inferred from the novels themselves, it seems a wiser course to confine such a study as this to what Hardy has consciously and deliberately stated about the novel.

Hardy's statements on the aesthetics of the novel are relatively few, and they are scattered, but most can be found in Florence Hardy's biography Early Life and Later Years (much of which was prepared by Hardy himself), his prefaces, and three published essays on fiction entitled "The Science of

Fiction," "The Profitable Reading of Fiction," and "Candour in English Fiction."²⁰ The novels to be considered are Hardy's five major ones: Far From the Madding Crowd, The Return of the Native, The Mayor of Casterbridge, Tess of the d'Urbervilles, and Jude the Obscure. It is upon these works that much of Hardy's fame as a novelist rests,²¹ and they also represent the best of what he considered his most serious novels, the "novels of character and environment." Two others (Under the Greenwood Tree and The Woodlanders) were included under this heading; the rest Hardy classified as "novels of ingenuity" or "romances and fantasies."

Because Hardy considered the novel to be an extension of oral story telling, his statements on fiction can be arranged under three major headings: the author, the story, and the telling. The author is important because his personality and temperament largely determine what will be told and how it will be told. Hardy's personal views of humanity, life and the universe, and tragedy greatly affected his stories. The story itself, Hardy believed, should be both interesting and believable. To accomplish this he included unusual events to make the story interesting, and true-to-life characters to make the

²⁰"The Science of Fiction," New Review, April, 1891, pp. 315-319; "The Profitable Reading of Fiction," Forum (New York), March, 1888, pp. 53-70; "Candour in English Fiction," New Review, January, 1890, pp. 15-21. These and other valuable writings of Hardy are collected in Orel's Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings, hereafter cited as "Orel."

²¹Benjamin Sankey, The Major Novels of Thomas Hardy (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1965), also considers these five novels Hardy's "major" novels.

story believable. It should also provide entertainment and mental profit by giving a lesson in life. The telling of the story should be characterized by sincerity and candor; that is, it must present life truthfully, especially the relations of the sexes. The telling should also give the illusion of reality rather than a copy of reality.

CHAPTER II

STORY TELLING AND THE AUTHOR

Because Hardy believed that the novel was an extension of oral story telling, he was convinced that the author necessarily influences the story. The author's personality, temperament, Weltanschauung--his very being--determine what will be told and how it will be told. Hardy's own personal views, especially his attitudes concerning humanity, life and the universe, and tragedy, greatly influenced his novels.

Hardy seemed to be primarily concerned with telling a story and treated the novel as an extension of oral story telling. Albert Guerard writes: "Hardy was primarily a teller of tales, longing to create life rather than merely record it and to hold the reader enthralled."¹ This interest in the narrative part of the story has led Donald Davidson to conclude that a Hardy novel "is conceived as a told (or sung) story, or at least, not as a literary story" because the narrative is of primary interest, the plot is complicated, and there is a balance of characters.² That Hardy treated the novel as a story

¹Albert J. Guerard, Thomas Hardy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), p. 47.

²Donald Davidson, "The Traditional Basis of Thomas Hardy's Fiction," in Hardy: A Collection of Critical Essays, Twentieth Century Views, ed. Albert J. Guerard (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 14.

that is told can easily be seen in the opening sentences of three of his novels. First, from Tess:

On an evening in the latter part of May a middle-aged man was walking homeward from Shaston to the village of Marlott, in the adjoining vale of Blakemore or Blackmoor.

From The Return of the Native:

A Saturday afternoon in November was approaching the time of twilight, and the vast tract of unenclosed wild known as Egdon Heath embrowned itself moment by moment.

And from The Mayor:

One evening of late summer, before the nineteenth century had reached one-third of its span, a young man and woman, the latter carrying a child, were approaching the large village of Weydon-Priors, in Upper Wessex, on foot.

In each of these opening sentences there is the hint and flavor of the fire-side tale, as much as if they began, "Once upon a time...." We feel from the very beginning that we are being "told" a tale, and the narrative continues to dominate throughout the story. In The Mayor Hardy reminded the reader that "these improvements, however, are somewhat in advance of the story,"³ and earlier in the story he endeavored to keep the reader informed in this manner: "While Elizabeth-Jane sits waiting in great amaze at the young man's presence, we may briefly explain how he came there."⁴ Thus, Hardy the novelist performed much the same function as the narrator of an oral tale who presents a story to his audience. This practice was, of course, fairly common among Victorian novelists and not a peculiarity of Hardy's.

³The Mayor, Ch. 20.

⁴The Mayor, Ch. 9.

The author, or tale-teller, as a personality is an important force which shapes and colors the tale, the story being largely an expression of the author's self. The act of creating brings forth the personality of the writer, and he cannot but project some of his own character and being into the story because "a writer who is not a mere imitator looks upon the world with his personal eyes and in his peculiar moods."⁵ Hardy realized that the very selection of things to present in a story reflects the author. He is reported to have said that "all imaginative work is events seen through a temperament. That unconscious or conscious selection by the personality of the author must colour the work."⁶ Even the characters of a story are but reflections of the author: "the characters, however they may differ, express mainly the author, his largeness of heart or otherwise, his culture, his insight, and very little of any other living person."⁷ In the preface to Jude Hardy warned the reader:

Like former productions of this pen, Jude the Obscure is simply an endeavor to give shape and coherence to a series of seemings, or personal impressions, the question of their consistency or their discordance, of their permanence or their transitoriness, being regarded as not of the first moment.⁸

Thus, Hardy's temperament and character caused him to see life

⁵"The Profitable Reading of Fiction" (Orel, p. 122).

⁶Hardy, as quoted by Elliot Felkin, "Days With Thomas Hardy," Encounter, XVIII (April 1962), 27.

⁷"The Profitable Reading of Fiction" (Orel, p. 124).

⁸Preface to Jude (Orel, pp. 32-33).

in a certain way, and this is reflected in his stories. Hardy was a personality, and as a tale-teller, he looked at "the world with his personal eyes, and in his peculiar moods." This is no doubt true of all authors, but it is so much truer of Hardy than most authors.

Hardy's personal views of humanity, life and the universe, and tragedy are very evident in his novels, and although these views may seem to be more related to his "philosophy" than to his aesthetics of the novel, they illustrate Hardy's concept of the novel as a very personal expression of the author. They also help explain various "Hardyesque" aspects of the novel such as his concern for characters of the lower classes, his portrayal of a bleak universe, and his concept of tragedy.

Hardy had a deep love for all of humanity because he recognized the common origin and destiny of all men. He also recognized that all men share the same emotions and passions regardless of social position:

All persons who have thoughtfully compared class with class--and the wider their experience the more pronounced their opinion--are convinced that education has as yet but little broken or modified the waves of human impulse on which deeds and words depend. So that in the portraiture of scenes in any way emotional or dramatic--the highest province of fiction--the peer and the peasant stand on much the same level; the woman who makes the satin train and the woman who wears it. In the lapse of countless ages, no doubt, improved systems of moral education will considerably and appreciably elevate even the involuntary instincts of human nature; but at present culture has only affected the surface of those lives with which it has come in contact, binding down the passions of those predisposed to turmoil as by a silken thread only, which the first ebullition suffices to break. With regard to what may be termed the minor key of action and speech--the unemotional,

every-day doings of men--social refinement operates upon character in a way which is oftener than not prejudicial to vigorous portraiture, by making the exteriors of men their screen rather than their index, as with untutored mankind.⁹

Hardy, of course, was more familiar with the peasant than he was the peer, and was following a writer's instinct to write about what he knows best when he wrote about rustics and villagers. But he was concerned, as this passage shows, with the lower classes for another reason: they possessed the same emotions and passions as the higher classes, and they did not mask their individuality or emotions. (Hardy told Edmund Blunden: "They are full of character, which is not to be found in the strained, calculating, unromantic middle classes."¹⁰ But while the peasants were picturesque to Hardy, they certainly were not grotesque. Concerning the illustrations that were to accompany the installments of Far From the Madding Crowd, he expressed his "hope that the rustics, although quaint, may be made to appear intelligent, and not boorish at all."¹¹

In a notebook entry for 1882, Hardy wrote about the theme that runs through the Wessex Novels: "the intense interests, passions, and strategy that throb through the commonest lives."¹² Hardy's characters are nearly all from the lower classes because he was concerned primarily with human nature,

⁹"The Profitable Reading of Fiction" (Orel, p. 124).

¹⁰Edmund Blunden, Thomas Hardy (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1951), p. 78.

¹¹Florence Emily Hardy, The Early Life of Thomas Hardy (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928), p. 128.

¹²Early Life, p. 199.

and, as Hardy said, "there was quite enough human nature in Wessex for one man's literary purpose."¹³ His "delicate purpose" in The Hand of Ethelberta was "to excite interest in a drama--if such a dignified word may be used in the connection--wherein servants were as important as, or more important than, their masters; wherein the drawing-room was sketched in many cases from the point of view of the servants' hall."¹⁴ The characters of the major novels are all of humble station, coming from either the lower or middle class. Jude is an orphan of obscure origins who never rises above the position of a workman. Tess, a dairymaid, is of peasant stock. Clym's family, although among the elite of Egdon Heath, is still an humble one. Oak is a shepherd and farmer who rises to be something of a gentleman farmer. Henchard represents the highest social order of Hardy's major characters, but even though he is a prosperous businessman and a mayor, he is of humble origins and does not rise to the level of anything like London society. Nowhere do we see characters and scenes of high society and the nobility. We see instead those characters and scenes which are "far from the madding crowd."

Another important aspect of Hardy's personal view of humanity is his belief that the author who has sympathy for human nature can better portray it. This is true because the novelist should be concerned with "the more ethereal

¹³General Preface to the Wessex Edition (Orel, p. 45).

¹⁴Preface to The Hand of Ethelberta (Orel, p. 11).

characteristics of humanity,"¹⁵ characteristics which need to be felt rather than observed:

A sight for the finer qualities of existence, an ear for the "still sad music of humanity," are not to be acquired by the outer senses alone, close as their powers in photography may be. What cannot be discerned by eye and ear, what may be apprehended only by the mental tactility that comes from a sympathetic appreciativeness of life in all of its manifestations, this is the gift which renders its possessor a more accurate delineator of human nature than many another with twice his powers and means of external observation, but with that sympathy. To see in half and quarter views the whole picture, to catch from a few bars the whole tune, is the intuitive power that supplies the would-be storywriter with the scientific bases for his pursuit. He may not count the dishes at a feast, or accurately estimate the value of the jewels in a lady's diadem; but through the smoke of those dishes, and the rays from these jewels, he sees written on the wall:--

We are such stuff
As dreams are made of, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.¹⁶

The author's power of feeling and his power of sympathy were to Hardy more important than the author's power of observation because human nature, rather than mere objects, was the main thing to be depicted. He felt that the realists were concerned with details simply for the sake of accurate reporting.

Hardy's sympathy and compassion extended down to the "common" man. He was especially concerned with the agricultural worker, and in "The Dorsetshire Labourer" he discussed many of the problems and hardships that the laborer faced. This discussion is without a trace of a condescending tone and reveals a genuine sympathy. Several of the peasant's problems which Hardy pointed out in "The Dorsetshire Labourer" were used in

¹⁵ "The Science of Fiction" (Orel, p. 137).

¹⁶ Ibid.

Tess and are ample evidence of his deep sympathy for the agricultural worker. For instance, the description of the threshing and the grueling labor necessary to feed the threshing machine is certainly one of his more compassionate pictures of country life. Another is the picture of the peasant family being forced from their land. Jack Durbeyfield's death caused the Durbeyfield family to lose their lease, and Hardy explained:

Tess's father's life had a value apart from his personal achievements....It was the last of three lives for whose duration the premises were held under a lease; and it had long been coveted by the tenant-farmer for his regular labourers, who were stinted in cottage accommodations. Moreover, "liviers" were disapproved of in villages almost as much as little free-holders, because of their independence of manner, and when a lease determined it was never renewed.¹⁷

Hardy continued in the following chapter:

These families, who had formed the backbone of the village in the past, who were the depositaries of the village traditions, had to seek refuge in the large centres; the process, humourously designated by statisticians as "the tendency of the rural population towards the large towns," being really the tendency of water to flow uphill when forced by machinery.¹⁸

This up-rooting of families from land which they had lived on and worked all their lives was a very sad thing to Hardy, and he showed how distressing such an up-rooting can be to those of advanced age in An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress.

In addition to his concern for the agricultural worker, Hardy expressed a deep sympathy for mankind in general in his emphasis on the human element in the story. The mere presence of a human being, or even an object which can be associated

¹⁷Tess, Ch. 50.

¹⁸Tess, Ch. 51.

with humanity, was enough to arouse in Hardy tender feelings, as if the slightest hint of humanity were enough to remind him of man's mortality and basically pitiful condition. Thus the human element is far superior to things and objects:

An object or mark raised or made by man on a scene is worth ten times any such formed by unconscious Nature. Hence clouds, mists, and mountains are unimportant beside the wear on a threshold or the print of a hand.¹⁹

Hardy did not simply describe details but showed the relationship between those objects and the characters in the story. A rather long notebook entry reveals his concern with the human element.

The method of Boldini, the painter of "The Morning Walk" in the French Gallery two or three years ago (a young lady beside an ugly blank wall on an ugly highway)--of Hobbema, in his view of a road with formal lopped trees and flat tame scenery--is of that infusing emotion into the baldest external objects either by the presence of a human figure among them, or by mark of some human connection with them.

This accords with my feeling about, say, Heidelberg and Baden versus Scheveningen--as I wrote at the beginning of The Return of the Native--that the beauty of association is entirely superior to the beauty of aspect, and a beloved relative's old battered tankard to the finest Greek vase. Paradoxically put, it is to see the beauty in ugliness.²⁰

Hardy's reference to The Return of the Native concerns the description of "haggard" Egdon Heath. Egdon--massive, majestic, brown, monotonous--is certainly as ugly as Boldini's ugly wall and highway, and it has its own kind of beauty:²¹ "The qualifications which frequently invest the facade of a prison with

¹⁹Early Life, p. 153.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 157-158.

²¹Hardy wrote in his notebook: "To find beauty in ugliness is the province of the poet" (Early Life, p. 279).

far more dignity than is found in the facade of a palace double its size lent to this heath a sublimity in which spots for beauty of the accepted kind are utterly wanting."²² But Egdon has another kind of beauty, though, which comes from its relationship to humanity. Just as Boldini infused emotion into his picture by showing a young lady amid ugliness, Hardy infused emotion into his picture of Egdon by placing humanity upon the scene. The entire first chapter is a description of the heath; the second chapter ("Humanity Appears on the Scene, Hand in Hand With Trouble") introduces humanity by showing the old man walking along the road.²³ As the story unfolds we learn about the old man and the other characters, but we never completely forget Egdon. It seems as if Hardy tried to contrast the inanimate and unfeeling objects with the living and feeling man.

Hardy's personal view of life and the universe also influenced his stories, and accounts for his so-called pessimism and his bleak universe. It seems that he learned from his mother a certain fatalistic outlook. A notebook entry for October 30, 1870, is very revealing: "Mother's notion (and also mine)--that a figure stands in our van with arm uplifted, to knock us back from any pleasant prospect we indulge in as probable."²⁴ Such a notion is surely indicative of a temperament conditioned to see the unhappy aspects of life, and sets

²²The Return of the Native, Bk. I, Ch. 1.

²³A number of Hardy's novels begin with a figure on a road.

²⁴Evelyn Hardy, ed., Thomas Hardy's Notebooks (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), p. 32.

definite limitations on the possibility of human happiness. This notion was undoubtedly reinforced by the fatalistic outlook of the Dorset peasants who could accept trouble and misfortune as simply part of life, something that was meant to be. Christian Cantle in The Return of the Native, asked why he voluntarily revealed that he was a man whom no woman would marry, replies: "'Twas to be if 'twas, I suppose."²⁵ And Clym, worried about the troubled relationship between his mother and Eustacia, says: "Well, what must be will be."²⁶

It seems that Hardy felt that perfect happiness was not possible because man has the ability to visualize the perfect, but the inherent order of things does not allow the perfect to exist. In short, man is an idealist, but the universe does not contain the ideal. This discrepancy between the expected and the real causes disappointment. Two notebook entries show Hardy's belief that happiness is not to be expected. First, he wrote: "This planet does not supply the materials for happiness to higher existencies. Other planets may, though one can hardly see how."²⁷ This same thought is echoed in Tess when Abraham asks Tess if the earth is a "splendid" world or a "blighted one"; she replies that the earth is a "blighted one."²⁸ Secondly, Hardy wrote: "These venerable philosophers

²⁵The Return of the Native, Bk. I, Ch. 3.

²⁶The Return of the Native, Bk. IV, Ch. 2.

²⁷Early Life, p. 286.

²⁸Tess, Ch. 4.

[Hegel and others] seem to start wrong; they cannot get away from a prepossession that the world must somehow have been made to be a comfortable place for man."²⁹

The world of Hardy's novels is certainly not a comfortable one for man, and it is to some degree blighted. Man's best laid schemes seem always to go awry for one reason or another, causing the characters to feel as if they are being punished by some unknown force. Eustacia exclaims:

"How I have tried and tried to be a splendid woman, and how destiny has been against me!...I do not deserve my lot!" she cried in a frenzy of bitter revolt. "O, the cruelty of putting me into this ill-conceived world! I was capable of much; but I have been injured and blighted and crushed by things beyond my control! O, how hard it is of Heaven to devise such tortures for me, who have done no harm to Heaven at all!"³⁰

And after the deaths of her children, Sue cries in despair to Jude:

"There is something external to us which says, 'You sha'n't!' First it said, 'You sha'n't learn!' Then it said, 'You sha'n't labor!' Now it says, 'You sha'n't love.'"³¹

Henchard too "could not help thinking that the concatenation of events this evening had produced was the scheme of some sinister intelligence bent on punishing him."³² To be sure, these are not Hardy's words but his characters', but the fact remains that the world is uncomfortable enough for them to feel as if there were some sinister force working against them. The closing

²⁹Early Life, p. 234.

³⁰The Return of the Native, Bk. V, Ch. 7.

³¹Jude, Pt. VI, Ch. 2.

³²The Mayor of Casterbridge, Ch. 19.

words of The Mayor of Casterbridge are those of the author speaking of Elizabeth-Jean, whose experience "seemed to teach that happiness was but the occasional episode in a general drama of pain," and in the preface to The Woodlanders Hardy spoke of life as a "brief transit through this sorry world."³³ The words of his characters, then, reflect the same thoughts that he himself expressed.

But Hardy recognized that although at times it might seem as if there is a force working against man, events developed from purely natural causes. The universe was an indifferent and impersonal universe (as opposed to a universe ruled by a benevolent and omnipotent power which sees the fall of a sparrow) which did not take into account man's happiness or unhappiness. Thus Hardy was prompted to write that "The world does not despise us; it only neglects us."³⁴ This neglect is one cause for the pervading gloom in Hardy's novels. Even in Far From the Madding Crowd, one of his more "happy" novels, there is little real joy and gusto for life. If anyone achieves happiness, it is Oak; but his impassive nature seems to allow him to avoid unhappiness rather than actively achieve and enjoy happiness. There hangs over the whole story a note of mute resignation. In the later novels this gloomy atmosphere is more noticeable, and we almost become convinced, as are many of the characters, that the world of Wessex is one in which life is "a thing to be

³³Preface to The Woodlanders (Orel, p. 20).

³⁴Early Life, p. 63.

put up with."³⁵ The world of Wessex, then, is unique in its particular gloomy atmosphere and the fatalistic outlook of its inhabitants. Unrestrained joy and bright-eyed optimism are foreign to Wessex because Hardy's personal views of life and the universe color his creation, making it somber and impassive.

Hardy's personal views of tragedy greatly influenced his stories because he was essentially a tragedian. He realized that he, as an individual, was predisposed to select certain things to present in his stories:

As, in looking at a carpet, by following one colour a certain pattern is suggested, by following another colour, another; so in life the seer should watch that pattern among general things which his idiosyncrasy moves him to observe, and describe that alone.³⁶

Hardy's idiosyncrasy moved him to observe and describe the tragic pattern of life:

Differing natures find their tongue in the presence of differing spectacles. Some natures become vocal at tragedy, some are made vocal by comedy, and it seems to me that to whichever of these aspects of life a writer's instinct for expression the more readily responds, to that he should allow it to respond. That before a contrasting side of things he remains undemonstrative need not be assumed to mean that he remains unperceiving.³⁷

Hardy here was defending his decision to present the unhappy aspects of life which many readers felt was too gloomy and too depressing. But he felt that he was merely expressing the views of the age and the thoughts of his contemporaries, and not necessarily his own peculiar view of life.

³⁵The Return of the Native, Bk. III, Ch. 1.

³⁶Early Life, p. 198.

³⁷General Preface to the Wessex Edition (Orel, p. 49).

Hardy apparently believed that life in the nineteenth century was growing more melancholy and tragic in nature. One possible reason, of course, is the loss of religious faith which we usually associate with the late nineteenth century; Hardy was well acquainted with The Origin of the Species and Essays and Reviews and became an agnostic by the time he was thirty years old. In Tess, Hardy described Angel Clare as one who was "wonderfully free from the chronic melancholy which is taking hold of the civilized races with the decline of belief in a beneficent Power."³⁸

Hardy definitely saw life as becoming increasingly tragic in aspect. Tess's dejection is described as "feelings which might almost have been called those of the age--the ache of modernism."³⁹ And when Jude tries to console Sue after the boy called Little Father Time had hanged the other two children and himself, he tells her:

It was his nature to do it. The doctor says there are such boys springing up amongst us--boys of a sort unknown in the last generation--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. He says it is the beginning of the universal wish not to live.⁴⁰

In The Return of the Native--which is pervaded by a sense of life growing more grim, austere, and tragic--Clym's countenance is described as resembling the countenance of the future:

In Clym Yeobright's face could be dimly seen the typical countenance of the future. Should there be a classic

³⁸Tess, Ch. 18.

³⁹Tess, Ch. 19.

⁴⁰Jude, Pt. VI, Ch. 2.

period to art hereafter, its Pheidias may produce such faces. The view of life as a thing to be put up with, replacing that zest for existence, which was so intense in early civilizations, must ultimately enter so thoroughly into the constitution of the advanced races that its facial expression will become accepted as a new artistic departure. People already feel that a man who lives without disturbing a curve of feature, or setting a mark of mental concern anywhere upon himself, is too far removed from modern perceptiveness to be a modern type.⁴¹

Hardy saw man's nature as already tragic and becoming more and more in harmony with the tragic spirit. He apparently believed that the great tragedies of the Periclean and Elizabethan ages were the result of a certain temper and way of thinking. He was convinced that the Victorian age was approaching that same tragic temper and should be reflected in the novel. The method which he felt was "most in accordance with the views themselves" was "by a procedure mainly impassive in its tone and tragic in its developments."⁴²

Tragic developments, Hardy believed, could result from three main causes: the universe, man's institutions, and man's passions. He did not see any one of these three causes as more important than the others, but he did at various times emphasize different ones. In his notes he defined tragedy in various ways. He once wrote: "Tragedy may be created by an opposing environment either of things inherent in the universe, or human institutions."⁴³ Another time he emphasized man's passions:

⁴¹The Return of the Native, Bk. III, Ch. 1.

⁴²"The Science of Fiction" (Orel, p. 126).

⁴³Florence Emily Hardy, The Later Years of Thomas Hardy (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1930), p. 44.

"A plot, or tragedy, should arise from the gradual closing in of a situation that comes of ordinary human passions, prejudices, and ambitions, by reason of the characters taking no trouble to ward off the disastrous events produced by the said passions, prejudices, and ambitions."⁴⁴ In practice, Hardy usually used all three causes in combinations of varying emphasis.

The universe can cause a tragic development because it is indifferent to the fate of individuals and allows blind chance, or fate, to become a tragic force. The universe is not ruled by an evil power, as many of Hardy's characters feel, but is simply an indifferent universe which is oblivious to man and his quest for happiness. Blind chance, not some sinister intelligence, contributes to the downfall of the protagonist. Chance causes Tess's "confession" in the form of a letter to Angel to slip under the carpet and go undiscovered. Had Angel found the letter, the chances are that he would have forgiven Tess; but instead the letter goes undiscovered, making Tess's and Angel's bitter separation inevitable. Similarly, the minor character Fanny Robin in Far From the Madding Crowd misses her chance for happiness and insures her miserable death (as well as the misery of Troy and Bathsheba) by mistaking the church in which she is to marry Troy. Her late arrival causes Troy to spurn her, making possible the romance between Troy and Bathsheba. Similar instances of chance or fate causing misfortune in the Wessex are numerous and often strain credibility, but this is

⁴⁴Early Life, p. 157.

consistent with Hardy's belief that there is no rational basis to the universe (at least as far as man is concerned) and that man is often a victim of this indifferent universe. Hardy commented on Tess's seduction:

But, might some say, where was Tess's guardian angel? Where was the providence of her simple faith? Perhaps, like that other god of whom the ironical Tishbite spoke, he was talking, or he was pursuing, or he was in a journey, or he was sleeping, and not to be awaked.⁴⁵

Tess does not have a guardian angel to look after her; instead, chance repeatedly throws her into the company of Alex, making possible her seduction. And as usual in Wessex, chance and fate work against the character rather than for the character. Seldom does chance bring happiness.

Man's institutions can also cause tragic developments, especially those based upon laws which are "framed merely as social expedients by humanity, without a basis in the heart of things,"⁴⁶ that is, those laws which are not based upon natural law. Jude shows three institutions which could have had a firmer base in reality: the English university, orthodox Christianity, and marriage. All three institutions help defeat Jude, but marriage is perhaps the most vigorously attacked by Hardy, and is the object of attack in other Hardy novels. Hardy was quick to point out that the attack on marriage in Jude was made by the characters and not the author, but it is obvious that he was trying to point out some of the weaknesses of that institution.

⁴⁵Tess, Ch. 11.

⁴⁶"Candour in English Fiction" (Orel, p. 127).

Outmoded concepts of marriage, as Jude's girl Sue repeatedly points out, make marriage an unbearable yoke of servility for the woman, with the husband as the dominating master. Such a relationship stifles affection, whereas a relationship more like a partnership is conducive to free exchange of love between the two persons. Sue tells Jude that the incompatibility of their natures would destroy their affection for each other after marriage:

The intention of the marriage contract is good, and right for many, no doubt; but in our case it may defeat its own ends, because we are the queer sort of people we are--folk in whom domestic ties of a forced kind snuff out cordiality and spontaneousness.⁴⁷

Marriage and other institutions contribute to Jude's defeat, but are not the sole cause, for he himself must bear a part of the blame. Jude has only a vague awareness of the part society played in his downfall, and tells the crowd in his harangue:

I perceive there is something wrong somewhere in our social formulas: What it is can only be discovered by men or women with greater insight than mine--if, indeed, they discover it--at least in our time.⁴⁸

Jude has found--though he only dimly perceives it--that many of the institutions are too far removed from the real world of men. They are not based upon natural law and work against him.

Man's passions can also cause tragic developments because they cannot be satisfied. Man, like Carlyle's bootblack who, not satisfied with half the world, must have the other half too, has infinite desires. A notebook entry reveals that Hardy

⁴⁷Jude, Pt. V, Ch. 4.

⁴⁸Jude, Pt. VI, Ch. 1.

blamed "Law" for giving man emotions, ambitions, and desires which cannot be fulfilled:

After infinite trying to reconcile a scientific view of life with the emotional and spiritual, so that they may not be interdestructive I come to the following:

General Principles. Law has produced in man a child who cannot but constantly reproach its parent for doing much and yet not all, and constantly say to such parent that it would have been better never to have begun doing than to have overdone so indecisively; that is, than to have created so far beyond all apparent first intention (on the emotional side), without mending matters by a second intent and execution, to eliminate the evils of the blunder of overdoing. The emotions have no place in a world of defect, and it is a cruel injustice that they should have developed in it.⁴⁹

Law has given man passions and desires, but "has provided no adequate satisfactions."⁵⁰ We do see some desires fulfilled, such as Oak's finally becoming a prosperous farmer and his winning of Bathsheba, but for the most part, human aims, desires, and passions go unfulfilled.

Jude, as Hardy pointed out in the preface, is in part a "tragedy of unfulfilled aims." Jude desires to be a scholar but cannot gain admission to the university. He is exceptional enough to have a zeal for learning and to have high goals, but he is not exceptional enough to reach these goals. Failing to become a scholar and churchman (he thought of being a bishop), Jude tries to enter the Church at a lower level as a licenciate, but soon realizes that he is ruled by human desires, burns his theological books, and abandons his plans for the Church. At this point Jude realizes that his attraction to women has severely hindered him in fulfilling his ambition to rise above

⁴⁹Early Life, p. 192.

⁵⁰Early Life, p. 213.

his obscure origins. His attraction and marriage to Arabella all but checked his scholarly progress; his attraction to Sue overshadowed his spiritual desires. He then renounces all ambition and attempts to live the simple life of a stonemason with Sue, but in this he also fails. His every ambition and desire is denied, and he dies repeating in bitterness the words of Job: "Let the day perish wherein I was born...." His passions, in combination with the nature of the universe and man's institutions, have contributed significantly to his downfall.

The world of Wessex abounds with tragic situations because Hardy chose to be a tragedian. He felt that tragedy was the best method to express the views of the age because man's nature was growing more melancholy and tragic in aspect. Tragic developments in Wessex arise mainly from three things: the universe, man's institutions, and man's passions. Hardy usually used all three in combination to defeat his protagonist and show the tragic nature of life.

We have seen that Hardy was primarily a tale-teller, and since the tale-teller "looks upon the world with his personal eyes and in his peculiar moods," Hardy's personal views greatly influenced his stories. He saw the passions as a common basis for all humanity. Because the lower classes possessed these passions but did not mask their individuality, they were to Hardy the best subjects for the novel. He also felt that the novelist who was in sympathy with human nature could better depict it and that this was the highest province of fiction. He saw the universe as an uncomfortable place for man because

it was an indifferent universe which allowed blind chance to become a tragic force. He saw life as becoming more and more tragic in nature, with tragic developments resulting chiefly from the indifferent universe, man's institutions, and man's passions. Serious fiction therefore should exhibit the tragic nature of man.

CHAPTER III

THE STORY

Hardy believed that the author colors the story, and from this intimate relationship between the author and his story we can see several characteristics which Hardy felt a story should possess. The story should first of all be concerned with man's tragic nature, with emphasis on human feelings and emotions. The story should also deal with the lower classes of people who do not mask their individuality, and take into account the indifferent universe in which blind chance seems to work against man.

But he also believed that a story should possess three other important qualities. The story should be unusual and interesting, providing the reader with some measure of entertainment. The story should not, however, be so unusual that credibility is lost; it must be believable. And the story should provide the reader with some moral or mental "profit" by giving a lesson in life.

For Hardy, the question of a story being interesting was very important. He felt that an uninteresting story would very likely remain unfinished, or if it were finished by a persevering reader, it would fail to make a lasting impression in his mind. But while Hardy placed a high value on the

story's being interesting, he did not feel that the events of a story should be merely sensational. From his experience with motion pictures, which he described as "unfortunate," he seems to have condemned the movies for being essentially the exhibition of the sensational. He told his friend Vere Collins: "There always seem to be motorcars rushing over cliffs and people jumping out of windows."¹ Rather than the interest being generated by isolated events, the interest should be generated by the story as a whole. Thus, the story, or plot, must be unusual and extraordinary.

Because Hardy was convinced that the story should definitely be interesting, and therefore uncommon and unusual, it is not surprising that William Dean Howells' "realism of the commonplace" struck Hardy as being uninteresting and inadequate; he felt that "Howells and those of his school forget that a story must be striking enough to be worth the telling."² Along with Howells, he also considered Henry James as one whose stories were not "striking enough to be worth the telling." A notebook entry for February 23, 1893, succinctly expresses his conception of the story:

A story must be exceptional enough to justify its telling. We tale-tellers are all Ancient Mariners, and none of us [i.e., any novelist] is warranted in stopping Wedding Guests (in other words the hurrying public) unless he has

¹Vere H. Collins, Talks With Thomas Hardy at Max Gate--1920-1922 (New York: Doubleday, Doran, and Company, Inc., 1928), p. 3.

²Florence Emily Hardy, The Early Life of Thomas Hardy (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928), p. 314.

something more unusual to relate than the ordinary experience of every average man and woman.³

As far as the plot is concerned, then, Hardy rejected the common.

But while man has a love for the uncommon, he also has a love for verisimilitude; he wants a certain amount of what is "real" or believable. Too much of the uncommon in a tale would make it unbelievable. The problem of the novelist, then, as Hardy saw it, was to find the proper balance between the uncommon and the common, the interesting and the believable. He stated the problem, and solution, in this manner:

The real, if unavowed, purpose of fiction is to give pleasure by gratifying the love of the uncommon in human experience, mental or corporeal.

This is done all the more perfectly in proportion as the reader is illuded to believe the personages true and real like himself.

Solely to this latter end a work of fiction should be a precise transcript of ordinary life: but,

The uncommon would be absent and interest lost. Hence,

The writer's problem is, how to strike the balance between the uncommon and the ordinary so as on the one hand to give interest, and on the other, reality.

In working out this problem, human nature must never be made abnormal, which is introducing incredibility. The uncommonness must be in the events, not in the characters; and the writer's art lies in shaping the uncommonness while disguising its unlikelihood, if it be unlikely.⁴

It is clear from this extremely important notebook entry that Hardy believed that in addition to being interesting, a story should be convincing; the interest should be generated by the plot, which contains the uncommon and unusual, and the

³Florence Emily Hardy, The Later Years of Thomas Hardy (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1930), pp. 15-16.

⁴Early Life, pp. 193-194.

credibility should come from the characterization.

This assigning of a specific function to both plot and characterization is one of the major ideas in Hardy's theory of the novel. He believed that all persons, from whatever walk of life, share a common humanity; therefore, any portrayal of a character which is not true to human nature would be immediately recognized as false and unbelievable. For this reason, the element of credibility in a story must come from characterization, or the portrayal of human nature. On the other hand, no one person can have intimate knowledge of all the events which are possible in this world, so the reader can more easily accept a strange event than a case of strange human nature. The reader should accept events in the story which might be improbable, because they could very well have occurred outside his realm of experience; what seems strange to one might be familiar to another. Hardy's belief here in the possibility of all things is clear enough: "Though a good deal is too strange to be believed, nothing is too strange to have happened."⁵ The element of strangeness or uncommonness in a story should, therefore, come from the events.

Hardy's interest in the element of the unusual in his own novels has caused him to receive severe criticism from those readers who find the events a bit too unusual to be believable. There probably is not one of the Wessex Novels which does not contain some events which the average reader finds difficult to accept. But Hardy's belief that a novel should be interesting

⁵Evelyn Hardy, ed., Thomas Hardy's Notebooks (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), p. 35.

at least partially explains the problem of probability in his novels, believing as he did that "nothing is too strange to have happened."

The Mayor of Casterbridge is often singled out and condemned for its outlandish plot and its numerous improbabilities; it is also the novel which Hardy has most frequently commented on in regard to plot and probability. He acknowledged that the plot of The Mayor might indeed contain too many events, but felt "that it was quite coherent and organic, in spite of its complications."⁶ He partially blamed the necessity of writing for serial publication for the somewhat improbable plot, saying that he tried to stimulate and sustain the reader's interest by having an incident in each installment. Undoubtedly, serial publication influenced many of his works to a great extent, but the fact remains that Hardy did feel that the story must have an unusual plot in order to be interesting. In a notebook entry for January 2, 1886, he wrote:

The Mayor of Casterbridge begins today in the Graphic Newspaper, and Harpers Weekly--I fear it will not be so good as I meant, but after all, it is not improbabilities⁷ of incident but improbabilities of character that matters.

Here he discounts the improbabilities of incident, and maintains his belief that the characterization must be true. Hardy also explained to the reader in the preface to The Mayor that some of the improbabilities in the story were based on actual events:

The incidents narrated arise mainly out of three events, which chanced to range themselves in the order and at or about the intervals of time here given, in the real history

⁶Early Life, p. 235.

⁷Early Life, p. 231.

of the town called Casterbridge and the neighbouring country. They were the sale of a wife by her husband, the uncertain harvests which immediately preceded the repeal of the Corn Laws, and the visit of a Royal personage to the aforesaid part of England.⁸

These three events are unusual enough, but the story that Hardy built around these events is even more unusual.

Michael Henchard, a hay-trusser, in a perverse mood which has been heightened by the influence of rum, sells his wife Susan and young daughter to a sailor named Richard Newson. When he is again sober, Henchard sincerely regrets his mistake and tries to find his wife and daughter. After months of searching, he gives up. He vows to avoid strong drink for a period of twenty years.

Some eighteen years later, Susan and her nearly grown daughter return. Susan is now a "widow" because Newson has been lost at sea. The daughter, Elizabeth-Jane, knows only that Henchard is a distant relative by marriage. During these eighteen years Henchard, still a "bachelor," has become a prosperous grain dealer and mayor of Casterbridge. He meets a young Scot, Donald Farfrae, whom he likes and persuades to stay in Casterbridge to become his manager.

As always, Henchard wants to do the right thing, and he and Susan plan to marry after a feigned courtship. Henchard is actually obligated to marry Lucetta, a young lady from Jersey, but he feels his first duty is to his wife and daughter. Henchard and Susan finally marry, but Elizabeth-Jane is kept

⁸ Preface to The Mayor of Casterbridge (Orel, p. 18).

ignorant of Henchard's true relationship to her and her mother. Henchard understandably wants Elizabeth-Jane to change her name from Newson to Henchard.

Farfrae in the meantime has begun to take over Henchard's position as leader of the town, and finally leaves Henchard's employ to establish his own business as a grain dealer.

Susan dies, leaving Henchard a letter with the instructions "not to be opened until Elizabeth-Jane's wedding day." Henchard persuades Elizabeth-Jane to go ahead with the proposed name change by telling her that he is her real father, not Newson. That very night Henchard is moved to open the letter which Susan left him; when he does, he learns that Elizabeth-Jane is not, as he has supposed all along, his daughter. His daughter, also named Elizabeth-Jane, died shortly after Susan went with Newson.

Upon learning that Elizabeth-Jane is not his daughter, Henchard subconsciously rejects her, and their relationship becomes strained. When offered a position as companion to a rich young woman newly arrived in town, Elizabeth-Jane accepts. The rich young woman is Lucetta, who has learned of Susan's death and has come to Casterbridge in hopes of marrying Henchard.

Farfrae, calling on Elizabeth-Jane, meets Lucetta; each is attracted to the other. Lucetta's interest in Farfrae grows while her feeling for Henchard diminishes, but Henchard forces her to agree to marry him by threatening to reveal her past intimacies with him. While attending Petty Sessions, Henchard hears the case of an old woman accused of being a public

nuisance. She is the old furmity-woman who sold Henchard the furmity which made him drunk twenty years ago when he sold his wife and daughter. The woman recognizes Henchard and tells the story. No one is willing to believe her, but Henchard tells the people that the story is true. After hearing of this, Lucetta breaks her promise to Henchard and secretly marries Farfrae.

Henchard becomes pressed for money and finally goes bankrupt. Farfrae takes over his business and Farfrae and his new bride move into Henchard's old house, while Henchard is forced to work for Farfrae as a hay trusser. The term of Henchard's vow to avoid strong drink ends, and he begins to drink heavily. He sends Lucetta's old love letters to her (because she feared that he would show them to Farfrae), but the messenger opens the packet and the story of Henchard and Lucetta's past affair becomes known around town. During the Royal personage's visit to Casterbridge, Henchard foolishly approaches the coach and is pulled back by Farfrae, who is now mayor. This humiliating experience makes Henchard realize the extent to which he and Farfrae have changed places.

Some of the more unsavory citizens plan a "skimmity-ride," an old custom which was designed to inform a husband, in a very rude fashion, that his wife has had an affair before her marriage. This spectacle causes Lucetta to have an epileptic seizure and miscarriage, resulting in her death.

Henchard has seen his world slowly crumble away. Now Newson appears on the scene very much alive. Henchard tells him that Susan is dead and that Elizabeth-Jane died also. He

has come to love Elizabeth-Jane even though she is not his daughter, and he cannot bear the thought of losing her to Newson. Newson believes Henchard and leaves, but later returns; Henchard then leaves Casterbridge. Farfrae and Elizabeth-Jane marry, and Henchard dies a miserable and lonely death.

Clearly The Mayor is an unusual story that goes beyond the ordinary experience of the average person. It is much to Hardy's credit that many of the improbabilities are, in the context of the story, quite believable. During the course of the story, we are engrossed in the story and accept what otherwise might be regarded as unbelievable.

But while the events in the story are quite unusual, human nature remains "true"; that is, we recognize Henchard as another human being who is subject to the same natural laws and natural desires as we. The element of the common, then, comes from this characterization, and even though the events which happen are strange, Henchard's character is not strange or unbelievable. For the most part Henchard's behavior is predictable, and is, in any event, understandable. The strange events in the story reveal Henchard's character and a profound tragedy.

Hardy felt that the purpose of the novel was twofold: to provide entertainment and "intellectual or novel profit."⁹ "The Profitable Reading of Fiction" contains most of Hardy's ideas and comments on the purpose of fiction; in this article, he discussed the mental profit that might accrue to the reader

⁹"The Profitable Reading of Fiction" (Orel, p. 112); subsequent references to this article in this chapter will be cited parenthetically in the text.

of fiction. He recognized that many readers read for entertainment and are concerned with plot only. These readers seek that which "affords relaxation and relief when the mind is overstrained or sick of itself" (p. 111), and the profit that they seek is an escape from "over-work and carking care" (p. 112). This escape is accomplished by providing a contrast or change of scene. The city dweller finds some measure of relief in the stories of the country, and the village dweller finds his relief in the stories of aristocratic society. The change of scene is more effective if the reader is absorbed in the tale.

In discussing the less important purpose of fiction--entertainment--Hardy emphasized the importance of faith in the author. The reader who is reading for "hygienic purposes" should be willing to suspend his disbelief:

In other words, his author should be swallowed whole, like any other alternative pill. He should be believed in slavishly, implicitly. However profusely he may pour out his coincidences, his marvelous juxtapositions, his catastrophes, his conversions of bad people into good people at a stroke, and vice versa, let him never be doubted for a moment (p. 111).

In this statement we can see Hardy defending his own novels. In the novels which he classified as "novels of ingenuity" and "romances and fantasies," he probably expected a great deal of faith on the reader's part. He perhaps expected a little less confidence in his serious novels, those of "character and environment," but it is clear that he demanded more faith than many readers (and critics) were willing to give. Hardy expected the reader to accept the improbable events as being possible (after all, "nothing is too strange to have happened"), just

as the listener accepts the fireside tale.

The serious reader of a serious novel would, however, seek more than entertainment. Hardy felt that the true purpose of fiction was to provide the reader with some intellectual or moral profit, or to offer him "a lesson in life" (p. 114). This is not to say that the story is didactic, because the lesson in life should come from the "representations of life" and from the "elements essential to the narratives themselves and from the reflections they engender" (p. 114). Didactic editorializing and other appendages to the narrative clutter the story and detract from it. For instance, in the pig killing scene in Jude Hardy described the messy and cruel business of slaughtering pigs, but he did not pass any value judgment. If this scene helped the movement for the more humane treatment of animals, Hardy felt it was because it was an objective description rather than a moralizing tract.¹⁰ A didactic argument, he felt, could more effectively be put into an essay than into a piece of imaginative writing, and therefore has no place in a novel.

Hardy succeeded in the difficult task of providing a lesson in life without being didactic primarily by using the concrete universal, or to use his own words, "the general principle in the particular case" (p. 115). This allows the events in the story to tell the moral, or lesson, rather than the author.

¹⁰Carl J. Weber, ed., The Letters of Thomas Hardy (Waterville, Maine: Colby College Press, 1954), pp. 46-47.

Hardy cited a Biblical example of the general principle in the particular case:

Many elaborate reflections...have been composed by moralizing chroniclers on the effect of prosperity in blunting men's recollection of those to whom they had sworn friendship when they shared a hard lot in common. But the writer in Genesis who tells his legend of certain friends in such adverse circumstances, one of whom, a chief butler, afterward came to good fortune, and ends the account of this good fortune with the simple words, "Now the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him," brings out a dramatic sequence on ground prepared for assent, shows us the general principle in the particular case, and hence writes with a force beyond that of aphorism or argument. It is the force of an appeal to the emotional reason than to the logical reason (p. 115).

Since the novel is a representation of life, it appeals to the intuition and to the emotional reasoning; the teaching of the lesson in life results from the reader's "intuitive conviction" (p. 114).

One of the major characteristics of Hardy's fiction is this appeal to the reader's emotional reasoning; he dramatically presents life and the general principle in the particular case. One of Hardy's most dramatic episodes is Fanny Robin's walk to the Casterbridge Union in Far From the Madding Crowd.¹¹ Fanny continues her walk despite great obstacles, and she practices self-deception to force herself on:

She said again in the same tone, "I'll believe that the end lies five posts forward, and no further, and so get strength to pass them."

This was a practical application of the principle that a half-feigned and fictitious faith is better than no faith at all.

She passed five posts and held on to the fifth.

"I'll pass five more by believing my longed-for spot is at the next fifth. I can do it."

She passed five more.

¹¹Far From the Madding Crowd, Ch. 40.

"It lies only five further."
 She passed five more.
 "But it is five further."
 She passed them.

Fanny improvises a pair of crutches, uses the rails for support, uses a friendly dog for support, and does everything else in her power to reach her destination. This is a minor episode in the novel, but it shows one particular human being struggling against odds, struggling with dignity and determination, and finally succeeding. Thus, Fanny illustrates the general principles of perseverance.

On a larger scale, we can look at the major character in Far From the Madding Crowd. Gabriel Oak's silent and steadfast devotion to his ideals and to Bathsheba is demonstrated over and over. Just as his name implies, he endures and withstands, and eventually triumphs. Oak is the hero, Hardy's ideal of what a man should be, and is contrasted with the flamboyant Sergeant Troy. Oak's qualities, such as loyalty and sincerity, are revealed through his actions, and the reader sees that Oak is worthy of emulation. Hardy never tells the reader that these qualities are good; the reader sees for himself, and is convinced of the truth of the matter because the representation of life reinforces his convictions. Hardy gives the reader a representation which gives a lesson in life.

Hardy's theory of the story, then, centers on three main characteristics of the story. The story must be interesting by being unusual, but it must also be believable; the element of the unusual should come from the plot, and the element

of the common should come from characterization. Further, the story must provide some moral or mental profit by giving the reader a lesson in life.

CHAPTER IV

THE TELLING

There are two broad aspects of Hardy's fiction which seem to fall most logically under the "telling" of the story: candor and realism. Candor to Hardy was that quality of truthfulness which would enable the author to give a true representation of life. Realism to Hardy was his own particular brand that did not present "a slice of life," or a copy of reality, but rather the illusion of reality.

Hardy was very much concerned with sincerity and candor in fiction. Because he experienced difficulty in getting several of his novels published without first expurgating them of indelicate parts and still received censure from many critics and readers, Hardy was especially concerned with what appeared to him to be insincerity and "quackery"¹ in contemporary fiction. He believed that Victorian fiction did not give a true representation of life and did not express truly the views of the age. Since the purpose of the serious novel is to provide a lesson in life, the subject of the novel can be nothing less than life itself. The novel should give a "true exhibition of man"² and a "picture of life in action."³

¹"Candour in English Fiction" (Orel, p. 126).

²"The Profitable Reading of Fiction" (Orel, p. 115).

³"The Profitable Reading of Fiction" (Orel, p. 113).

Much of Hardy's difficulty with editors and critics came with the publications of Tess and Jude. In his effort to present life truthfully he dealt with the relations of the sexes and was censured for his candid treatment of that theme. Hardy had, of course, treated the relations of the sexes in the earlier novels but not so frankly as he did in Tess and Jude. To many Victorians the portraying of a "fallen" woman like Tess as "a pure woman"⁴ was unthinkable, and there were many episodes in both novels that were too delicate for fiction. For instance, in Tess, Alec's seduction of Tess and her living with him as his wife are situations which offended the Victorian sensibility. In Jude, Jude is seduced twice by Arabella, and Jude and Sue live together and have children without marrying.

Sensitive to public opinion, the editors and publishers of the period preferred to avoid anything that might cause a public outcry. The editors of the "family" magazines were particularly eager to avoid controversial material; the book publishers were only slightly more liberal in outlook. Tess and Jude were published serially in popular magazines before their publication in book form; the inevitable result was that the two versions differed greatly. The changes that Hardy made in the expurgation of the stories for serial publication affected many elements of the story, even sentence structure.⁵ One of

⁴The subtitle of Tess is "A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented."

⁵Mary Ellen Chase, Thomas Hardy From Serial to Novel (New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1965), pp. 69-180.

his better known concessions to Mrs. Grundy, which reveals the difficulty of pleasing the Victorian press, concerns an episode in Tess. In Chapter 23, Tess, Marian, Izz, and Retty are on their way to church and find themselves blocked by a place in the lane which had been washed out by summer rains. Angel comes upon the scene and proposes to carry the girls across the water. This he does, carrying each girl in his arms safely to the other side. In the serial version, however, Angel had to find another means of transporting the girls: he uses a wheelbarrow, wheeling each girl across the water. This change is, as Mary Chase writes, "an interesting example of the sacrifice of the aesthetic to the conventional."⁶ Hardy stoically commented on this change:

The editor objected to the description of Angel Clare carrying in his arms, across a flooded lane, Tess and her three dairymaid companions. He suggested that it would be more decorous and suitable for the pages of a periodical intended for family reading if the damsels were wheeled across the lane in a wheelbarrow. This was accordingly done.⁷

This one minor example gives us some understanding of Hardy's difficulty in giving a truthful representation of life.

⁶Chase, p. 86.

⁷Florence Emily Hardy, The Early Life of Thomas Hardy (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928), p. 315. It seems that Hardy was willing to please his editors even though it meant damaging the story. In a letter to Leslie Stephen, he wrote: "The truth is that I am willing, and indeed anxious, to give up any points which may be desirable in a story when read as a whole, for the sake of others which shall please those who read it in numbers. Perhaps I may have higher aims some day, and be a great stickler for the artistic balance of the completed work, but for the present circumstances lead me to wish merely to be considered a good hand at a serial" (Early Life, p. 131).

Hardy felt that fiction should deal with the relationship of the sexes because this relationship is a part of life; "Life being a physiological fact, its honest portrayal must be largely concerned with...the relations of the sexes."⁸ Any portrayal of human existence that does not take into account the sexual side of man and the influence it has on his life must be false to some degree. In Hardy's novels the process of human mating and the effect it has on the lives of the individuals is highlighted. For example, the life of Jude is very much affected by his sexual desires and marriages, and the same is true of Tess, Bathsheba, Clym, Eustacia, Fanny Robin, and many more of Hardy's characters. Hardy's stories are, in a very real sense of the word, love stories.

He believed that not only the sexual but all of man's passions should be treated frankly and realistically in fiction. This attitude arose from his belief that serious fiction should be concerned primarily with tragedy and that the passions were the heart of tragedy. For instance, Othello, Hamlet, and Antony and Cleopatra⁹ all show man destroyed by his passions (and are lessons in life). The violation of moral order is, then, essential to tragedy: "the crash of broken commandments is as necessary an accompaniment to the catastrophe of a tragedy as the noise of drum and cymbals to a triumphal march."¹⁰

⁸"Candour in English Fiction" (Orel, p. 127).

⁹Hardy cited these three tragedies as examples of the kind of literature which would not be tolerated "if they were issued as new fiction." ("Candour in English Fiction," Orel, p. 130).

¹⁰"Candour in English Fiction" (Orel, p. 129).

To be confined by convention was especially frustrating to Hardy because he felt that the novel must invariably deal with the passions and believable characters. Convention often forced characters, especially those which appeared in the family magazines, to act in an unbelievable manner; that is, they could not react to a given situation in a way that would be true to human nature. Hardy commented on this conflict that the writer in the Victorian period often faced:

What he often does, indeed can scarcely help doing...is, belie his literary conscience, do despite to his best imaginative instincts by arranging a denouement which he knows to be indescribably unreal and meretricious, but dear to the Grundyist and subscriber. If the true artist ever weeps it probably is then, when he first discovers the fearful price that he has to pay for the privilege of writing in the English language--no less a price than the complete extinction, in the mind of every mature and penetrating reader, of sympathetic belief in his personages.¹¹

Given a set of circumstances, a character very possibly would react in a way that would be "improper" yet true to human nature, and for Hardy, the element of credibility (the usual) came from the characters. Sincerity, then, was needed in fiction to give a true representation of life and believable characters.

Realism, the second aspect of telling a story, was to Hardy essentially the realism of illusion. He was a realist to the extent that he wanted enough details and particulars to give verisimilitude to the story, and a romanticist to the extent that the presentation of things were subordinate to the presentation of people and their feelings. In a notebook entry (1882) he wrote: "Coleridge says aim at illusion in audience or

¹¹"Candour in English Fiction" (Orel, p. 130).

readers--i.e., the mental state when dreaming, intermediate between complete delusion (which the French mistakenly aim at) and a clear perception of falsity."¹² He wanted the illusion of reality rather than the copy of reality because "nothing but the illusion of reality can permanently please."¹³

He agreed with Zola "that the novel should keep as close to reality as it can,"¹⁴ but felt that the realists were too much concerned with trivial details in their attempt to present a copy of life. He lamented the fact that the novel was becoming "a spasmodic inventory of items which has nothing to do with art"¹⁵ because he recognized the impossibility of the novelist's reproducing "in its entirety the phantasmagoria of experience with infinite and atomic truth, without shadow, relevancy, or subordination."¹⁶ Art is not reality but the illusion of reality; the artist must select his material from the plenitude of life and transform that material into an organic unity:

Art is a disproportioning--(i.e., distorting, throwing out of proportion)--of realities, to show more clearly the features that matter in those realities, which, if merely copied or reported inventorially, might possibly be observed, but would more probably be overlooked.¹⁷

Hardy's belief here is in accord with the Aristotelian concept

¹²Early Life, p. 197.

¹³"The Science of Fiction" (Orel, p. 135).

¹⁴"The Science of Fiction" (Orel, p. 135).

¹⁵Florence Emily Hardy, The Later Years of Thomas Hardy (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1930), p. 65.

¹⁶"The Science of Fiction" (Orel, p. 135).

¹⁷Later Years, p. 299.

of art being more truthful than either history or nature. In "The Profitable Reading of Fiction" (Orel, p. 117) he gave this example from sculpture:

No real gladiator ever died in such perfect harmony with normal nature as is represented in the well-known Capitoline marble. There was always a jar somewhere, a jot or tittle of something foreign in the real death-scene, which did not essentially appertain to the situation, and tended toward neutralizing its pathos; but this the sculptor omitted, and so consecrated his theme.

Thus the first step towards art is the selecting and ordering of experience.

Everything which the novelist chooses to present--every detail, every episode, and every character--should contribute to the exposition of the theme. As Samuel Chew said of Hardy, he "practices a rigid exclusion of non-essentials."¹⁸ All elements in the Wessex Novels work together toward a conclusion; none is superfluous because Hardy wanted the story to be an organism. He observed that Tom Jones, a novel frequently cited as a nearly perfect example of a tight plot, was not quite so closely knit as it might have been; The Bride of Lammermoor, however, he felt was very tightly structured and an "almost perfect specimen of form."¹⁹ This observation, incidentally, reflects a discerning critical faculty.

Dialect is another aspect of the novel in which Hardy aimed for the illusion of reality rather than reality itself. He felt that it was unnecessary and undesirable to copy the

¹⁸Samuel C. Chew, Thomas Hardy, Poet and Novelist (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), p. 95.

¹⁹"The Profitable Reading of Fiction" (Orel, p. 121).

sounds of the Wessex dialect. What he aimed for was, again, just enough of the specific and concrete to be "realistic," but he did not escape criticism. A reviewer for the Papers of the Manchester Literary Club wrote that Hardy was one of those novelists "whose thorough knowledge of the dialectical peculiarities of certain districts has tempted them to write whole conversations which are, to the ordinary reader, nothing but a series of linguistic puzzles, and probably...not really representative of the common speech 'at any particular time or place.'"²⁰ But it was what the character said rather than his manner of speech that was important to Hardy; he merely tried to suggest the sounds of the Wessex dialect:

In the printing of standard speech hardly any phonetic principle is at all observed; and if a writer attempts to exhibit on paper the precise accents of a rustic speaker he disturbs the proper balance of a true representation by unduly insisting upon the grotesque element, thus directing attention to a point of inferior interest, and diverting it from the speaker's meaning, which is by far the chief concern where the aim is to depict the men and their natures rather than their dialect forms.²¹

In this Hardy succeeds: the sounds of the dialect words do give the desired illusion of reality.

With the words themselves, though, it is usually a different matter because many of the words are stumbling blocks to the average reader. In the Modern Library Edition of Tess (1951) Carl J. Weber provides a glossary of Dorset words which are likely to give the reader trouble; the list includes such words as "azew," "plim," "mampus," "crumby," and "vles." Hardy

²⁰Quoted in Orel, p. 93.

²¹"Dialect in Novels" [1878] (Orel, p. 91).

felt it desirable to use such words because there were no synonyms to substitute for them:

The rule of scrupulously preserving the local idiom, together with the words which have no synonym among those in general use, while printing in the ordinary way most of those local expressions which are but a modified articulation of words in use elsewhere, is the rule I usually follow.²²

Hardy the realist reported fairly accurately the speech of the Wessex peasants; Hardy the romanticist kept the emphasis on the characters and their passions.

Hardy, then, was not a true realist, although he was sometimes criticized by his contemporaries for being too realistic (as in the pig killing scene in Jude, for example). He did not copy reality but aimed for the illusion of reality in his novels.

²²"Dialect in Novels" [1881] (Orel, p. 92).

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Hardy felt his way to a method, working, much like Mark Twain, by instinct rather than by a rigid set of logical rules. His statements concerning the novel and novel writing are few and they are scattered, but together they form a rather clear picture of his basic concept of the novel; they also help explain Hardy's intent in the Wessex novels. Much of what he has written was intended to be a defense of his own novels and aesthetics against the numerous attacks of both critics and readers.

Because Hardy viewed the novel as an extension of oral story-telling, his ideas can be grouped under three main headings: the author, the story, and the telling.

The author of a story necessarily influences the story because his temperament and personality color the story. Hardy's own personal views, especially his views of humanity, life and the universe, and tragedy, greatly influenced his novels. His love for humanity pervades the Wessex novels. The basis for his love of humanity was the fact that all men share a common origin, a common destiny, and common emotions. Since the emotional side of man is the important thing to be depicted, the lower classes were for Hardy suitable subjects for a story:

they had the emotions that every person had, but they did not mask them as the middle and upper classes did. Hardy showed his love for humanity in general by emphasizing human feelings and passions in his stories, and he displayed his regard for particular individuals and for the agricultural worker by his sympathetic treatment of those characters. Hardy's personal view of life and the universe also influenced his stories. His pessimistic and fatalistic outlook lends to his novels a characteristic gloom. There is no benevolent Power in Hardy's universe; instead there is an impersonal and indifferent universe fulfilling its own laws, oblivious to man's pitiful condition. Chance more often than not works against man's efforts to find happiness. Hardy's personal view influences his stories because he was essentially a tragedian. Some writers, he felt, were conditioned to see more clearly either the tragic or the comic aspects of life. His own idiosyncrasy moved him to observe and describe the tragic. For some reason, possibly the general loss of religious faith, Hardy saw the late nineteenth century as growing more and more grim, austere, and tragic.

Tragic developments, Hardy believed, could result from three main causes: the universe, man's institutions, and man's passions. The universe can cause tragedy because it is an indifferent universe which does not take into account man's happiness or unhappiness. Man's institutions can cause tragedy when those institutions are not based on natural law but "framed merely as social expedients."¹ Perhaps the institutions most

¹"Candour in English Fiction" (Orel, p. 127).

vigorously attacked by Hardy are orthodox Christianity and marriage. Man's passions can cause tragic developments simply because they cannot be satisfied. Hardy blamed "Law" (the controlling power in the universe) for giving man emotions, ambitions, and desires which cannot be fulfilled.

The story itself Hardy believed should possess three qualities. It should be interesting, it should be believable, and it should provide the reader with some moral or mental profit. To make the story interesting, Hardy used an unusual and complicated plot. To make the story believable, he used characters that were true to human nature and therefore true-to-life. Concerning The Mayor of Casterbridge Hardy wrote that "it is not improbabilities of incident but improbabilities of character that matters."² The purpose of the novel for Hardy was to provide the reader with some moral or mental profit. The lesson in life, however, should come from the narrative itself and not from didactic editorializing. To accomplish this Hardy showed the general principle in a specific case. The narrative would, for example, present a man like Gabriel Oak and show how his character and ideals were worthy of respect and emulation. But this we learn from the narrative, not from the author. The appeal is to the emotions rather than to the reason.

To Hardy the telling of a story should be characterized by two qualities: candor and realism. Candor was necessary to present a true picture of life. Victorian fiction, Hardy felt,

²Florence Emily Hardy, The Early Life of Thomas Hardy (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928), p. 231.

was insincere because it did not deal truthfully with such matters as the relations between the sexes. Any account of man which did not include this physiological fact would be, to some degree, false. Hardy recognized the tremendous influence that love can have on a man's existence, and so he emphasized this facet of life to the extent that we can, with some justification, call Hardy's novels love stories. Not only the sexual, however, but all of man's passions should be treated frankly and realistically because they are at the heart of tragedy. And if the characters are to be true to human nature, they must be allowed to act in accordance with it and not with convention. Convention often forced fictional characters to react to a given situation in a totally unbelievable manner.

Realism for Hardy was the realism of illusion. He wanted just enough details to give the appearance of reality, but he always emphasized human emotions and passions more than mere objects. He realized that an author cannot copy life exactly: he must choose and select those details that he needs to illustrate his theme. This ordering of experience is in effect a distortion of reality, but this distortion shows clearly what in real life may be obscure and go unnoticed. Thus the author shapes and orders experience into an organic unity that has the appearance of real life but which is actually a distortion of real life. Dialect is one area of the novel in which he aimed at the illusion of truth. Rather than copying the Wessex dialect, he used just enough dialect words and sounds to suggest the Wessex dialect. No attempt was made to

give an exact copy of the Wessex speech.

Hardy's somewhat random remarks about the novel necessarily give a partial picture of his aesthetics. If he had written something like James' Prefaces or Forster's Aspects of the Novel, we would no doubt have a more complete picture of his creed as a novelist. But even though the picture is necessarily incomplete, it does offer some insight into the basic aesthetics of a very influential novelist. And if one may judge from Hardy's continuing popularity and influence, his aesthetics must be generally sound.

Perhaps the single most important aspect of Hardy's aesthetics is his belief that human nature is the highest province of fiction. He was convinced that the most accurate portrayal of human nature as by those who were in sympathy with it. The novel would, then, be chiefly concerned with "the more ethereal characteristics of humanity," those characteristics that a camera cannot capture in a photograph:

What cannot be discerned by ear and eye, what may be approached only by the mental tactility that comes from a sympathetic appreciativeness of life in all of its manifestations, this is the gift which renders its possessor a more accurate delineator of human nature than many another with twice his powers and means of external observation, but without that sympathy.³

Perhaps the anecdote with which Hardy closed "The Science of Fiction" best expresses his concern for human nature, which to Hardy was the heart of the novel. No other single statement seems to offer as much insight into Hardy's concept of what the

³"The Science of Fiction" (Orel, p. 137).

novel should be:

Once in a crowd a listener heard a needy and illiterate woman saying of another poor and haggard woman who had lost her little son years before: "You can see the ghost of that child in her face even now."

That speaker was one who, though she could probably neither read nor write, has the true means towards the "Science" of Fiction innate within her; a power of observation informed by a living heart. Had she been trained in the technicalities, she might have fashioned her view of mortality with good effect; a reflection which leads to a conjecture that, perhaps, true novelists, like poets, are born, not made.⁴

⁴"The Science of Fiction" (Orel, p. 13). Several notebook entries reveal Hardy's concern with the emotions as a basis for art. In 1886 he wrote: "My art is to intensify the expression of things as done by Crivelli, Bellini, etc., so that the heart and inner meaning is made vividly visible" (Early Life, pp. 231-32). In retrospect (1897) he wrote that he "had mostly aimed at keeping his narratives close to natural life and as near to poetry in their subject as conditions would allow" (Later Years, p. 65).

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