

SOME ASPECTS OF HARDY'S NOVELS



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ABSTRACT



This thesis deals with some aspects of Hardy's fourteen novels. The aspects that are discussed here are the themes, plots and characters. The themes are divided into three main ones: the theme of fate, the relationships between people and the loneliness of exceptional characters. The plots are treated under two categories: realistic, including naturalistic, and non-realistic, and lastly the characters are treated under two headings: nature as a character and individual human characters.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter I Themes.....	4
Chapter II Plots.....	39
Chapter III Characters.....	73
Conclusion.....	127
Footnotes.....	134
Bibliography.....	142

INTRODUCTION



Hardy himself has given us a definition of his aims as a novelist. In some notes written in 1881 he laid down the principles which, at that time, he was trying to follow:

The real, if unavowed, purpose of fiction is to give pleasure by gratifying the love of the uncommon in human experience, mental and 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 the 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, on the other to give 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 showing that uncommonness while disguising its unlikelihood, if it be unlikely.¹

I shall try to show that he is faithful to these principles. His novels show a continuous development of ideas and of treatment, and the last are the most powerful and the most revealing of his philosophy.

Hardy's novels can be divided into three types. Firstly, there are the Novels of Character and Environment, which include: Under the Greenwood Tree (1872), Far from the Madding Crowd (1874), The Return of the Native (1878), The Mayor of Casterbridge (1886), The Woodlanders (1887),

Tess of the D'Urbervilles (1891), Life's Little Ironies (1894), and Jude the Obscure (1896). These novels place their emphasis on character, personality, scenery, country life and work.

The second group is that of Romances and Fantasies: A Pair of Blue Eyes (1873), The Trumpet-Major (1880), Two on a Tower (1882), A Group of Noble Dames (1891), and The Well-Beloved (1892). These novels have non-realistic plots so that ideas can be expressed freely.

Thirdly, there are the Novels of Ingenuity: Desperate Remedies (1871), The Hand of Ethelberta (1876), and A Laodicean (1881). These are stories in which the plot is the most important thing.

Hardy's novels were all written between 1871 and 1894. He started writing them when he was 31 and stopped when he was 54, to return to poetry which was his first and last love, for he considered himself a poet rather than a novelist. Although he undoubtedly became a serious novelist, economic necessity was one of the main reasons for his turning to the novel and his long concentration on it. His interest and his theories developed as he used the novel form.

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; so little indeed, that at one of the brief literary lectures, or speeches, he had occasionally delivered to Blomfield's pupils in a spare halfhour of an afternoon he had expressed to their astonishment an indifference to a popular novelist's fame.²

His wife also says that "his mind had been given in the main to poetry and other forms of pure literature."³ She adds further that when he finished The Mayor of Casterbridge "he called his novel writing 'mere journeywork' he cared little about it as art, though it must be said in favour of the plot, as he admitted later, that it was quite coherent and organic, in spite of its complication."⁴