Chapter – I

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1.1: THE REGIONAL NOVEL

The regional novel is a derivative of the social novel that focuses on specific features— including characters, dialects, customs, history and topography— of a particular region. Literally, the term region means 'a fairly large area of a country, usually without exact limit, a part of a country that is away from the capital city', and regional refers to 'that which is connected to a particular region'.¹ Oxford English dictionary defines region as 'a large area of land, usually without exact limits or borders' or 'One of the area that a country is divided into, that has its own customs and/or its own government', and regional as 'relating to or characteristic of a region'.² Hence regional novel delineates the life of people in a particular place— focusing on customs and speech— to demonstrate how environment influences its inhabitants.

Several attempts have been made to define regional novel by various scholars. M. Drabble refers it as novels set in a real and well-defined locality, which is in some degree strange to the reader. She added that from about 1839, the localities described in regional novels were often smaller and more exact. Later novelists became ever more interested in precise regional attachment and description.³ F.W.Morgan stressed the novel’s absorption, and not merely interest, in a particular locality. Arguing that the area of a regional novel must not be too small he continues ‘The true regional novel has people at work as an essential

¹ Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, p.1190
² Oxford Advanced Lerner’s Dictionary (Sixth Edition), p.1069
³ Drabble, M. (ed): The Oxford Companion to English Literature p.816
material: it has become almost the epic of the labour.' Thus the regional novel produces a synthesis, a living picture of the unity of place and people, through work and with regard to landscape it provides an atmosphere which is not transferable. K.D.M. Snell provides a more composite view on regional novels. By regional novel, Snell means fiction that is 'set in a recognizable region, and which describes features distinguishing the life, social relations, customs, language, dialect, or other aspects of the culture, of that area and its people. Fiction with a strong sense of local geography, topography or landscape is also covered by this definition.  

A Regional Novel is the product of its fidelity to a particular geographical section, accurately representing its habits, speech, manners, history, folklore or beliefs. According to M.H. Abrams a regional novel emphasizes the setting, speech and social structure and customs of a particular locality, not merely as local colour, but as important conditions affecting the temperament of the characters and their ways of thinking, feeling, and interacting. Famous literary critic and regional novelist Phyllis Bentley highlights that the regional novel concentrates on a particular part, a particular region of a nation, depicts the life of that region in such a way that the reader is conscious of its characteristics which are unique to that region and differentiate it from other common motherland. In one sense, the test of regionalism is that the action and the personages cannot be moved, without major loss or distorting, to any other geographical setting.

In such writing a particular place or regional culture may perhaps be used to illustrate an aspect of life in general, or the effects of a particular environment

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5. Snell, K. D. M. (Edited): The Regional Novel in Britain and Ireland, p. 1
upon the people living in it. And one usually expects to find out certain characteristics in a regional novel: description of a place, setting or region, whether rural or urban, which bears approximation to a real place; characters usually drawn from working or middle class origin; dialogue representation with some striving realism; and attempted verisimilitude.  

Although regional novel is the novel which depicts the physical feature, life, customs, manners, history etc. of some particular region or locality, this does not mean that regionalism is mere factual reporting and photographic reproduction. The regional artist emphasises the unique features of a particular locality, its uniqueness, the various ways in which it differs from other localities. But as in all other arts, so also in regional art, there is a constant selection and ordering of material. In other words, regional art is also creative. Through proper selection and ordering of his material the novelist stresses the distinctive spirit of his chosen region and shows, further, that life in its essentials is the same everywhere. The differences are used as means of revealing similarities; from the particular and the local, the artist rises to the general and the universal. The selected region becomes a symbol of the world at large, a microcosm which reflects the great world beyond. The greatness of a general novelist lies in the facts that he surmounts the bounds of his chosen region, and makes it universal in its appeal. That explains the continuing and world-wide popularity of regional novels, say those of the Brontes and Thomas Hardy.

The regional novel concentrates on some particular region, and it is remarkable for its vivid and illuminating presentation of its scenes and sights, of its landscape and geographical features. These geographical features form the background or setting to the human drama that is enacted in the novel. As the same scenes and sights, the same geographical features - rivers, hills, dales etc.  

8. Snell, K. D. M. (Edited): The Regional Novel in Britain and Ireland, p.1
appear and reappear in successive novels, the separate works of the novelist are welded into a single whole. His separate novels acquire in this way a continuity and a wholeness which is not possible for other kinds of novels. Sometimes, presentation of the scenic background, of the local details, is so vivid, realistic and life-like that the fictitious seems to be real and actual. Thus many Hardy enthusiasts have visited his ‘Wessex’ and tried to locate the various landmarks which appear in his novels like *Tess* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.

Further, the regional novel is essentially democratic. It expresses a belief that the ordinary man and the ordinary woman are interesting and worth depicting. It details with the ordinary men and women living in a particular locality, and shows them going about the business of living very much like average humanity. They are shown carrying on the professions and occupations, as well as following the customs and traditions, that are peculiar to that region. In this way, the particular region is immortalised in the regional novel. Moreover, concentration within a limited region results in intensity of emotion and passion. The novelist shows that drama of Sophoclean grandeur may be enacted within the confinement of a small village, and in a humble cottage. It is so in the novels of *The Bronte sisters* and the ‘Wessex Novels’ of Thomas Hardy.

### 1.2: GROWTH OF ENGLISH REGIONAL NOVEL

The year 1800 is a landmark in the history of the English novel, for in that year Maria Edgeworth (1767-1849) published her *Castle Rackrent*, which is often regarded as the first regional novel in English. The region she discovered was Ireland, and, with Ireland, the Irish peasant. Edgeworth was an Anglo-Irish novelist who exploited the humours of the Irish peasantry and its relation to the

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big houses. She is the founder of the regional novel, and all later regional novelists are indebted to her.

Before Maria Edgeworth, the locale of the English fiction was generalised and conventionalised. The novelists, by and large, confined themselves to London and Bath as their setting. The eighteenth-century novelists rarely had a sense of place; the background of his fiction is as bare of scenery, almost, as in an Elizabethan play. It was there not because it was a specific landscape but because it was a romantic one.

Maria Edgeworth gave fiction a local habitation and a name. And she did more than this: she perceived the relation between the local habitation and the people who dwell in it. She invented, in other words, the regional novel, in which the very nature of the novelist’s characters is conditioned, receives its bias and expression, from the fact that they live in a countryside differentiated by a traditional way of life from other countrysides.\(^{10}\)

In *Castle Rackrent* Edgeworth has narrated the history of the Rackrent family, who are Irish landowners. The language she has employed is close enough to Irish peasant speech, which provides the illusion of authenticity. *Castle Rackrent* was followed by *The Absentee*, another great work of fiction. In this novel, Edgeworth has seized upon the essential situation of her country at the time of writing— the absence of its landowners in England and the stranglehold their agents had on helpless peasantry. Thus the novel has a theme that was of the highest importance in its day, and it is embodied forth in a set of admirable characters. Maria Edgeworth had a most enviable gift of creating characters in the round, characters that seem, for much of the time at least, to exist independently of their author. Her *Belinda*, *Ormond*, *Patronage*, and *Harrington* are excellent regional novels with the Irish setting.

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\(^{10}\) Allen, Walter: *The English Novel- A Short Critical History*, p.103.
P.H. Newby compares Edgeworth with Jane Austen and writes, “whereas Jane Austen was so much the better novelist, Maria Edgeworth may be the more important. For whereas Jane Austen surveyed with the eye of a realist ground that had already been tilled, and brought it into perfection, Maria struck out and subdued stretches of new territory, the psychology of children, the dignified and humorous mind of the peasant, the resolute mind of a woman of affairs, and she supplied an impetus for the writing of all regional fiction”.

Inspired by Maria Edgeworth, many others took to the regional novel. Susan Ferrier (1782-1854) is another great novelist of the age. Her three famous novels are *Marriage* (1812), *The Inheritance* (1824), and *Destiny* (1831). “What Miss Edgeworth did for Irish life, Miss Ferrier did for the Scottish. The two writers had much in common: humour, observation, and a vein of earnest didacticism; but Miss Ferrier’s work shows greater variety”.

Walter Scott (1771-1832), who was famous for his historical novels also attempted to popularise the English land through his *Waverley Novels*. In “Postscript” he placed on record his gratitude to Edgeworth and said that his aim was ‘in some distant degree to emulate the admirable Irish portraits drawn by Miss Edgeworth.’

Next come the three *Bronte Sisters*- Charlotte (1816 - 1855), Emily (1818 -1848), and Anne (1820-1849) - who may rightly be called regional novelists. The Yorkshire Moorlands which they knew most intimately, as they had been born and brought up in the seclusion of the Moors, is the region which forms the background to their novels. “The most obvious contribution of the Bronte sisters is the presentation of the life of Yorkshire and its rich and beautiful nature-

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They all presented its landscape—Charlotte realistically, Anne nostalgically, Emily fully, poetically, superbly. They used its rich rough dialect, and they presented its people realistically. In *Wuthering Heights* the Yorkshire character is presented in quintessence, as though all wilfulness of Cathy. In *Shirley* the Yorkshire character is shown to us realistically and consciously.

Charlotte and Emily were the rage of the day. They had a fervid imagination and a vast capacity for wrath, which are writ large in their works. Though not of Yorkshire blood, they revealed in their novels the essential character of Northern England. They lived in Haworth, and the scenery of the place, its not very congenial atmosphere, the character of its inhabitants, their traditions have all gone to the making of the novels of the Bronte sisters. Emily paid effusive tributes to Haworth in one of her poems:

"What have those lonely mountains worth revealing?
More glory and more grief than I can tell.
The earth that wakes one human heart to feeling.
Can centre both the worlds of Heaven and Hell."

In all her novels Charlotte drew too much upon her own experience, and some of her portraits are mere photographs. She had the light of a vivid imagination, but the light played only upon what she had personally seen, heard, and known in the bleak moors, the turbulent streams, the valleys of the West Riding. All her novels are full of local colour. The dialogues are intensely regional.

The Bronte sisters experienced life within a narrow conflict, but their narrow and limited experience did not stand in the way of their achieving

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15. Bentley, *Phyllis Eleanor: The Brontes*, p.113
16. *The poem was first published by Charlotte Bronte in 1850 as one of the eighteen poems*
excellence in their work. Rather, it imparted intensity to it. Of course, the repetition of same themes made their novels somewhat stale, but this lack of freshness was compensated for by the presentation of passion and emotion in an intensified form. Charlotte Bronte and Anne Bronte had experience of life as governesses, school teachers and pupils, and they repeated the same scenes and experiences again and again in their novels. *The Professor* is enjoyable but the repetition of the same theme in *Villette* makes the book uninteresting. But the emotional fervour and exuberance of the novelist carries the readers through. A highly charged emotional atmosphere is the most remarkable feature of their novels. Love in their novels is highly passionate and intimate.

The Bronte sisters’ love for the moors in the *West Riding of Yorkshire* is evident in all their creations. We have it on the testimony of Mrs. Gaskell, the author of *the Life of Charlotte Bronte* that Emily was never so happy as when she was roaming the moorland with her dog, like her own Catherine in *Wuthering Heights*, who wished that she were a girl again, “half savage and hardy and free.”17 She felt a spirit on the moors, which provided her with the suitable background of her great novel. What Catherine said is actually her own feelings: “Do let me feel it- it comes straight down the moor—do let me have one breath. I’m sure I should be myself were I once among the heather on those hills.”18

No work of art is a photograph. It is only an idealised portrait. So is *Wuthering Heights*. The scene of the drama has been identified with a farm three miles from Haworth, near the village of Stanbury. The term ‘wuthering’ itself is the local dialect for ‘weathering’, which means blustering and tottering. The word ‘Wuthering’ is, as Mr. Lockwood tells us, “a significant provincial adjective descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy

17. Bronte, Emily: *Weathering Heights*, p.163
weather”. In Haworth, as in the *Wuthering Heights* the common fuel was peat and larger houses had a peat room. The glass chandeliers with tapes instead of candles were in use. The moorland folk were suspicious of strangers. The society was pronouncedly class-conscious. Servants usually spent their whole lives, sometimes through two or three generations in the service of a ‘house’. Consumption used to take a heavy toll. Education worth the name was conspicuous by its absence. Prosperous persons engaged private tutors for their wards. The uplands and lowlands of the moors are always present in Emily’s imaginative vision. The gaunt and stunted trees, lashed by the fury of the north wind always sprawl before us.

George Eliot (1819 –1880), whose *nom de plume* is Mary Ann Evans, contributed substantially to regional novels. Her early novels *Adam Bede, Mill on the Floss*, and *Silas Marner* are realistic and concrete in the presentation of the life of the Midland Countries of Warwickshire and Derbyshire, which she had intimately known. This particular region with its life and characters, comes to life in these novels. In these early novels, George Eliot freely took her material from her own experience of life, from her personal memories and from the life and activities of her relatives and friends, In this way she showed that personal experience and memories could supply all the matter that a novelist needed. Therefore, realism and faithful portraiture of life and characters known to her are the hallmarks of these novels.

Eliot’s *Adam Bede* is a picture of English village life in Staffordshire, and brings into the canvas life-like portraits of artisan, village worthy, tenant farmer, West-eyan preacher, rector, and squire. The scene of *Felix Holt, Radical* is laid in north Loamshire, which is veiled Staffordshire. *Mill on the Floss* is an autobiographical novel, recording much of the author’s recollection of her own

childhood and of the people and senses of her Warwickshire days. According to George Eliot’s husband Walter Cross. ‘The early part of Maggie’s portraiture is the best representation we can have of George Eliot’s own feelings in her childhood, and many of the incidents in the book are based on real experiments of family life, but so mixed with fictitious elements and situation that it would be absolutely misleading to trust to it as history.’ The scene of *Silas Marner* is laid in Raveloe, a village in a Midland county of Warwickshire. It owes much to the influences of the author’s childhood and girlhood in Warwickshire. The element of concrete experience is the principal ingredient of most of her novels, particularly the earlier ones, in which she has freely drawn on the stores of her memory. "Scene after scene, character after character in these novels have been identified with some place or person within the range of her early experience. Her mansions and cottages, her lanes and meadows are those to which she had been accustomed to drive in childhood with her father, or over which she had rambled with her brother. Still more are the characters of her novels, the figures with whom she had been familiar; and almost in proportion to the familiarity is the frequency of their appearance."

*Thomas Hardy* (1840–1928) is the most important of the regional novelists of England, and deserves more space and attentions. His Wessex stretches from the English channel in the south, to Cornwall in the West, and as far as Oxford to the North. It is this limited region which forms the scenic background to each of his *Wessex Novels.* "The same physical features- hills and dales, rivers, pastures, meadows, woodland and heaths—appear and reappear in all his works. This imparts to his works a kind of scenic continuity and a touch of realism difficult to match in any fiction. Every event takes place within this locality. It is seldom that he strays out of it. It is for this reason that he is a regional novelist."
He had acquired a thorough knowledge of this region. He was permeated with its scents and sounds, with its scenes and sights. He described the physical features of his Wessex with great accuracy and realism. He expressed the very spirit of this locality in his works. He immortalized the land of Wessex which is a living, breathing reality in his novels. That is why many a Hardy enthusiast and topographer has taken the imaginary for the real and has gone in search of various landmarks described in the Wessex novels. For example, the description of Casterbridge in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is so realistic that many have taken it to be an exact reproduction of the town of Dorset. Similarly, all visitors to the Hardy country have testified that the dreary and desolate atmosphere of Flint-Comb-Ash farm in *Tess of the D’urbervilles* is exactly the same as that of the real place.

Another great novelist, Arnold Bennett (1867-1931) has often been described as the most remarkable regional novelist. He was essentially a realist and a regionalist and his realism is well brought out in the vivid and real pictures of the pottery districts of England. His reputation rests on *Anne of the five Towns, The Old Wives’ Tale, Clayhanger, Hilda Lessways*, and *These Twain*, for in them Bennett is essentially and unmistakably a regional novelist. The life of materialism is well-portrayed in his novels. “The internal economy of houses and hotels down to their plumbing, to food, bought, prepared and eaten, to clothes and their fashions, to means of transport, indeed, to all the machinery, equipment and paraphernalia of living, claimed Bennett’s absorbed interest”. Bennett became an interpreter of the life and society of a particular region, the Five Towns, which he knew well. But it is to his credit that like a true artist he maintained an air of impartiality and detachment in the presentation of the life of this region. He did not aim at any propaganda or moral preaching through the medium of his art. A charming

Dickens like humour plays over all, and makes the reading enjoyable. The impression of drabness, dullness and sordidness, that might be created by a study of his realistic pictures of the life of Five Towns, is further removed by his addition of romance, specially the romance of love. Besides finding romance in love, Bennet, like Kipling, finds romance in the ordinary things of life. He refused to identify romance, ‘with the merely picturesque or the merely extraordinary.’ God had endowed him with the ability of, ‘evoking the beauty and romance of the ordinary lives of ordinary folk which is one of the most attractive features of his best novels.’

A distinction may, however, be drawn between Hardy and Bennett as regional novelists. Hardy belonged to Wessex, and breathed in that atmosphere. Bennett was never of the ‘five towns.’ For Hardy, Wessex was a microcosm of the universe and we accept it as such. But for Bennett the Five Towns were provincial; he left them where he was twenty-one and never returned to them for longer than a few days at a time. Steeped as he was in them, in their atmosphere, history and traditions as a writer he was completely outside them. His attitude towards them is always expository; he is explaining them, exhibiting them to an outside world that is not provincial. They exist in relation to a longer world than Bennett accepts as the norms.

Hardy’s Wessex was a revival of the past and his characters were rooted to that past. This past of Hardy stood contentment, if not happiness; but Bennett’s Potteries resisting changes produced only squalor, ugliness and tragedy. The harmony between the people and their environment so prominent in Hardy is absent in Bennett’s. Walter Allen underlined the feature of Bennett’s novels: “At his best Bennett does achieve a universality of a kind, but it is not Hardy’s kind. It is, if such a thing is possible, a limited universality; true for a certain kind of a

community at a certain point in time, a picture of life not only in the Five Towns but in any industrial provincial community during the last three decades of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{22} It is a very considerable achievement, but not in the class of the greatest. It is only in a few passages in \textit{The Old Wives' Tale} and \textit{Clayhanger Family} that brought the reader face to face not merely with the human situation at a given date and place in North Staffordshire but with the eternal human situation.

Into \textit{The Old Wives' Tale} and \textit{Clayhanger} Bennett has put without stint his humour, his scrupulousness, and his old knowledge of Midland life. They are full of character and truth to character; the scene is clearly set; one reads with the sense of being taken not only into a tale of individual human beings but into the homes and shops and hearts of the Midlands and the Midland people; above all, the books and the people in them grow not arbitrarily, but organically. If it is true that they remain small, as small as human beings are in real life, that must be set down as a deficiency in the realistic novel itself, for in that genre only Balzac's and Dostoevsky's people are larger than life, and Balzac's live in a world altogether fabulous, while Dostoevsky's are so large as to be fantastic. In Bennett's books one is still among the normal. It was his objective to deal with the normal. That was what absorbed him.

The Five Towns of Bennett's works are the pottery towns of Staffordshire, which form the federated borough of Stoke-on-Trent. They are Tunstall, Burslem, Hanley, Stoke-upon-Trent, and Longton, appearing in Bennett's novels as Turnhill, Bursley, Hanbridge, Knype, and Longshaw; while Oldcastle is the town of Newcastle-- under Lyne. As one reads these regional novels of Bennett, one becomes familiar not only with the main streets and buildings and landmarks, but also with the inmates, who are part and parcel of that area. Bennett saw

\textsuperscript{22} Allen, Walter Ernest: \textit{Arnold Bennett}, p.43
ugliness as a pattern of life and, therefore, his pictures have become naturalistic. Next to Hardy’s Wessex, Bennett’s Five Towns was the most remarkable addition to the map of topographical fiction ever since Trollope and the Bronte sisters.

Hardy and Bennett were the creators and populariser of a new type of regional novel. Quite a few of the English writers, therefore, followed their footsteps, although most of them could not reach the heights of their masters. Constance Holme in her *Crump Folk Going Home, The Lonely Plough, The Splendid Fairing*, and *The Trumpet in the Dust* wrote against the background of Westmoreland and achieved a measure of success. Eden Phillpots in his *Children of the Mist, The Human Boy*, and *The Secret Woman* had Devonshire for his canvas. The mantle of Scott fell upon the Kailyard School of novelists in Scotland. These novelists invested their novels with romance and sentiment, and often sacrificed accuracy of description in their bid for popularity. John Watson, who had assumed the pen name of Ian Maclaren, wrote *Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush, A Doctor of the Old School*, and *Kate Carnegie*. S.R. Crockett wrote *Mad Sir Uchtred of the Hills, The black Douglas, The Strickit Minister and Some Common Men*, and *The Lilac Sunbonnet*. Thomas Nicoll Heburn with his pen-name Gabriel Setoun, is the author of *Robert Unquhart* and *The Skipper of Barncraig*. All these novelists romanticised and sentimentalized life and landscape. Naturally there was a reaction against the maudlin representation of life and landscape. G.D. Brown in his *House with the Green Shutters* presented a realistic picture of the region. What was done by W.B. Yeats and J.M. Synge in drama was done by Standish O’Grady, Emily Lawless, Martin Ross, and James Joyce. Dublin is the background of Joyce’s novels, namely *Ulysses* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

William Faulkner, the Nobel Prize winner, was the only American regional novelist worth mentioning. Born at new Albany, Mississippi, which served as
the principal model for the fictitious town of Jefferson in Yoknapatawpha County, he wrote quite a few novels, e.g. *As I lay Dying*, *The Sound and the Fury*, *Light* and *August*, and *Sanctuary*. His characters and more particularly the families of which they are members recur in his novels.

Nevertheless, the regional novel today is a well established art-form with some of the greatest novelists of England as its devoted votaries. It could have been rightly expected that with the obliteration of regional and local differences following the mass use of swift means of communications—the car, the railways, the aeroplane, the radio and the television—the regional novel would lose its value and significance but regional novels of great worth and significance continue to be written. *E.C. Booth, Mary Webbe, Thomas Moult, Sheila Kaye Smith, Constance Holme, Frances Brett Young*, are a few of the more prominent practitioners of this form in the modern age.

**1.3: THOMAS HARDY: LIFE AND CAREER**

Born on June 2, 1840, in Upper Backhampton, near Stinsford in Dorset, Thomas Hardy was the eldest son of a master mason or building contractor. His mother came from a family long established in Dorset. At the time of his birth, the old family of le Hardy, as it was once called, was poor and barely above the status of the labouring class. Hardy owed much to his parents and their rural background, inheriting from his father a love of music, from his mother a love of reading, and from both, strength of personality as well as the stability which connected him in an age of change with a world already vanishing.

When Hardy was born he was thought to be dead, and was rescued only by the keen perception of a nurse. His parents did not expect him to live until he was eight. Too frail for school attendance, he was taught first by his mother, then
in the private school of the lady of manor. Only at eight, he was strong enough to enter the village school. In all he attended four schools from 1848 to 1856, the last the Dorchester Grammar School, founded by one of his own ancestors, and of which he himself was the governor from 1909 to 1926. Hardy’s formal education consisted only of some eight years in local schools, but by the end of this period he had on his own read a good deal in English, French and Latin. He was interested in music too, and learned to play violin.

At the age of sixteen Hardy was apprenticed to John Hicks, an ecclesiastical architect in Dorchester, with whom his father has long business done. This man was something of a classical scholar, easy-going and lenient, and allowed his young apprentice to spend more time in studying Greek than in studying architecture. Hardy continued his reading, also encouraged by William Barner, the Dorset poet, who kept a school next door to Hicks’ office; and by Horace Moule, the brilliant son of a vicar, to whose friendship he owed much intellectual stimulus.

Hardy began to write poetry during this time, but none of it was published. In 1862 he went to London to work for Sir Arthur Bloomfield. In March 1865, his first prose work, a humorous sketch, was published in a journal, but he was more interested in poetry. Feeling often lonely and depressed, he became ill, and in 1867 he returned to Dorset. During 1867 and 1868 he wrote a ‘purpose’ story *The Poor Man and the Lady*. It was read by George Meredith who asked Hardy to call on him, and advised him not to publish it but to write another story with more plot. Hardy too, having an absurdly critical opinion of his own novel destroyed the manuscript.

His first published novel was *Desperate Remedies* (1871), which was a great financial loss to Hardy. This novel first came out in serial form before publication as a book, an arrangement Hardy was to follow for the rest of his novels. However Hardy continued writing and in the very next year *Under the
Greenwood Tree appeared followed by A Pair of Blue Eyes in 1873. These novels brought him real fame as a novelist, along with some income and enable him to marry Ema Lavinia Gifford on Sep 17, 1874.

Hardy’s first popular novel that made him an ever established novelist was Far From the Madding Crowd, commissioned first as a serial by Cornhill’s magazine. Published in 1874, this novel was his great financial and literary success. Much to Hardy’s annoyance, some critic guessed the book to be by George Eliot under a new pseudonym.

From this time Hardy devoted his full time to writing, continuing to publish novels regularly until his last Jude the Obscure in 1895. Among these are some of the best of his so-called Wessex novels: The Return of The Native (1878), The Mayor of Casterbridge (1886), The Woodlanders (1887), Tess of D’Urbervilles (1891) and Jude The Obscure. To this list of the best should be added the earlier Far From the Madding Crowd.

In writing most of the novels, Hardy meticulously worked out the details of time and geography he wanted to use. Almost every novel is, therefore located in a carefully mapped out area of Wessex and covers a specified period of time. The Return of the Native, for example, covers the period of 1842-43 in its first five books and set on Puddretown Heath, called Edgon Heath in the novel, on which Upper Bockhampton is situated.

Between 1878 and 1912, Hardy wrote nine novels, three volumes of short stories, published three collection of poems and completed the most massive, unique and characteristic achievement of his life, the five hundred and twenty pages of mingled prose, dramatic lyric and philosophical verse which is called The Dynasts. Hardy gradually came to be acknowledged, not without dispute, as the greatest English writer of his time. The Order of Merit was conferred upon
him in 1910 by King Edward VII and honorary doctorates were awarded by the universities. He was showered with the honorary degrees from Oxford and Cambridge, from Aberdeen, Bristol and St. Andrew's. He received the gold medal of the Royal Society of Literature. He became an honorary fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects. He was the third President of the Incorporated Society of Authors, the first two being Tennyson and Meredith.

Before this on November 27, 1912, Mrs. Hardy died, a woman who suffered from virtual insanity in her last years and with whom Hardy had become increasingly incompatible. Their married life had been childless, but had been a close and devoted union and enjoyed much memorable moments in early conjugal life. In 1914, at 74, Hardy married again. His second wife was his longtime secretary Florence Emily Dugdale, who later became his chief biographer. She was, of course, very much his junior, but she devoted herself to him acting as companion, nurse and secretary. There is no doubt that Hardy was extremely fond of her and happy in the fourteen years of his second marriage. On January 11, 1928, Hardy breathed his last. His heart was buried in his first wife's grave near Dorchester, the remainder of his body was cremated and buried in the Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey.

"Thomas Hardy's career divides itself into three periods. The first of these contains his work as novelist, and ends with Jude the Obscure."²³ Throughout the series of the novels there gradually became more and more insistent a characteristic metaphysic, in which the striving and passions of individuals are in futile conflict with the relentless process of the world.

The second period consists of the Dynasts, the greatest single achievement of his career. This great poem was written to give full utterances, in artistic form, to his peculiar metaphysic. That, however, was not its originating intention, which

²³. Yust, Walter(ed.): Encyclopædia Britannica, Vol.11, p.193
was simply to celebrate in a chronicle play England’s part in the Napoleonic war. But as the conception grew and deepened, and as to the human action added the superhuman comment of "Phantom Intelligences", the poem became the summation of Hardy’s vision of life. In its fundamental splendor and its perfect command of Hardy’s immense wealth of matter, though not in its diction, this work can only be compared with great monuments of man’s destiny like Goethe’s Faust and Milton’s Paradise Lost.

The third period may be said to begin with Time’s Laughing Stock (1909), and is devoted to lyric poetry. Poetry was Hardy’s first literary love and his last. No one would have his poems and not one of them was published until 1898, when his career as a novelist was over. Hardy always wished to be remembered as a poet, and it is possible that in the end, his poetry will be felt to outweigh his prose. It is intellectual poetry, cryptic, sometimes difficult and gnomic, full of distinction and personal idiom, yet often beautifully lyric. He made no mistake in knowing himself for a poet. However, this third lyrical period is not entirely a new development of Hardy’s genius. While he was writing novels, he had occasionally experimented with poetry. But after 1909, Hardy wrote little besides poetry, and this may therefore truly be called his lyrical period. It represents a new concentration of his power, but certainly no decline in it. It is in fact the same Hardy in the lyrics as in the novels and The Dynasts, by virtue of which he hold a secure, indeed a unique position in modern English literature.

1.4: THOMAS HARDY AS REGIONAL NOVELIST

Thomas Hardy is head and shoulders above most of the regional novelists. Wessex is the background of all his novels. Wessex, its atmosphere, its pattern of
life and thought touched him keenly. As mentioned earlier, Hardy’s Wessex, the six odd counties in the South-West part of England, appear and reappear in all of his novels. No aspect of Wessex life escaped Hardy’s eye.

When Hardy grew old, he shifted from Wimborne Minster to Dorchester, and he a sort of nostalgia for the places, he knew when he was a small observant boy. His interest in Wessex people and their dialect never waned. He recalled the inn known as ‘The Three Mariners’. “A long, narrow dimly-lit passage gave access to the inn, within which passage the horses going to the stalls at the back, and the coming and departing human guests, rubbed shoulders indiscriminately, the latter running no slight risk of having their toes trodden upon by the animals. The good stabling and the good ale of the Mariners, though somewhat difficult to reach on account of their being at this narrow way to both, were nevertheless perseveringly sought out by the sagacious old heads who knew what was what in Casterbridge.”

The reverie continues: “The yeomen, farmers, dairymen, and townsfolk, who came to transact business in these ancient streets, spoke in other ways than by articulation.......Here the face, the arms, the hat, the stick, the body throughout spoke equally with the tongue. To express satisfaction, the Casterbridge market-man added to his utterance a broadening of the cheeks, a crevicing of the eyes, a throwing back of the shoulders, which was intelligible from the other end of the street........”

But this does not mean that Hardy’s works have the literal fidelity of a guidebook. One should not expect scientific accuracy from a writer of fiction. As Hardy himself pointed out, his Wessex is “partly a real and partly a dream

24. Hardy, Thomas: The Mayor of Casterbridge, p.63
25. Ibid, p.95
26. Hardy, Thomas: Far from the Madding Crowd, preface, p.viii
country”. It is a clever blending of fact and fiction. The general features and broad outlines remain the same as of the real objects. The spirit-of the place also remains the same. Thus much is realism. But the details are shifted, modified or enlarged to suit the purpose of the novelist. For example, the powerfulness of his imagination enabled the writer to magnify a small heath to epic proportions and immortalise it in *the Return of the Native*. Similarly, he magnified the small wood near his native place, and in *the Woodlanders*, imparted to it a vastness and grandeur which is utterly lacking in the original.

Hardy drew upon his wide and varied experience to create his Wessex works. He was, as had been aptly pointed out by John Butler, ‘in his real identity: both the educated observer and the passionate participant’ of Wessex life.

Hardy chose Wessex as the setting of his novels with no regret. In the preface to his novels and poems he wrote: “But I would state that the geographical limits of the stage here trodden were not absolutely forced upon the writer by circumstances; he forced them upon himself from judgment. I considered that our magnificent heritage from the Greek in dramatic literature found sufficient room for a large proportion of its action in an extent of their country not much larger than the half-dozen counties here reunited under the old name of Wessex, that the domestic emotions have throbbed in Wessex nooks with as much intensity as in the palaces of Europe, and that, anyhow, there was quite enough human nature in Wessex for one man’s literary purpose. So far was I possessed by this idea that I kept within frontiers when it would have been easier to overleap them and give more cosmopolitan features to the narrative.”

27. Butler, Lance St. John: *Thomas Hardy*, p.6
But in spite of his strong declaration that he is ‘cosmopolitan, he tends to be regional.’ “Thus, though the people in most of the novels (and in much of the shorter poems) are dwellers in a province bounded on the north by the Thames, on the south by the English channel, on the east by a line running from Hayling Island to Windsor Forest, and on the west by the Cornish Coast, they were meant to be typically and essentially those of any and every place where "Thoughts the slave of life, and life time's fool, begins in whose hearts and minds that which is apparently local should be really universal."\textsuperscript{29}

Hardy chose to present the drama of life, both tragic and comic, in the England province, known as Wessex, which is relatively impervious to new ideas. "He takes for his chief characters," says Lionel Johnson, "men of powerful natures, men of the country, men of little acquired virtue in mind and soul but men disciplined by the facts and by the necessities of life, as a primitive experience manifests them. He surrounds them with men of the same origin and class but men of less strongly marked a power, of less finely touched a spirit; the rank and file of country labour....He brings his few men of that stronger and finer nature, his rustic heroes, into contact and into contrast with a few men, commonly their superiors in education, and sometimes in position, but their inferiors in strength and fineness of nature: men, whom more modern experiences have redeemed from being clowns, at the risk of becoming curse.”\textsuperscript{30}

The Egdon Heath is the hard core of Wessex. The Heath is the protagonist of the action. It is the symbol of something indescribably sinister. ‘The black, lean land of featureless contour’ plays a dominant role, and the characters are subordinated to the moods of the Heath. The Heath, says D.H. Lawrence, "is the primitive, primal earth, where the instinctive life heaves up. There, in the deep,
rude stirring of the instincts, there was the reality that worked the tragedy. Close to the body of things, there can be heard the stir that makes us and destroy us. The [earth] heaved with raw instinct, Egdon whose dark soil was strong and crude and organic as the body of a beast. Out of the body of this crude earth are born Eustacia, Wildeve, Mistress Yeobright, Clym, and all the others. They are one year's accidental crop. What matters if some are drowned or dead, and other preaching or married; what matter, any more than the withering heath, the reddening berries, the seedy furze, and the dead fern of one autumn of Egdon. The Heath persists.  

There is no denying the fact that Hardy recreated Wessex, and the outcome is the synthesis of the new Victorian science and hoary tradition and superstition. Wessex was enough for Hardy, for it provided the variety of social levels that he had been in quest in other milieus. He had his training as an architect, but he chose to remain a provincial, a countryman. He revived the word 'Wessex' and added new dimensions. "Peasants for the most part", says Walter Allen, "they are closed to an earth that has changed little over centuries."

Hardy belong to Dorchester, the south-western part of England, which he renamed Wessex, and immortalised that region. Never a region has been so composingly celebrated as in these books. And within the world, out of which Hardy stepped timidly and with awkward results, he has created hundreds of characters, many of them mere choral voices in an alehouse and aristrophe in the classic Greek drama, who live with a close and intimate endearment for generation after generation of readers. Their cloths and manners are becoming somewhat period-dated now, but the people themselves are still warm-blooded; still capable of infinite suffering and gusty happiness. They dance and sing, eat and drink, work and make love; and on some occasions they do more desperate things,

31. Lawrence, D.H.: Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays, p.25
such as ever taking place in a countryside of downlaid, sea-border, plashy meadows, and creamy farms, where milk and cider flow and the breath of cows is sweet, and lavender is laid in the drawers of old furniture in rooms where man and wife sleep, in beds that their forbears were born and died in.

Hardy, it has been said, is the successor of King Alfred the Great, for both of them were the kings of Wessex, one literally, and the other figuratively. Wessex, the counties of Barkshire, Wittshire, Hampshire, Somerset, Dorset and Devon owed to Hardy the revelation of their ineffable beauty and charm. Hardy did not describe merely the geographical contours of the Wessex region. With his metaphysical vision he brought Wessex to supreme height. But even then the sight, the smell, and hearing of that region are never lost sight of. It is the panorama of those gross-grown, leafy pasture lands. It is the scent of the orchard in October, the creamy odour around the apple trees hard by the dairies, the fragrance of cut hay on the banks of the river in June. It carries to us the chants of all trees, the hermits of the heath and chorus of the forest. With a record of sensory observations of astonishing scope, it interprets the whispering of the wind upon every species of leaf. What treasures ignored by our eyes and lost to our ears, to our sense of smell and even to our touch have thus been preserved from oblivion!

Beautiful as the Wessex landscape is, it certainly needed a chronicler. And Hardy chronicled it with loving care. With wonderful observation he discovered in Wessex what escaped the notice of our ordinary eye. The rocks and woods, the rivers and lush vegetation of the region were charged with poetry and loveliness. His conclaves of peasants offer a humours assemblage of types curious and even droll, at the same time exhibiting their strewdness; a whole social fauna of a past age. “One recalls the inimitable rustics of

33. Pierre d’Exideuil (Georges Lasselin): The Human Pair in the Work of Thomas Hardy, p.186
Shakespeare’s theatre in the presence of these simple beings with their dialect talk, creatures of a humanity, fashioned according to the rhythm of the seasons".  

Hardy’s regional novels evince a tendency to retreat into the rural landscape of Wessex to project an idealistic picture of rural England. In its setting, Hardy’s novels were as far away as they could be from the rest of the Victorian novelists. His subject matter was the countryside and its people, but their life provided him with no less a powerful metaphor for the condition of England than did urban life for Dickens. In relating into the rural landscape, Hardy was being an essentialist in his approach to the subject matter. But Hardy’s concern in relating into rural landscape must be viewed in terms of his association with his Dorsetshire. His portrayal of Wessex was imbued with a strong sense of his personal life. Hardy could not adjust himself to the ways of London and after his unsuccessful attempts at architecture, he turned to creative writing. He therefore endowed this alternative imaginary space with features of Dorset. What is of paramount significance in this context is hardy’s assertion and idealization of the regional identity. In his writings there was an attempt to present what was declining in a world presently characterized by conflicting interests. The tension between the old rural life and new urban life was clearly shown. Hardy expressed his resentment of London while preserving the superiority of Wessex life. The urban and rural spaces were created as contesting each other. One is superior to the other.

1.5: THOMAS HARDY : LITERATURE REVIEW

In accordance with the public appreciation of Hardy’s novels, critics started to attend seriously to his novels when his career as a novelist was still in progress. In 1894, Lionel Johnson, in *The Art of Thomas Hardy*, attempted to sum up the impression of Hardy’s novels published by then. He suggested a
common pattern in themes and characters of Hardy’s major novels. He pointed out the element of a heroic hope in Hardy’s works: ‘He [Hardy] sends out his characters to that forlorn hope, life: forlorn, but not lost, and promising at least the noblest of defeats’.\(^{34}\) Although he has focused on Hardy’s primarily as an artist, giving equal coverage to his plot and narrative, he has derived from his works certain important themes like the urban invasion and the validity of the established patterns of human relationship.

An American critic, W.L. Phelps in *Essays on Modern Novelists* (1910) discussed in detail the much-trumpeted pessimism in Hardy’s novels. While trying to trace the roots of Hardy’s depiction of the dark and the terrible side of life in an interesting way, he claimed that Hardy was indebted to Schopenhauer, an assertion which didn’t flourish later as, according to Timothy Hands, it ‘drew Hardy’s displeasure’ (167)

Lascelles Abercrombie (1912) developed a more comprehensive approach, affording due and almost balanced coverage to Hardy’s subject and style, though slightly overemphasizing the philosophical connotations of his art at the cost of the aesthetic ones. In *Thomas Hardy: A Critical Study*, he analyzed the speech of characters as representative of their minds. He applied to Hardy’s fiction the classical Greek notions of tragedy, and tried to prove him to have been enormously influenced by Sophocles.

D.H. Lawrence concentrated on Hardy’s characters as individuals struggling against the established conventions of the community. His ‘Study of Thomas Hardy’ (1914), appearing posthumously in *Phoenix*, was a great tribute by a contemporary admirer— who himself was a great creative artist. He appreciated Hardy’s protagonists’ outburst of the instinctive self as the source of all sublimity

\(^{34}\) Johnson, Lionel: *The Art of Thomas Hardy*, p.410
as well as all tragedy and, as such, has evaluated Jude more favourably than the rest.

H.C. Duffin (1916) was the first to discuss Hardy’s novels systematically, analyzing in detail his themes, plot and characters. Duffin’s work, *Thomas Hardy: The Wessex Novels*, was probably the first classified analysis of Hardy’s art. Four of its chapters, in particular, entitled ‘The Irony of Fate: Hardy’s View of God’, ‘Human Nature : Hardy’s View of Man’, ‘Convention : Hardy’s View of Society’, and ‘Pessimism : Hardy’s View of Life’ directly tackle some of the major issues undertaken by this research.

Virginia Woolf (1928) admires Hardy’s characters for their ability to compel the readers to remember them. ‘We recall their passions. We remember how deeply they have loved each other and often with what tragic results.’ She is of the opinion that Hardy gives impressions when he is at his greatest, and arguments when he is at his weakest.

In *The Life of Thomas Hardy*, Hardy’s estimation of himself and his works is found. Although its authorship is nominally attributed to Florence Emily Hardy, Hardy’s second wife, it is widely, rather unanimously, believed to be a disguised autobiography written in third person. Initially, it appears in two parts: *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy* (1840-91) appearing in November, 1928; and *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy* (1892-1928) in April, 1930. The single-volume edition appeared in 1962. *The Life of Thomas Hardy* is not just an autobiography in the traditional sense; it provides a valid self-estimation of Hardy’s literary and aesthetic concerns, ideals and inclinations, including many dimensions of his personality.

Arthur McDowell (1931) attempts a comparative evaluation of Hardy’s tragic novels, focusing on their individual features of distinction in addition to

the writer’s comprehensive scheme. According to him, *The Return of the Native* is the best of all Hardy’s novels, a masterpiece of art, but he considers Michael Henchard as ‘the most original as well as the most forcible character Hardy ever drew.’

Carl J. Weber (1940), in his critical biography of Hardy, has related the subjectivity of impressions in his novels to the writer’s own intellectual and emotional progress. He is of the view that Hardy started writing novels with the hope to influence the ways of the world, but discovered at the end, particularly after writing *Jude*, that the only effect was on himself. That is why he abandoned novels.

Lord David Cecil’s *Hardy the Novelist* (1943) is an invaluable critical document, exploring some very significant dimensions of Hardy’s art. It offers an exclusive and comprehensive coverage to Hardy’s fictional art, encompassing all his major novels. He very effectively argued that in his creative talent Hardy was closer to Elizabethan dramatists than to his contemporary artists; that is why his art was adversely affected when he attempted to follow other great novelists like Fielding, Scott, Dickens, etc., particularly when he tried to derive ‘models’ from their works. Declaring Hardy ‘one of the very great English writers’, he came up with certain foundational comments like ‘Hardy conceives man in relation to ultimate human destiny.’

Albert J. Guerard (1949) adopted a more censoring approach towards Hardy’s works. He accused him of revealing ‘an initial sluggishness of mind, most often perhaps in his tendency to schematize and oversimplify dilemmas.’ He advised Hardy’s readers not to search for profundity of thought, seriousness

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37. Cecil, David: *Hardy the Novelist*, p. 84
of purpose, insight into social problems, extraordinary psychological understanding, perfection of style and plot, as his real greatness rests on his flight of imagination, his talent of story-telling, his ability to relate atmosphere to character and his all-embracing human sympathy, particularly for those that are sensitive and miserable.

John Holloway (1953) upholds character and environment as the spirit of Hardy’s novels, incidents and events being just subservient tools. In this way, he attempted to justify improbabilities in Hardy’s fiction. He also pointed out symbolism in Hardy’s characters, incidents and happenings, suggesting that a true understanding of Hardy’s works can be developed only when his view of life as a whole is taken into consideration, rather than segregated fragments of his thought.

Douglas Brown (1954) discussed the strong simplicity and integrity of Hardy’s feeling, taking his novels as a record of a tragic view of life. Two chapters in his *Thomas Hardy* entitled ‘Novels of Character and Environment’ and ‘The Uniqueness of His Art’ are masterpieces of in-depth criticism. While questioning the validity of Hardy’s novels as criticism of life, he highlighted Hardy’s stern insight, honesty of purpose, the power to chasten and subdue, a profounder perturbation of the spirit and the marvelous depiction of the life and ways of the agricultural community as the glories of his art. He plays very high tributes to Hardy as a thrilling narrator: ‘In the extreme force and the guileless fascination of his narrative, Hardy yields to no master of our language.’

George Wing in *Hardy* (1963) questioned the validity of the concept of Hardy’s evolutionary meliorism, calling it a distant dream, not very different in terms of prospects of fulfillment from the unappealing orthodox doctrines of consolation offered by the church. His *Hardy* is an impressive critical evaluation

39. Brown, Douglas: *Thomas Hardy*, p.43
of other Hardy critics, particularly those that have discussed the issue of pessimism versus meliorism.

Roy Morrell in *Thomas Hardy: The Way and the Will* (1965) adopted an interestingly original approach to Hardy’s art, particularly with reference to the individual capacity of his characters. He stressed the importance of the extent of free will and choice afforded to Hardy’s protagonists- Tess in particular- and concluded that their role as individuals is mostly determined by their for-granted role as characters, a blunder through which, according to Morrell, ‘Hardy’s reputation has suffered out of all proportion to its seriousness.’ Morrell also pointed out certain elements of irony, like in the concluding paragraph of *Tess*, also contending that ‘the irony is aimed, at least partially, against the reader.’

David Lodge (1966) described the causes of Hardy’s being termed a great novelist ‘in spite of great defects, the most commonly alleged of which are his manipulation of events in defiance of probability to produce a tragic-ironic pattern, his intrusiveness as authorial commentator, his reliance on stock characters, and his capacity for writing badly’. Concentrating on *Tess* in order to analyze such objections, he has pointed out many uncompromising contradictions in Hardy’s art, particularly in his relating his characters to their environment.

Raymond Chapman is one of the most outstanding Hardy critics. In *The Victorian Debate* (1968), he criticized Hardy in the light of his position in reference to the Victorian society - its culture, traditions and artistic inclinations. In the article entitled ‘Meredith and Hardy’ in the said volume, he appreciated Hardy’s art of characterization. According to him, there may be imbalances in individuals- ‘Eustacia may be too much a romantic conception and Clym may be too weak in

40. Morrell, Roy; *Thomas Hardy: The Way and the Will*, p.39
41. Lodge, David: *Language of Fiction*, p.165
42. Chapman, Raymond: *The Victorian Debate*, p.327-328
human terms, but there is a grandeur in their portrayal which makes them bear existence beyond the simple plot. He also discussed Hardy being affected by Darwinism, and his coverage of the theme of ‘the survival of the fittest’, comparing the helpless humans to the weak in animals. In *The Language of Thomas Hardy* (1990), Chapman has presented an unparalleled appreciation of Hardy’s use of language as reflective of the nature and moods of characters as well as of the collective pattern of life. In *Forms of Speech in Victorian Fiction* (1994), he discussed the speech of many of Hardy’s characters—particularly Sue and Jude—as brilliant instances of demonstrating complexes and sensibilities of individuals.

Trevor Johnson (1968) has focused primarily on Hardy’s art of characterisation, calling Tess ‘Hardy’s most masterly portrait of a woman’, thoroughly tackled and shown while facing multiple problems and persons in different situations. While tracing causes of her tragedy, he has termed her ego, her natural freedom and her delicacy of feeling responsible for her disaster.

Michael Millgate is generally believed to be Hardy’s most authoritative biographer. His *Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist* (1971) and *Thomas Hardy: A Biography* (1982) are masterpieces of critical biography. He traced the presence of autobiography or depiction of self in all of his successful fiction. According to him, Hardy’s best work was produced only when it had strong root in his own background—at least in terms of characterization. The presence of autobiography is very vital as its absence is generally a cause of failure.

Ian Gregor’s famous book *The Great Web- The Form of Hardy’s Major Fiction* (1974) discusses Hardy’s six great novels most comprehensively, claiming that there were two blended levels of his depiction of a character: as a total human being, and as a tool in the drama concerned. The alternative titles that the

43. Johnson, Trevor: *Thomas Hardy*, p.151
author suggested for the novels under discussion were very significant: 'The Creation of Wessex': *Far from the Madding Crowd*; ‘Landscape with Figures’: *The Return of the Native*; ‘A Man and his History’: *The Mayor of Casterbridge*; ‘The Great Web’: *The Woodlanders*; ‘Poor Wounded Name’: *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*; ‘An End and a Beginning’: *Jude the Obscure*.44

Merryn Williams in *A Preface to Hardy* (1976) offered a critical survey of Hardy’s life and works. J.R. Ebbatson evaluated Hardy as a trend setter in fiction, followed by great creative artists like D.H. Lawrence. In ‘*Thomas Hardy and Lady Chatterley*’ (1977), he traced Lawrence’s appreciation of Hardy’s novels, particularly *Two on a Tower*, to the latter’s keen insight of female psychology, wherefrom Lawrence derived many elements in his *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, a novel that demonstrates the late Victorian intellectual scientific pessimism.

John Bayley in *An Essay on Hardy* (1978) has called Hardy ‘the most aesthetic of all English novelists’. He asked Hardy’s readers not to look at disappointments offered by Hardy’s novels as a proof of his failure to do otherwise. He has discovered Hardy’s fictionalized presence in his novels and his being on very familiar terms with all his characters. Highlighting the foundation status of Hardy’s characters in relation to plot and narrative, he stated: ‘When his characters bumble, his text bumbles too’.45

Lance St. John Butler’s *Thomas Hardy* (1978) provided a substantial introduction to his six major novels and his poems. It deals more briefly with the minor fiction. John Butler discussed Hardy as an important novelist and poet due to his capabilities as a social historian or provincial chronicler. Again Hardy’s ability to universalise his tragic material, in which he was akin to Shakespeare,

44. Gregor, Ian: *The Great Web- The Form of Hardy’s Major Fiction*
45. Bayley, John: *An Essay on Hardy*, p.10
was seen as his abiding achievement. While referring to Hardy’s repudiating ‘pessimism’ and admitting ‘evolutionary meliorism’, he contends, ‘Although Hardy did not claim to have produced a system, he presents a remarkably consistent picture of the universe.’

Detailed analyses were made of some crucial passages in the major novels and a serious attempt was made to counter the proposition that Hardy ‘wrote badly’.

Alan Hurst’s *Hardy: An Illustrated Dictionary* (1980) is not just a dictionary in the traditional or typical sense: it provides some very intelligent critical comments on Hardy’s novels, poems and characters, along with objective evaluation of his major themes and concerns. It has catalytically facilitated academic research on Hardy.

Norman Page (1980) evaluated Hardy’s diction and grammar, claiming his being enormously influence by Horace Moule and William Barnes. He proved with the help of epistolary evidences that, in the beginning of his career as a novelist, Hardy did have problems with style, and was anxiously searching for a model to follow, requesting Moule to guide him therein. Moule, however, advised him not to follow any one and to be subjective and creative in style.

Roger Robinson (1980) examined Darwin’s influence on Hardy’s fiction and poetry, attaching symbolic significance to many of Hardy’s characters, settings and authorial comments in the light of Darwin’s scientific theories. Calling Hardy ‘the most honest and sensitive recorder of the shockwave from the evolutionary discoveries’, he commented on Hardy’s tragic novels as ‘trying to dramatize the disease of feeling for the popular market’.

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46. Butler, Lance St. John: *Thomas Hardy*, p.11

David Ball (1987) in his article ‘Tragic Contradiction in Hardy’s The Woodlanders’ has contrasted The Woodlanders and Far from the Madding Crowd, particularly the characters of Giles Winterborne and Gabriel Oak, suggesting that Giles has a certain edge over Gabriel for his selfless sacrifice without any hope of reward.

F.B. Pinion’s A Thomas Hardy Companion (1968) is a fine review of Hardy’s life and work. Pinion pointed out many elements of affinity between Hardy and Wordsworth, particularly their choice of "low and rustic life" because here “the essential passions of the heart find a better soil”. Utilising the findings in his two earlier works, A Guide to the Works of Thomas Hardy and their Background (1968) and Thomas Hardy: Art and Thought (1977), he has identified some dimensions of the external aspects of romanticism in Hardy’s art, dispelling the impression that Hardy, the pessimist, can never be compared to Wordsworth, the optimist. He has proved with strong arguments that, in spite of Hardy’s refusal to accept Wordsworth’s platonic theory of pre-existence, the points of affinity between the two are stronger than those of adversity.

Phillip Mallett in The Achievement of Thomas Hardy (1995), examined in detail Hardy’s Wessex as a product of exceptionally strong imagination combined with his talent as a regional writer, depicting the community to which he belonged. The inherent association of Wessex setting, however, fettered his characters within certain compulsions. The protagonists of Jude the Obscure are free from such limitations because that novel is Hardy’s farewell to Wessex.

Gillian Bear (1996) has discussed the theme of decay and decline in Hardy’s works in the light of scientific theories like that of evolution, and certain philosophical assertions of the age. In his article ‘Hardy and Decadence,’ he has

48. Bear, Gillian: Darwin’s Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and
pointed out Hardy’s dislike for systemization of his art, his tendency ‘to resist settlement and hold to seemings,’ and his ‘claim for a new kind of actuality not bound to longer-known laws’. 48

H.M. Deliski in Thomas Hardy and Paradoxes of Love (1997) has tried to exonerate Hardy from the change of sexism as asserted by the feminist critics. Highlighting Hardy’s originality and profundity in tackling his female characters, he rejects the view that Hardy has shown misogynist inclinations in his depiction of characters. He has also pointed out the basic difference between Hardy and sexist novelists like Lawrence and Joyce in tackling sexual relations and the involvement of females therein.

Angelique Richardson projected the theme of ‘biologization of romance’ in Hardy’s novels and short stories, stressing the importance of ‘the role that biology played in broadening the franchise of fictional possibilities not simply in terms of a more open treatment of sex, and sexual relations, but in broader portrayals of life, love and heredity’. 49

Judith Stinton (2001) has scrutinized Hardy’s manuscripts, letters and other documents, attempting to discover certain dimensions of Hardy’s personality, his friends, heroes and admirers. She tells of Hardy’s expectation from his researchers and biographers of ‘endorsing his own official version of his life’, and of his ‘attempting to control how posterity saw him’, 50, resulting in his writing his autobiography, and his strong reaction to hostile biographies and comments by others.

49. Richardson, Angelique: “Hardy and Biology”: Mallett, Phillip(ed): Thomas Hardy: Texts and Contexts, p.61
50. Thomas Hardy Journal, vol.17, issue.1, p.63
Mentioned above are some of the critics that have evaluated Hardy's genius. There are many more, but the quoted ones represent almost all the major critical looks about Hardy's art in general and his novels in particular. This Literature Review along with its preceding discussion makes it clear that most of the critics obviously discussed Hardy's regionalism; his Wessex environment, its people, and his immortal characters.