Chapter – II

BACKGROUND OF THOMAS HARDY’S NOVEL
2.1: HARDY’S BACKGROUND

Man is mostly a product of his environment and so is a writer. A writer cannot be wholly free from the influence of his age or from his environment. The impact of his age and environment must be upon him in varying degrees. Although Hardy was for the most part aloof from the main current of Victorian thought and outlook, nevertheless the prevailing tendencies of his age had their impact upon him.

Indeed, Hardy’s age had a great bearing upon him, upon his conception, particularly upon his predilection to pessimism. The prevailing conditions of the nineteenth century have been correctly summed up by G.A. Sambrook. In the first of the century the English Nation adapted itself to revolutionary changes which gave great wealth and power to one section of the community, while the labouring classes were near starvation. The state of unemployment, misery and want which resulted from the Napoleonic Wars was aggravated due to changes in agricultural methods, and large scale enclosure. Fluctuating prices and serious unemployment followed. The hardships and sufferings of the working class encouraged suspicion and distrust, which were fomented into despair and resentment. Violence and crime were everywhere. They reached climax in the "Hungry Forties". "In one parish and Dorchester thirty-six persons dwelt, on an average, in each house." \(^1\) It was no wonder that people living in such conditions were ignorant and vicious.

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These conditions were really disturbing for the sensitive minds. "The industrial revolution was in the process of destroying the old agricultural England; the population was shifting; the old ties which had united the small communities of the past were breaking bit by bit." Before the industrial revolution, most of the people lived in villages, and the most thickly populated parts of England were in the countries of the South and the East. The North of England was thickly populated. The growth of industries in the Coal and Iron Regions of the North resulted in migrations of populations towards the North. Increasing proportion of population started moving towards the cities. The increasing urbanisation followed, and it brought about the ruin of the old rural institutions and the rural society itself. Under these changed conditions a new social relationship and a new psychology developed. "In England, in the early nineteenth century, Cobbett and others looked on the Industrial Revolution as 'a fall from grace', and wished to restore the rural conditions of pre-1760". In fact the contrast between dire poverty and vast wealth became more marked in the nineteenth century in any period of history since the decay of Roman Empire. Naturally the public conscience woke up to the fact that there was social problem within the limits of which the individual was helpless against the forces of modern industrialism.

As a matter of fact, industrial revolution caused serious economic repercussions of the village community because of the concentration of factories in urban areas and the destruction of the two kinds of village industries, mentioned by G.M. Trevelyan. "It destroyed first the spinning and other by-employments of the wives and children of agricultural families; and secondly the full time employment of villagers in such various trades as clock-making, basket weaving, carriage and wagon building, tanning, milling and brewing, saddlery, cobbling.

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2. Cecil, Devid: Hardy- The Novelist, pp.20-21
tailoring and the great national industry of cloth weaving." Thus the two industries, which the Industrial Revolution gradually made an end of the village sector, were the spinning industry and a set of cottage and small scale industries of handicrafts type including the weaving industry.

According to Sir Llewellyn Woodward, the creative exuberance of the industrial age had passed out of times by the middle of nineteenth century. There were no doubt certain improvements in material conditions; but they simply left the thoughtful minds more free to consider problems of conduct and belief which went beyond organisation of social life. The thoughtful people began to attack the vast and obvious social abuses. At the same time, the Biblical criticism as well as the materialistic thoughts of Spencer and Buckle started shaking the middle class mind seriously. In other words, the disintegration of ideas went side by side with the old social and economic structure.

"Eighteenth century rationalism had united with the new romantic spirit of rebellion against convention, to shake the fundamental basis of belief- religious, social, political- which the people of the old England had unquestionably accepted. Since the beginning of the century, leaders of thought were, more often than not, unorthodox. The mental atmosphere of the reflective minds tended to be overcast by clouds of doubts." Besides the highest criticism of the Bible towards the middle of the century, the Darwinian theory of evolution also contributed much to precipitate the disintegration of ideas and to throw the reflective minds into doubts. The Darwinian theory may be summed up in Herbert Spencer’s phrase as ‘the survival of the fittest’. "The Darwinian theory abolished the dividing line between men and animals, denied any sudden creation of man, and therefore any

5. Cecil, David : Hardy- The Novelist, p.21
literal interpretation of the fall of man, with its theological consequences." It was indeed a great shock to the orthodox interpretation of Christian belief, and it was not at all surprising that the first attitude of the Church Leaders was entirely hostile to it. In 1859 the Origin of Species by means of Natural Selection was published. Its publication coincided with another attack upon orthodox opinion, starting from a different angle, and based upon different types of evidence. The seven writers, including Temple, Jowett, Mark Pattison, Baden-Powell, C.W. Godwin and others contributed to Essays and Reviews and their conclusion was almost the same as Darwin's. These writers insisted upon a less rigid interpretation of the Bible, and a revision of the Historical Doctrines based upon the literal meaning of biblical and patristic texts.

Thus the philosophic basis of Christianity became a subject of controversy. So was the case with the historical facts on which Christianity rested. Such disintegration of ideas not only struck a blow at Christianity but also at all religious and ideal interpretation of the Universe. When Christianity and the conception of Divine Justice were proved to be untrue, the age old moral and spiritual values which men in the past had come to regard as the most precious things in life were reduced into insignificance. Among the new thinkers, some rationalists, some romantics, there was no unanimity. They were uncertain as to what creed should take the place of the old faith. The thoughtful persons were swept by the crisis of faith. In this atmosphere of doubt and disintegration, particularly the sensitive artists were affected to a very great extent. Guided by personal religious experience some discovered strength in old faith. By dint of sheer imagination some also took refuge in the world of beauty. But there was also the third group who had no consolation for themselves. And for the first time there was the expression of conscious and well reasoned pessimism. Arnold, Fitz Gerald, Thompson and

Thomas Hardy belonged to this group. "Hardy was especially open to the melancholy implications of the new outlook." As a product of rural England, Hardy belonged to the world that was passing. It was hallowed for him by every childish sentiment; but unfortunately it was beginning to crumble before his eyes. To his utter regret Hardy noticed that old habits were being discontinued every year. The old stories and songs were being forgotten every moment. The families settled up in certain places for generations were being uprooted every year. In such a state life seemed unbearable; it seemed precarious too.

The disintegration of the old ideas seemed to have affected Thomas Hardy all the more. He was rooted in the old Christian tradition, for he was brought up in a society in which the tradition of mediaeval Christianity had lingered long. Instinctively he respected the Christian ideal of virtue. But he was not however a mystic; he had also no personal sense of spiritual world that would prompt him to support Christianity against any attack. According to him, mere material improvement would never satisfy the demand of man's soul. Christianity could have once satisfied the heart; but now that Christianity was lost. There was very little hope for man in this world. Naturally his philosophy began to appear confirmedly gloomy. "The universe was huge impersonal mechanism, directed by some automatic principle of life unknown, pursuing its mysterious end, utterly indifferent to the feelings of mortals." Thus Hardy's pessimistic attitude is not at all difficult to understand, if we remember that he was living in an age of sudden scientific development and rapid change in the old, accepted values. By the age of twenty seven Hardy had already lost the religious faith of his youth, and he came more and more to believe in the doctrine of impersonal fate or law of life, an attitude he maintained until the day of his death.

7. Cecil, David: Hardy- The Novelist, p. 22
8. Ibid, p. 24
While age and environment contribute to the development of one’s imaginative sensibility, origin and upbringing contribute to the growths of one’s instinctive and emotional faculties. Therefore, to understand Thomas Hardy, apart from his age and environment, one must also understand his origin, his upbringing and the circumstances in which he was born and brought up. David Cecil rightly observed in his evaluation of Thomas Hardy: "First of all, we must acquaint ourselves with his creative range. We have to do this before making a judgement on any novelist."9

This prolific writer of human dramas was born on June 2, 1840, in a lonely and silent spot between Woodland and Heathland, his birth place being the seven-roomed house that stood easternmost of the few scattered dwellings called Higher Bockhampton, in the Parish of Stinsford, Dorset. "The domiciles were quaint, brass-knockered, and green shuttered then, some with green garden doors and white balls on the posts, and mainly occupied by life holders of substantial footing like the Hardy’s himselfs."10 During the days of Hardy’s birth most of the inhabitants of the place were elderly people, and as such the place was also nicknamed "veterans’ valley". At the same time, it was also locally called "Cherry Alley", for the lane leading through it was planted with an avenue with cherry trees. In those days the railway communication was yet not available to these country places. These places were linked up with railway only when Hardy was six or seven years old.

Dorchester, "the capital of Dorset, a town of great antiquity on the Frome", was widely known for its excellent ale and was proud of possessing “the most perfect Roman amphitheatre in the Kingdom". The capital town had paved streets and its houses were usually built of stone. Upon the wide meadows and downlands of Dorchester, vast flocks of sheep used to graze. Among country seats, as

10. Hardy, F.E.: The Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840-1928, p. 3
mentioned in the road book for London-Bridport road, the most important one was "Stinsford House, Lady Susan O’Brien". Hardy’s father was reported to have practised violin at that very house. The Pitts were the most famous public spirited family of Dorchester.

Nevertheless rural Dorset was a remote place, far remoter in the early years of Thomas Hardy than it is at present. "Feudal and sequestered, centring round church and village inn and squire’s manor house, its life - little touched by the changes of the great world - revolved in the same slow rhythm as for hundreds of years past". It was predominantly an agricultural life in which almost all, except the clergy and the schoolmaster, lived by land. The cottage were clay-built and cramped, in which people struggled for existence year after year against the uncharitable wind, the sun and the rain to support a wife and family with a very meagre income of 7 $ a week. It was thus a hard life; yet such a life had its dignity and stability. In the grey old churches people used to meet, as their ancestors had done for generations. Along with the sublime meditations of Prayer Book and authorised versions, the community also talked on the joys and sorrows in their lives. In that bucolic atmosphere and environment life also provided ample scope for light relief in the form of home-made traditional pleasures, such as, harvest celebrations, Christmas gaieties, birth and marriage celebrations etc. In those celebration people used to dance to their hearts’ content, drink ale and tell many tales. Hardy, who as a second fiddle to his father, (who was a famous musician in the neighbourhood) went off to fiddle in those celebrations, and must have heard those tales and verily impressed.

The year of his birth had an accidental coincidence with certain events which, whether pleasing or displeasing, might have indirectly affected Thomas Hardy. There was the marriage of Queen Victoria with Prince Albert in February.

A pot-boy named Edward Oxford made an attempt to shoot the couple as their carriage was climbing up the Constitution Hill in June. It was indeed a new era in postal business in as much as there was circulation of a Penny Postage Stamp designed by Mulready. War broke out against China. Prince Louis Napoleon was sentenced to perpetual imprisonment for his failure to invade Boulogne. The foundation stone of Nelson Monument was laid at Trafalgar Square. There was the second funeral of Emperor Napoleon at the Invalids, Paris. Fanny Burney who was then eightyeight died. Browning’s *Sordello* and Dicken’s *Master Humphery’s Clock* were published. There were many other events that might be mentioned. Nevertheless life at Bockhampton went on much as usual.

If not affected by the outside events, the rural Bockhampton had however its own drama. It was the strange simple drama arising out of the narrow poverty stricken circumstances in which its inhabitants carried their miserable existence. Love was often lost, and lovers were often parted. A lover having left the village in search of a livelihood, would return only to find his betrothed wedded to another. Indeed, in such a confined and elemental world, passions would often grow to obsessions. Men were often wronged in the form of injustice and exploitation. They brooded and brooded on their wrongs until these seemed intolerable and ultimately they gave vent to their emotions in crime. In those days the laws were very stern, and the offenders were even awarded capital punishment.

David Cecil rightly observes that Hardy was "fascinated by the idea of heredity."12 There was in him a reticent pride that he was one with a lineage. Indeed the Hardys of Dorset were a quite ancient and interesting race, "formerly of influence". According to the available evidences, all the Hardys of the South-West were of the origin of the Jersey Le Hardys who had migrated to Dorset.

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some centuries ago. Hardy even intended to add the "Le" to his name and be called "Thomas Le Hardy", but that did not ultimately materialise. The Dorset Hardys were in fact the descendants of one Clement Le Hardy who was Lieutenant Governor of the Island of Jersey in 1488. Thomas Hardy was aware that his more recent ancestors had played their parts well and truly in the life of that honourable country world, Wessex.

Indeed, the Hardys had the characteristics of an old family of spent social energies, which for generations dwelt in or near the valley of the river Frome or Froom. Its diverse Dorset section included many memorable figures like Elizabethan Thomas Hardy, the founder of Dorchester Grammar School; the Thomas Hardy, Captain of the "Victory at Trafalgar"; Thomas Hardy of Warcham, an influential burgess; Thomas Hardy of Chaldon; and others of local note. But the family had considerably declined by the time the Hardy of our discussion was born; and literally he hailed from a poor family, his parents being just above the status of labouring class. Theirs was a thatched house, and in Bockhampton hamlet Hardy's father had only a field and some sand-pits useful for his business.

Hardy's father, the elder Hardy, was a stone mason by profession, who in his world 'spoke with authority'. Though he was successful in his own trade, he had not the soul or the ambition of a tradesman. He was tolerant, humorous, probably an indolent man of integrity and general friendliness. The mother of Thomas Hardy was more determined, critical and farseeing; she was also capable of sharp comments, and her sense of realities was essentially human. Had the elder Hardy been more worldly and materialistic, he would have obeyed his wife's judgement and transferred his business and builder's yards and four children into some more conspicuous and profitable place than Stinsford. But he never did so, and Mrs. Hardy could understand it. One thing the elder Hardy often did was going up on the heath on a hot weather, and then "lying on a bank of thyme
or camomile with the grasshoppers leaping over him". Thomas Hardy inherited his love of music and the countryside from his father, while the love of reading from his mother.

Nothing much is known about the infancy of Thomas Hardy. The only authentic version in this regard is perhaps "The Life of Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) by his second wife Florence Emily Hardy. It shows that Hardy had not the physique of his father, and was very weak in constitution. Perhaps he would have never seen this world, but for the commonsense of the experienced woman who attended his mother as a monthly nurse, while she was in the family way. He was declared to be still-born by the attending surgeon and was thrown aside as dead until rescued by the attending nurse who exclaimed to the surgeon, "Dead! Stop a minute: he is alive enough sure!"

Another most interesting of his infancy was the curious fact that while Thomas Hardy as an infant was asleep in his cradle, his mother returning from out of the doors one hot afternoon found a large snake curled up upon his breast, comfortably asleep like himself. Perhaps the snake had crept into the house from the nearby heath which was the abode of many such reptiles.

Although he was generally healthy, yet he was fragile and precocious in the sense that he was able to read even before he could walk and to tune a violin even in his early childhood. His father was reported to have given him a toy-accordion and taught him to fiddle. Being extraordinarily sensitive to music, the child was of ecstatic temperament. Among the endless jigs, hornpipes, reels, waltzes and country dances which his father often played in his early married life...
years and to which the child often danced, there were at least three or four that invariably moved him to tears, though he tried to hide them with efforts. "This peculiarity in himself troubled the mind of ‘Tommy’ as he was called, and set him wondering at a phenomenon to which he ventured not to confess. He used to say in later life that, like Calantha in Ford’s *Broken Heart*, he danced on at these time to conceal his weeping. He was not over four years of age at this date.”

In those days the staircase at Bockhampton was coloured venetian red and was so situated that the rays of the setting sun added to its colour a great intensity for about fifteen minutes or so. Tommy watching this chromatic effect of which he was very much fond, used to utter to himself with great fervency from Dr. Watt’s Hymns that another day was now gone. It was perhaps not due to any religious sense but from a sense that the scene itself was most suitable to such a recital. Another note-worthy feature of his character during this time or thereabout was his lack of social ambition which followed him all through his life even when he was in health and happiness. Giving his back to the sun and covering his face with his straw hat, he often began to think how useless he was. Upon the reflection of his experiences of the world he had gathered so far, he had not the desire to grow up at all. While other boys talked of becoming men, Hardy for one did not want to be man at all. Nor did he desire to possess anything at all. On the contrary he wanted to remain as he was, in the same spot, and to know no more men than about half a dozen he already knew. This lack of social ambition was perhaps the characteristics of the Bockhampton Hardys.

It was no wonder that the boy of such a temperament should have a genuine interest in the Church services. Even on wet Sunday mornings he wrapped himself in a table cloth, stood on a chair and used to read the morning prayer. Everybody

15. *Ibid*, p. 15
opined that Tommy would be a person, being good for no other practical pursuits. Such an opinion caused his mother many a misgiving.

Since his very birth Hardy was so frail and delicate in health that up to his fifth or sixth year, his parents were sceptical about his survival. Nobody could even imagine that he would survive to be the immortal author of the immortal dramas of country life and passions. But to their great amazement he survived, and gradually when the need arose for the education of the boy Tom, it was his mother who dealt with it. At his eight year he was sent to the village school to learn the rudiments before being sent further afield. Here, in his Bockhampton School, he was set to work at Walkingame’s Arithmetic and at Geography, in both of which he excelled. But his chief ability led towards classical reading. For, his mother gave him Dryden’s Virgil, Johnson’s Rasselas and Paul and Virginia. Hardy also discovered a periodical - A History of the Wars - dealing with the wars with Napoleon. Its contributor was his own grandfather, who also volunteered himself to the Napoleonic Wars. "The torn pages of these contemporary numbers with their melodramatic prints of serried ranks, crossed bayonets huge knapsacks, and dead bodies, were the first to set him on the train of ideas that led to The Trumpet Major and The Dynasts". 16

At his eighth or ninth year, Hardy had his first experience of travel when he accompanied his mother on a visit to her sister at Hertfordshire. Because their stay prolonged for three to four weeks, Tommy was sent to a private school in which he was mercilessly tyrannised by the bigger boys whom he could beat in Arithmetic and Geography. During their return journey the mother and the son had to put up for the night in the Cross keys, St. John Street, Clerkenwell. It was the famous inn at which Shelley and Mary Godwin had been accustomed to meet

16. Ibid , p. 17
at weekends. The mother and the son were perhaps sheltered in the same room as had, perhaps, sheltered the most marvellous lyrist of English Literature.

After the lapse of a year or so when Thomas Hardy was found to be strong enough to walk further than to the village school, he was admitted into Dorchester Day School whose Headmaster, as viewed by his mother, was an exceptionally able man and a good teacher of Latin. The Lady of the manor who erected the Bockampton School was very much shocked at the removal of Tommy to the Dorchester Day School. He was then only nine or ten, while she was then about forty. Nevertheless, his feeling for her was almost that of a lover. Naturally, the boy must have secretly mourned his separation from the lady of his childhood passion, to whom he had been very much attached. So, one day, on the prospect of a meeting with her, Tom attended a harvest supper in the company of a young woman, a small farmer’s daughter. After the supper, there was singing and dancing. Some non-commissioned officers were also invited to the dancing as partners for the country dancing girls. This event, perhaps, got him extensively acquainted with soldiers of the old uniforms and long service. It must have helped him much when he came to write *The Trumpet Major* and *The Dynasts*. Herein Hardy not only met his intimate old friend, but also danced to his heart’s content. Only at three in the next morning he returned home just to be reprimanded by his parents. "It may be worthy of note that this harvest home was among the last at which old traditional ballads were sung, the railway having been extended to Dorchester just then, and the orally transmitted ditties of centuries being slain at a stroke by the London comic songs that were introduced".17

The other childhood memories of Thomas Hardy were those of seeing men in stocks, corn-law agitations, mail-coaches, road wagons, tinder boxes, candle snuffing etc. He was, as a small boy, taken by his father to witness the

17. Ibid, p. 20
burning of the effigy of the Pope and the Cardinal Wiseman in the old Roman Amphitheatre at Dorchester. The sight was quite lurid to young Hardy, and he never forgot it. Two or three years later, his another memory was connected with the Corn-Law Agitation. His father made for him a small wooden sword; he often dipped it into the blood of a pig just killed and walked about the garden with a slogan "Free trade or blood".

At the age of twelve Thomas Hardy was put through the "venerable Etonian Introduction to the Latin Tongue". This laid the foundation of such grammatical mastery of Hardy as even the brilliant classical men could not always display. But despite his love of classics and his general bookishness, Hardy at least during his young manhood, was very much fond of adventures with his fiddles. It was however strange that his mother although a "progressive" woman was ambitious on his account, did not object to these musical performances. It was perhaps from a feeling that they would help to teach him what life meant. So little Thomas played sometimes at village weddings.

Among his school fellows young Hardy was quite popular. At times his too much popularity even proved burdensome to him. Hardy loved being alone; he was by nature so inclined; but to his utter discomfort some of the school fellow often volunteered to accompany him on his way home to Bockhampton. This was really irksome to him. Another of his peculiarities was that, he always avoided being touched by his playmates. This peculiarity remained with him even in his old age.

When Hardy was a boy of fourteen he fell in love with a pretty girl near the South Walk, Dorchester. It was a sort of green sickness. She was riding, while Hardy was coming home from his school. For some unaccountable reasons she smiled at him. Next day Hardy saw her in the company of an old gentleman,
perhaps her father. Then for several days she was not found, though the boy 
wandered about miserably for her. After some days she was found once again. 
This time she was riding with a youngman. Since then she was not to be found 
any more. Hardy’s attachment was too strong to be easily shaken off.

About this time Hardy formed a trio to teach in the Sunday School of the 
Parish, the other two being the Vicar’s sons. Hardy had a dairy maid as his pupil. 
She was four years older than him. She appeared in Tess of the D’Urbervilles as 
Marian, a direct portrait drawn from real life.

Again young Hardy lost his heart for a few days to a young girl. She came 
from Windsor, just after he had finished his reading Ainsworth’s "Windsor 
Classic". But Hardy was disappointed to find that she had no interest either in 
Herne the Hunter or Anne Bolyen. Another young girl, a gamekeeper’s daughter 
with beautiful bay-red hairs became an object of his boyish admiration. But she 
despised him, for she was senior to him by two to three years and married early.

Another deep attachment of his was for Lousia, a farmer’s daughter. Hardy 
felt that his attachment to her was being reciprocated. So one evening on his way 
back home from Dorchester, when he met her, he longed to speak. But bashfulness 
overcame him. He could only utter "Good Evening", while poor Lousia uttered 
nothing. Thereafter Hardy even went to Weymouth Boarding School in search of 
Lousia. But all his efforts resulted in no more than a shy smile from her. That 
"Good Evening" was the only word passed between the two. The young and 
sensitive Tom must have been deeply touched by these failures in his childhood 
attachments; and this is perhaps one of the clues to his predisposition to tragic 
themes.

At the age of sixteen Hardy had just begun to be immensely interested in 
French and Latin Classics. Then arose the question of Tom’s getting into the
world. His father negotiated with Mr. John Hicks. He was an architect and Church restorer originally in practice in Bristol, and now in Dorchester. Young Hardy became Hicks's pupil, leaving the old British School at Dorchester and the strict discipline of Issac Last. The professional task in Hicks's office did not prevent other studies. Hicks was an educated, jovial and kindly-natured man, who allowed his boys some leisure for other than architectural studies. Soon Hardy got through several books of the Iliad, the Aeneid, some Horace and Ovid; and in this way he had the chance of getting into the Greek as well as Latin Classics. In those days and in that particular office a notion of theology was also inevitably involved with the rest. At that time Mr. Barnes, the Dorset poet and philologist kept his school next door. Hardy often used to run to him for his decision on some knotty points of dispute between him and his fellow pupil. Hardy said of Mr. Barnes: "A more notable instance of self-help has seldom been recorded". 19

Bastow, the other fellow in Hicks's office, also impressed young Hardy so much that his baptism made young Hardy feel the need of baptism again as an adult. The two were the companions not only in architectural but also in literary and theological studies. During his pupilage at Hicks's, the young Hardy also came in touch with the Baptist Minister Perkins and his argumentative family, including his two sons, friends of Bastow. They often debated on highly controversial matters of Classics and theology; and often Hardy had to fight alone against three. He was undoubtedly junior to his companions; yet he seemed to possess a breadth of mind which they had not. "It was through these Scotch people that Thomas Hardy first became impressed with the necessity for 'Plain living and high thinking', which stood him in such a good stead in later years. Among the few portraits of actual persons in Hardy's novels, that of the Baptist

19. Ibid, p. 10
Minister in A Laodicean is one-being a recognizable drawing of Perkins the father as he appeared to Hardy at this time, though the incidents are invented”.  

During this time young Hardy had two more literary friends in Dorchester, Hooper Talbot and Horace Moule of Queen’s College, Cambridge. Hardy often walked in the fields with these youngmen and was biased still further in the direction of the Classics. From them Hardy also learnt much about contemporary problems and thoughts. It was Horace Moule who advised Hardy to devote more time to architecture than to Classics, though he secretly wished that he should have been advised otherwise.

Later on when Hardy entered on a literary career, his architectural training was certainly of great help to him. It supplied him with the architectonic quality of the plots of his novels - the symmetry and the pattern. What he learnt as an architect was later on applied to his literary creations.

These two young people with whom Hardy mixed, such as, Hooper Talbot and Horace Moule and over and above Mr. Hicks himself, were all contributors to Hardy’s education. Although unusual for a youngman, yet in Hicks’s office his twenty four hours of a day marked off a triple existence - the professional life, the scholar’s life and the rustic life. It was due to this accident that he worked in a country town already advanced by Railways, Telegraphs and Daily London Papers but stayed in a World of Shepherds and Ploughmen in a hamlet three miles off, where modern improvements were looked upon as wonders, Hardy could see the doings in of the rural and the urban areas and of the ancient and the modern simultaneously.

Having completed the apprenticeship under Hicks, Hardy left alone for London at the age of twenty two to pursue the art and science of architecture on

20. Hardy, Florence Emily : The Life of Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), p. 30
more advanced lines. On the afternoon of his arrival in London, he was on the look out for lodgings. He got in touch with a fellow, some ten years older than himself, whose cousin was known to him. This acquaintance was sceptical about Hardy and advised him to be more practical. Hardy was disheartened and wished he should have thought less of the classics and more of iron girders. Now perhaps he could realise, at least to some extent, the wisdom behind Moule's suggestion to him. However, through the patronage of one Mr. Norton, a friend of Hicks, Hardy got an anchorage, which he never forgot. Mr. Norton strongly recommended Hardy to Arthur Blomfield who accepted the recommendations. Accordingly, Hardy got employed under Mr. Blomfield at St. Martin's Place. Within a couple of months the drawing office was shifted to 8, Adelphi Terrace. Its ground floor was then under the occupation of the Reform League, while Hardy had his office overhead. The Reform League, as Hardy said, was a body of extreme reformers who even solicited him to sit in Parliament as the representative of more advanced democratic or republican opinions.

In course of his stay in London Hardy became familiar with certain foreign singers like Mario, Tietjens, Nilsson, Patti, Giuglini, Parepa and others of the time. At that time an English Opera Company was also in existence. Hardy patronised it by often visiting operas produced by Balfe, Wallace and others. He was also very much shocked to hear the gradual decadence of the once fine voice of William Harrison. It was in defiance of fate that Harrison used to sing night after night his favourite songs which ultimately moved the sensitive listeners to tears. Harrison struggled on, hoping against hope, and it caused him to be remembered longer than his greatest success.

At Blomfield's Hardy again revived his literary pursuits which he was forced to abandon in 1861. He however, developed a growing tendency towards poetry. It was suggested to him that he might combine literature with architecture
by becoming an art critic. But he abandoned the idea and began to write verses for the magazines. His verses were however rejected by the editors. At that time he delivered short lectures on poets and poetry to his fellow pupils at Blomfield's. The only thing he was able to get published at that time was: *How I built myself a house*. It was primarily written to amuse the pupils of Blomfield. This little success perhaps had turned his mind in the direction of prose. He was supposed to be happy at Blomfield's; but in reality he was not. For, his self-confession in his diary at his twenty fifth birthday bears testimony to it: "June 2. My 25th birthday not very cheerful. Feel as if I have lived a long time and done very little". 21 Hardy's mental remorse was perhaps more due to his incompatibility with his architectural occupation. Further, in that alien atmosphere of the city of London, Hardy must have felt like a fish out of water.

By the summer of 1867 Hardy's health began to breakdown. He thought in terms of returning back to his native soil, by shrinking himself from the business of social advancement in London. To him, life was after all an emotion rather than a science of climbing. Hardy returned to his native soil in July 1867 and again got employed as an assistant to his former employer, Mr. Hicks. Within a few weeks of his return and with the resumption of his old habit of walking from Bockhampton to Dorchester and vice-versa, Hardy regained his former health and vigour.

Thus, Hardy had the experience of the rural and the urban, of the country and the city, and of the primitive and the modern. But it was indeed his country world that imparted him his greatest education. "There stayed his canon of life, of beauty, of merit; thence without effort he drew from fountains that had run clear for his forefathers, and still flowed in sun and shade with eternal attraction,

21. *Ibid*, p. 50
variousness and blessings."  

It was a rural life, sad, cruel and callous particularly for land labourers. It is a life in the raw, dependent and ignorant, exposed to the oppressions of the unjust social system and the caprice of the weather. Wages were then only a few shillings a week. The poor were made to feel ashamed at being poor, and were treated with condescension or pity, which was hard to put up with. Poverty led to crime; people were still hanged and hanged in public. When Thomas Hardy was in his teens he saw a woman hanged in Dorchester. After some two years or so another man was hanged in Dorchester prison. Hardy claimed on to the heath at the back of the house and focused his father's telescope on the prison and the gallows. When he had just placed the telescope to his eyes, the white figured victim dropped downwards, and the town clock struck eight. "The whole thing had been so sudden that the glass nearly fell from Hardy's hands. He seemed alone on the heath with hanged man, and crept homeward wishing he had not been so curious".  

Hardy as a sensitive boy, responded precociously to his experiences. The rural life in which he was born and bred deeply stamped his imagination with its moving spirit. When he reached the creative stage of development he conceived his picture of life in these terms. In short, Hardy's interest was always rural England. Timothy O'Sullivan observes that every feature of his rural surroundings spoke to Hardy throughout his life. He was reported to have told Clive Holland in his seventies that "ideas frequently presented themselves in his mind in the first instance more as mental pictures than as subjects for writing down".  

In visual terms Hardy's surroundings were hardly richer or more varied. To Hardy, his surroundings consisting of downland, forest, meadowland, and heath ornamented by earthworks, churches and manor-

22. Blunden, Edmund: Thomas Hardy, p. 11
23. Hardy, Florence Emily: The Life of Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), pp.28-29
24. O'Sullivan, Timothy: Thomas Hardy: An Illustrated Biography, p.14
houses, were but the marks of man's slow progress against nature. "Hardy believed in the oneness in essence of nature and man".25

Wessex is the commonly accepted Hardy world, but it seems that the real Hardy world lies elsewhere. It is the border line between custom and education, between primitive living and modern living and between rural simplicity and urban sophistication. Raymond Williams rightly puts it: "The Hardy country is of course Wessex: that is to say mainly Dorset and its neighbouring countries. But the real Hardy country, I feel more and more, is that border country so many of us have been living in: between custom and education, between work and ideas, between love of place and experience of change".26 In such a characteristics world, mobile and changing, the figures of Hardy stand out quite prominently like a landmark. It is not really from an old rural world or from a remote region that Hardy speaks to us. Nor does he speak anything we know not. He speaks from the heart of an active experience, and what he speaks we always know, understand and feel. Any change of the old ways and customs is a painful experience which every sensitive human soul of all times may be subjected to in varying degrees. This seems to be one of the aspects of Hardian universalism.

2.2: SETTING AND EVOLUTION OF HARDY'S WESSEX

Thomas Hardy set all of his major novels in the south and southwest of England. He named the area "Wessex" after the medieval Anglo-Saxon kingdom that existed in this part of that country prior to the Norman Conquest. Although the places that appear in his novels actually exist, in many cases he gave the place a fictional name. For example, Hardy's hometown of Dorchester is called

25. Ibid : p.14
26. Williams, Raymond : The English Novel : From Dickens to Lawrence , p.98
Casterbridge in his books, most famously in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. In an 1895 preface to the novel *Far From the Madding Crowd* he described Wessex as "a merely realistic dream country".²⁷

When Hardy started writing he had not decided whether to pursue his career as an architect or whether to become a professional novelist. It was not until *Far from the Madding Crowd* - his fourth published novel — that he gave up architecture in favour of writing. This step meant for him that he had to earn a sufficient income that enabled him to make ends meet. To be able to fulfill this condition he had to write to the taste of his nineteenth-century readers. This has not always been easy for Hardy, and his communication with publishers (e.g. Alexander Macmillan and Kegan Paul) and editors (e.g. Leslie Stephen) reveal some of the advice Hardy received during this time. It was not only advice that was privately given to Hardy that influenced his writing; perhaps more importantly it were literary reviews his works received that had an influence on their form and content.

It would be oversimplifying matters to suggest that the only demand from the public on Hardy was to create a regional framework for his plots. There were other issues that influenced Hardy during the process of his writing, most importantly the demand of the circulating libraries to write 3-volume fiction that suited the needs of household reading. In addition to complying with these restraints Hardy had to create a kind of trade mark for his fiction that made his works distinguishable from the writings of other professional novelists. This trade mark came to be Wessex.

When Desperate Remedies Hardy’s first published novel appeared in 1869 Hardy had not yet created Wessex as the fictional region for his works. Wessex

²⁷. Hardy, Thomas: *Far From the Madding Crowd*, preface.
as it is known to us today was the outcome of a long process of evolution that took several decades. Hardy first used "Wessex" in *Far from the Madding Crowd* writing that Greenhill fair is "the Nijnii Novgorod of Wessex." It is doubtful whether at this stage Hardy had Wessex as a fictional region for his works in mind. It seems more likely that his continuing to use Wessex to describe the region in which his fiction is set was the outcome of responses from the public which he received. In favour of this suggestion is that it was not until he wrote *Two on a Tower* - his eighth published novel - that he began to use a uniform system of naming places which he retrospectively introduced in subsequent editions of novels that have previously appeared.

Hardy soon began to divide Wessex into different regions. In *The Return of the Native* (1878) he introduced South Wessex. In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) Upper- and Mid-Wessex are mentioned for the first time. In *Jude the Obscure* (1895), the reader learns of the existence of North-, Nether- and Outer Wessex. Finally in 1914, Off Wessex appears for the first time on any of Hardy's maps.

Hardy undertook two extensive textual revisions - the first for the Wessex Novels Edition (London: Osgood, McLlvaine, 1895/96) and the second for the Wessex Edition (London: Macmillan, 1912). The main purpose of these revisions was to turn Wessex into the largely consistent region as which it is known to us today. The outcome was that from then on Wessex came to be perceived as an existing region (mainly Dorset) into which people can travel.

The actual definition of "Hardy's Wessex" varied widely throughout Hardy's career, and was not definitively settled until after he had retired from

28. *Ibid*, p.294
writing novels. When he first created the concept of a fictional Wessex, it consisted merely of the small area of Dorset in which Hardy grew up; by the time he wrote his last novel *Jude the Obscure*, the boundaries had extended to include all of Dorset, Wiltshire, Somerset, Devon, Hampshire, much of Berkshire, and some of Oxfordshire, with its most north-easterly point being Oxford (renamed “Christminster” in the novel). Similarly, the actual nature and significance of ideas of “Wessex” were developed over a long series of novels through a lengthy period of time. The idea of Wessex plays an important artistic role in Hardy’s works, particularly his later novels, assisting the presentation of themes of progress, primitivism, sexuality, religion, nature, and naturalism; however, this is complicated by the economic role Wessex played in Hardy’s career. Considering himself primarily to be a poet, Hardy wrote novels mostly to earn money: books that could be marketed under the Hardy brand of “Wessex novels” were particularly lucrative, which gave rise to a tendency to sentimentalised, picturesque, populist descriptions of Wessex - which, as a glance through most tourist gift shops in the south-west will reveal, remain popular with consumers today.

Hardy’s resurrection of the name “Wessex” is largely responsible for the popular modern use of the term to describe the south-west region of England (with the exception of Cornwall); today, a panoply of organizations take their name from Hardy to describe their relationship to this area. Hardy’s conception of Wessex as a separate, cohesive geographical and political identity has proved powerful, despite the fact it was originally created purely as an artistic conceit, and has spawned a lucrative tourist trade, and even a secessionist Wessex Regionalist Party.
2.3: INTRODUCTION TO MAJOR WESSEX NOVELS

i) Far from the Madding Crowd

It was not until the publication of *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), Hardy's fourth novel that Hardy won widespread popularity as a writer, and he was able to give up architecture. The book was published serially in 1874, in Corn Hill Magazine, a journal edited by Leslie Stephens, the father of Virginia Woolf. The novel was published in short sections, and as one read it, one can see that they intentionally leave the reader in suspense; this was a device to motivate readers to buy the next issue of the magazine. Early reviewers compared Hardy's writing to that of George Eliot and recognized him as an important new voice in English fiction. The novel gained a wide readership. Critical notices were plentiful and mostly positive. 'Hardy revised the text extensively for the 1895 edition, and made further changes for the 1901 edition'.

One of Hardy's central concerns in all of his writing was the problem of modernity in a society that was rapidly becoming more and more industrial. One of his projects as a writer was to create an account of life in the swiftly changing Dorsetshire as it had once been. He was particularly interested in the rituals and histories of that part of England, as well as the dialect of its locals. The title *Far From the Madding Crowd* suggests avoidance of the life of a city, modernized government, crowds and industry; in it, Hardy tries to fashion a portrait of what he saw as an endangered way of life and to create a snapshot for future generations.

Bathsheba Everdene has the enviable problem of coping with three suitors simultaneously. The first to appear is Gabriel Oak, a farmer as ordinary, stable,
and sturdy as his name suggests. Perceiving her beauty, he proposes to her and is promptly rejected. He vows not to ask again.

Oak’s flock of sheep is tragically destroyed, and he is obliged to seek employment. Chance has it that in the search he spies a serious fire, hastens to aid in extinguishing it, and manages to obtain employment on the estate. Bathsheba inherits her uncle’s farm, and it is she who employs Gabriel as a shepherd. She intends to manage the farm by herself. Her farmhands have reservations about the abilities of this woman, whom they think is a bit vain and capricious.

Indeed, it is caprice that prompts her to send an anonymous valentine to a neighboring landowner, Mr. Boldwood, a middle-aged bachelor. His curiosity and, subsequently, his emotions are seriously aroused, and he becomes Bathsheba’s second suitor. She rejects him, too, but he vows to pursue her until she consents to marry him.

The vicissitudes of country life and the emergencies of farming, coupled with Bathsheba’s temperament, cause Gabriel to be alternately fired and rehired. He has made himself indispensable. He does his work, gives advice when asked, and usually withholds it when not consulted.

But it is her third suitor, Sergeant Francis Troy, who, with his flattery, insouciance, and scarlet uniform, finally captures the interest of Bathsheba. Troy, who does not believe in promises, and laments with some truth that “women will be the death of me,” has wronged a young serving maid. After a misunderstanding about the time and place where they were to be married, he left her. This fickle soldier marries Bathsheba and becomes an arrogant landlord. Months later, Fanny, his abandoned victim, dies in childbirth. Troy is stunned — and so is Bathsheba, when she learns the truth. She feels indirectly responsible for the tragedy and knows that her marriage is over.
Bathsheba is remorseful but somewhat relieved when Troy disappears. His clothes are found on the shore of a bay where there is a strong current. People accept the circumstantial evidence of his death, but Bathsheba knows intuitively that he is alive. Troy does return, over a year later, just as Boldwood, almost mad, is trying to exact Bathsheba's promise that she will marry him six years hence, when the law can declare her legally widowed. Troy interrupts the Christmas party that Boldwood is giving. The infuriated Boldwood shoots him. Troy is buried beside Fanny, his wronged love. Because of his insanity, Boldwood's sentence is eventually commuted to internment at Her Majesty's pleasure.

Gabriel, who has served Bathsheba patiently and loyally all this time, marries her at the story's conclusion.

The title *Far From the Madding Crowd* comes from Thomas Gray's famous 18th-century poem "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard (1751)":

"Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,
Their sober wishes never learned to stray;
Along the cool sequestered vale of life
They kept the noiseless tenor of their way."

By alluding to Gray's poem, Hardy evokes the rural culture that, by Hardy's lifetime, had become threatened with extinction at the hands of ruthless industrialization. His novel thematizes the importance of man's connection to, and understanding of, the natural world. Gabriel Oak embodies Hardy's ideal of a life in harmony with the forces of the natural world.

The novel also contemplates the relationship between luck, or chance, and moral responsibility. Why should we live a morally upright life if tragedy

30.Gray, Thomas: "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard, lines 73-76"
strikes us all equally anyway? While some characters, like Gabriel, are always responsible and cautious, others, like Sergeant Troy, are careless and destructive. Hardy was very much influenced by the ideas of Charles Darwin, who maintained that the development of a biological species- and, by extension, of human society and history- is shaped by chance and not by the design of a god.

Another theme is the danger and destruction inherent in romantic love and marriage. Hardy exposes the inconsistencies, irrationalities, and betrayals that often plague romantic relationships. Bathsheba begins the novel an independent woman, but by falling in love with Troy, she nearly destroys her life. Similarly, Hardy presents us with many couples in which one partner is more in love than the other, and he shows what disastrous events result from this inequality.

Hardy’s *Far From the Madding Crowd* was a great success. In this novel of ‘character and environment’ as Hardy called it, the contrasted characters of the three chief men of story have been worked out well: the man of single eye, who waits and works patiently, scarcely hoping for any reward or recognition, but ready to help the woman he loved, literary through fire and water; the profligate soldier, who comes, sees and for a time conquers; and the reserved middle aged farmer falling in love for the first time in life at the age of forty, and driven almost to insanity by disappointment. Each of them plays his part well and takes his due share in the development of the story. H.C.Duffin is quite vocal in his praise of the novel and observes, “Far from the Madding Crowd is Hardy’s first masterpiece; and it went near to being his greatest. Only Tess surpasses it, and for sheer Hardian quality I doubt whether even the Mayor, even Jude, quite reaches the wonderful heights of this first wonder of all.”

ii) The Return of the Native

Hardy's second major novel *The Return of the Native* was almost a breakaway from Victorian convention. This human drama of pain and pathos begins with a description of Egdon Heath. The very description of Egdon Heath in its minute details indicates Hardy's mastery in descriptive art, and in power of description he excels many of his Victorian contemporaries. But it is worth noting that Hardy suggests much more than what he describes. As a descriptive writer Hardy belonged to his own age; but he chose to describe one might easily take him for one belonging to the modern times. "The new Vale of Tempe may be a great waste in Thule: human souls may find themselves in closer and closer harmony with external things wearing a somberness distasteful to our race when it was young. The time seems near, if it has not actually arrived, when the chastened sublimity of a moor, a sea, or a mountain will be all of nature that is absolutely in keeping with the moods of the more thinking among mankind."\(^32\)

*The Return of the Native* takes as one of its central themes- and, arguably, as its central character- the tract of windswept upland in Hardy's Wessex known as Egdon Heath. The novel is deeply rooted in the folk customs of the residents of the Heath, and attempts to imitate their attitudes and even their patterns of speech. It is the return to the heath of the educated Clym Yeobright that supplies the novel's title and catalyzing crisis. This surely derives from the experience of Thomas Hardy himself, who only a few years before the publication of the novel made his own return to his native country.

The novel opens with the action of the plot already underway. The reddleman Diggory Venn rides onto the heath with Thomasin Yeobright in the back of his wagon: her marriage to Damon Wildeve was delayed by an error in

\(^32\) **Hardy, Thomas: The Return of the Native, p.5**
the marriage certificate, and Thomasin collapsed. It is soon learnt that Wildeve orchestrated the error himself. He is infatuated with Eustacia Vye, and is, at least to some extent, using Thomasin as a device to make Eustacia jealous. When Venn learns of the romance between Eustacia and Wildeve, his own love for Thomasin induces him to intervene on her behalf, which he will continue to do throughout the novel. But Venn’s attempts to persuade Eustacia to allow Wildeve to marry Thomasin, like his own marriage proposal to Thomasin, are unsuccessful.

Into this confused tangle of lovers comes Clym Yeobright, Thomasin’s cousin and the son of the strong-willed widow Mrs. Yeobright, who also serves as a guardian to Thomasin. Eustacia sees in the urbane Clym an escape from the hated heath. Even before she meets him, Eustacia convinces herself to fall in love with Clym, breaking off her romance with Wildeve, who then marries Thomasin. Chance and Eustacia’s machinations bring Clym and her together, and they begin a courtship that will eventually end in their marriage, despite the strong objections of Mrs. Yeobright. Once Wildeve hears of Eustacia’s marriage, he again begins to desire her, although he is already married to Thomasin.

In marrying Eustacia, Clym distances himself from his mother. Yet distance soon begins to grow between the newlyweds as well. Eustacia’s dreams of moving to Paris are rejected by Clym, who wants to start a school in his native country. Wildeve inherits a substantial fortune, and he and the unhappy Eustacia once again begin to spend time together: first at a country dance, where they are seen by the omnipresent observer Diggory Venn, and then later when Wildeve visits Eustacia at home while Clym is asleep. During this visit, Mrs. Yeobright knocks at the door; she has come hoping for a reconciliation with the couple. Eustacia, however, in her confusion and fear at being discovered with Wildeve, does not allow Mrs. Yeobright to enter the house: heart-broken and feeling rejected by her son, she succumbs to heat and snakebite on the walk home, and dies.
Clym blames himself for the death of his mother; he and Eustacia separate when he learns of the role that Eustacia played in Mrs. Yeobright’s death, and of her continued relations with Wildeve. Eustacia plans an escape from the heath, and Wildeve agrees to help her. On a stormy night, the action comes to a climax: on her way to meet Wildeve, Eustacia drowns. Trying to save her, Wildeve drowns as well. Only through heroic efforts does Diggory Venn save Clym from the same fate. The last part of the novel sees the growth of an affectionate relationship, and an eventual marriage, between Thomasin and Diggory. Clym, much reduced by his travails and by weak eyesight brought on by overly arduous studies, becomes a wandering preacher, taken only half-seriously by the locals.

The Return of the Native looks at first like a typical nineteenth-century novel: long, with several plots, and set in a wide landscape. But this tale is really very compact. The major action takes place in a year’s time. All of the characters live in the Egdon area, and the outside world does not intrude.

All of the major characters are bound together in a dense knot of relationships. The structure of this book is concentrated, to reflect the tight organization of the action. Book First, the longest book, sets the stage and introduces the characters. Book Second brings Clym and Eustacia together and sees the marriage of Thomasin and Wildeve. Book Third shows the split between Clym and his mother and his marriage to Eustacia. Book Fourth tells of the terrible accidents that lead to Mrs. Yeobright’s death. Book Fifth sees Clym and Eustacia separate, bringing about the tragic deaths that end the main action. Book Sixth, a kind of epilogue, shows the marriage of Thomasin and Diggory.

The action is organized around seasonal celebrations, beginning and ending with the autumn bonfires, as if to emphasize the dramatic changes that can take place in such short periods of time. The story is told in straight chronological order, without the use of flashbacks or other devices. (This may underscore the
story’s sense of the straightforward, irresistible movement of time itself.) Regularly, our concentration upon the major characters is broken by the appearance of the country folk, as if for comic relief, to stress the need for the reader to step back and consider the meaning of the tale.

Take for instance, the example of Egdon Heath, the first "character" introduced into the book. The heath proves physically and psychologically important throughout the novel: characters are defined by their relation to the heath, and the weather patterns of the heath even reflect the inner dramas of the characters. "Egdon is not only the scene of the tale; it dominates the plot and determines the characters. It is silent; it feels, it speak, it slays".\(^{33}\) Indeed, it almost seems as if the characters are formed by the heath itself: Diggory Venn, red from head to toe, is an actual embodiment of the muddy earth; Eustacia Vye seems to spring directly from the heath, a part of Rainbarrow itself, when she is first introduced; Wildeve's name might just as well refer to the wind-whipped heath itself. But, importantly, the heath manages to defy definition. It is, in chapter one, "a place perfectly accordant with man's nature".\(^{34}\) The narrator's descriptions of the heath vary wildly throughout the novel, ranging from the sublime to the gothic. There is no possible objectivity about the heath. No reliable statement can be made about it.

For Clym, the heath is beautiful; for Eustacia, it is hateful. The plot of the novel hinges around just this kind of difference in perception. Most of the key plot elements in the novel depend upon misconceptions—most notably, Eustacia's failure to open the door to Mrs. Yeobright, a mistake that leads to the older woman's death—and mistaken perceptions. Clym's eventual near-blindness reflects a kind of deeper internal blindness that afflicts all the main characters in the novel: they do not recognize the truth about each other. Eustacia and Clym

\(^{33}\) Duffin, H.C.: Thomas Hardy, p.128
\(^{34}\) Hardy, Thomas: The Return of the Native, p.4
misunderstand each other's motives and true ambitions; Venn remains a mystery; Wildeve deceives Thomasin, Eustacia and Clym. The characters remain obscure for the reader, too. When *The Return of the Native* was first published, contemporary critics criticized the novel for its lack of sympathetic characters. All of the novel's characters prove themselves deeply flawed, or at the very least- of ambiguous motivation. Clym Yeobright, the novel's intelligent, urbane, generous protagonist, is also, through his impatience and single-minded jealousy, the cause of the novel's great tragedy. Diggory Venn can either be seen as a helpful, kind-hearted guardian or as an underhanded schemer. Similarly, even the antagonistic characters in the novel are not without their redeeming qualities.

Perhaps the most ambiguous aspect of the novel is its ending. The novel seems to privilege a bleak understanding of human nature. Given the tragedy of the double drowning, it seems impossible that the novel could end happily. And yet, Diggory Venn and Thomasin are contentedly married. This is not, however, the way the novel was first conceived; Hardy was forced to give the novel a happy ending in order to please the Victorian public. In an uncharacteristic footnote, Hardy remarks, "The writer may state here that the original conception of the story did not design a marriage between Thomasin and Venn... But certain circumstances of serial publication led to a change of intent. Readers can therefore choose between the endings." Thus, even the true conclusion of the novel is left in doubt, a fitting end for a novel that thrives on uncertainty and ambiguity. Nevertheless, the grim sense of tragedy and frustration of the story is to some relieved at the end by this union.

iii) The Mayor of Casterbridge

*The Mayor of Casterbridge* reveals Hardy's peculiar location in this shifting world, possessing elements of both the Victorian and modernist forms. It charts
the course of one man’s character, but it also chronicles the dramatic change of
an isolated, rural agricultural community into a modern city. In *The Mayor of
Casterbridge*, as well as in his most popular fictions, such as *Tess of the
D’Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy explores the effects of cultural and
economic development: the decline of Christianity as well as folk traditions, the
rise of industrialization and urbanization, and the unraveling of universally held
moral codes.

Michael Henchard is traveling with his wife, Susan, looking for employment
as a hay-trusser. When they stop to eat, Henchard gets drunk, and in an auction
that begins as a joke but turns serious, he sells his wife and their baby daughter,
-Elizabeth-Jane, to Newson, a sailor, for five guineas. In the morning, Henchard
regrets what he has done and searches the town for his wife and daughter. Unable
to find them, he goes into a church and swears an oath that he will not drink
alcohol for twenty-one years, the same number of years he has been alive.

After the sailor’s death, eighteen years later, Susan and Elizabeth-Jane
seek Henchard; Elizabeth-Jane believes he is merely a long-lost relative. They
arrive in Casterbridge and learn that Henchard is the mayor. The parents meet
and decide that in order to prevent -Elizabeth-Jane from learning of their disgrace,
Henchard will court and remarry Susan as though they had met only recently.

Meanwhile, Henchard has hired Donald Farfrae, a young Scotchman, as
the new manager of his corn business. Elizabeth-Jane is intrigued by Farfrae,
and the two begin to spend time together. Henchard becomes alienated from
Farfrae, however, as the younger man consistently outdoes Henchard in every
respect. He asks Farfrae to leave his business and to stop courting Elizabeth-
Jane.

Susan falls ill and dies soon after her remarriage to Henchard. After
discovering that Elizabeth-Jane is not his own daughter, but Newson’s, Henchard
becomes increasingly cold toward her. Elizabeth-Jane then decides to leave Henchard’s house and live with a lady who has just arrived in town. This lady turns out to be Lucetta Templeman, a woman with whom Henchard was involved during Susan’s absence; having learned of Susan’s death, Lucetta has come to Casterbridge to marry Henchard.

While Lucetta is waiting for Henchard to call on her, she meets Farfrae, who has come to call on Elizabeth-Jane. The two hit it off and are eventually married. Lucetta asks Henchard to return to her all the letters she has sent him. On his way to deliver the letters, the messenger, Jopp, stops at an inn. The peasants there convince him to open and read the letters aloud. Discovering that Lucetta and Henchard have been romantically involved, the peasants decide to hold a “skimmity-ride,” a humiliating parade portraying Lucetta and Henchard together. The event takes place one afternoon when Farfrae is away. Lucetta faints upon seeing the spectacle and becomes very ill. Shortly afterward, she dies.

While Henchard has grown to hate Farfrae, he has grown closer to Elizabeth-Jane. The morning after Lucetta’s death, Newson, who is actually still alive, arrives at Henchard’s door and asks for Elizabeth-Jane. Henchard tells him that she is dead, and Newson leaves in sorrow. Elizabeth-Jane stays with Henchard and also begins to spend more time with Farfrae. One day, Henchard learns that Newson has returned to town, and he decides to leave rather than risk another confrontation. Elizabeth-Jane is reunited with Newson and learns of Henchard’s deceit; Newson and Farfrae start planning the wedding between Elizabeth-Jane and the Scotchman.

Henchard comes back to Casterbridge on the night of the wedding to see Elizabeth-Jane, but she snubs him. He leaves again, telling her that he will not return. She soon regrets her coldness, and she and Farfrae, her new husband, go looking for Henchard so that she can make her peace. Unfortunately, they find
him too late, discovering that he has died alone in the countryside. He has left a will: his dying wish is to be forgotten. He died and left a will requesting no funeral or fanfare:

"That Elizabeth-Jane Farfrae be not told of my death, or made to grieve on account of me. "& that I be not bury'd in consecrated ground. "& that no sexton be asked to toll the bell. "& that nobody is wished to see my dead body. "& that no mourners walk behind me at my funeral. "& that no flowers be planted on my grave, "& that no man remember me. "To this I put my name".  

As a “Story of a Man of Character,” The Mayor of Casterbridge focuses on how its protagonist’s qualities enable him to endure. One tends to think of character, especially in terms of a “Man of Character,” as the product of such values as honor and moral righteousness. Certainly Michael Henchard does not fit neatly into such categories. Throughout the novel, his volatile temper forces him into ruthless competition with Farfrae that strips him of his pride and property, while his insecurities lead him to deceive the one person he learns to truly care about, Elizabeth-Jane. Henchard dies an unremarkable death, slinking off to a humble cottage in the woods, and he stipulates in his will that no one mourn or remember him. There will be no statues in the Casterbridge square, as one might imagine, to mark his life and work. Yet Hardy insists that his hero is a worthy man. Henchard’s worth, then—that which makes him a “Man of Character”—lies in his determination to suffer and in his ability to endure great pain. He shoulders the burden of his own mistakes as he sells his family, mismanages his business, and bears the storm of an unlucky fate, especially when the furmity-woman confesses and Newson reappears. In a world that seems guided by the “scheme[s] of some sinister intelligence bent on punishing” human beings,

37. Ibid, p.126.
there can be no more honorable and more righteous characteristic than Henchard’s brand of "defiant endurance."

The value of a good name is abundantly clear within the first few chapters of the novel: as Henchard wakes to find that the sale of his wife was not a dream or a drunken hallucination, his first concern is to remember whether he divulged his name to anyone during the course of the previous evening. All the while, Susan warns Elizabeth-Jane of the need for discretion at the Three Mariners Inn—their respectability (and, more important, that of the mayor) could be jeopardized if anyone discovered that Henchard’s family performed chores as payment for lodging.

The importance of a solid reputation and character is rather obvious given Henchard’s situation, for Henchard has little else besides his name. He arrives in Casterbridge with nothing more than the implements of the hay-trusser’s trade, and though we never learn the circumstances of his ascent to civic leader, such a climb presumably depends upon the worth of one’s name. Throughout the course of the novel, Henchard attempts to earn, or to believe that he has earned, his position. He is, however, plagued by a conviction of his own worthlessness, and he places himself in situations that can only result in failure. For instance, he indulges in petty jealousy of Farfrae, which leads to a drawn-out competition in which Henchard loses his position as mayor, his business, and the women he loves. More crucial, Henchard’s actions result in the loss of his name and his reputation as a worthy and honorable citizen. Once he has lost these essentials, he follows the same course toward death as Lucetta, whose demise is seemingly precipitated by the irretrievable loss of respectability brought about by the "skimmity-ride."

*The Mayor of Casterbridge* is a novel haunted by the past. Henchard’s fateful decision to sell his wife and child at Weydon-Priors continues to shape his
life eighteen years later, while the town itself rests upon its former incarnation: every farmer who tills a field turns up the remains of long-dead Roman soldiers. The Ring, the ancient Roman amphitheater that dominates Casterbridge and provides a forum for the secret meetings of its citizens, stands as a potent symbol of the indelibility of a past that cannot be escaped. The terrible events that once occurred here as entertainment for the citizens of Casterbridge have, in a certain sense, determined the town’s present state. The brutality of public executions has given way to the miseries of thwarted lovers.

Henchard’s past proves no less indomitable. Indeed, he spends the entirety of the novel attempting to right the wrongs of long ago. He succeeds only in making more grievous mistakes, but he never fails to acknowledge that the past cannot be buried or denied. Only Lucetta is guilty of such folly. She dismisses her history with Henchard and the promises that she made to him in order to pursue Farfrae, a decision for which she pays with her reputation and, eventually, her life.

iv) The Woodlanders

_The Woodlanders_ was published in 1887. Thomas Hardy mentioned in the biography that he thought of writing about the woodlanders more than ten years ago. In fact it was after ten years when he could realize his idea. He himself estimated _The Woodlanders_ as his best novel. Desmond Hawkins praised it “as the most professional example of the characteristic Hardy novel.”

_The Woodlanders_ is one of the six masterpieces of Thomas Hardy’s Wessex novels. However, it is not so popular or attractive as the other novels. One of the reasons may be that _The Woodlanders_ was written after _The Mayor of Casterbridge_. In _the Mayor_ there is one dominant character whose life and death

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38. Hawkins, Desmond: Hardy- Novelist and Poet, p.104
is tragic. Hardy would like to change a style of the novel. As a result, there are five main characters instead of one hero or heroine in the next novel. Although Grace Melbury is a center among five main characters, she is not a dominant character in the novel. Grace is not so strong or impressive as the other heroines.

Grace cannot find her place in her hometown and leaves with her unfaithful husband in the end. She is doomed to live an unhappy life. However, her story is not a tragedy like Henchard’s and Tess’s, because of her weak character.

Grace belongs to both woodlanders and outsiders. She is suffering from the conflict of the two worlds. Her father, a rich timber merchant, gives her a higher education and tries to raise her social rank. Her marriage is completely controlled by her ambitious father. Grace sometimes shows her hope to marry Giles Winterbome, a rustic man who has lost his cottages under the life-hold system.

She is after all persuaded by her father to marry Edred Fitzpiers, an intellectual dilettante and philanderer. Fitzpiers despises the villagers of Little Hintock and runs away to the continent with Mrs. Charmond, a rich landlady of the woodland. Grace’s position as a deserted wife is not secure in the village. Through suffering, Grace comes to know Giles’ true love for her, and hopes to remarry him. After Giles dies of the disease, Grace returns to her husband. Thus Grace is torn between Winterborne and Fitzpiers, but she finally chooses to live with Fitzpiers. Her future life might be unhappy, but she chooses not to die but to live a life.

Giles Winterborne and Marty South are woodlanders, while Fitzpiers and Mrs. Charmond are outsiders. As the title shows, Giles and Marty plant trees and know the woods very well. They are the spirits of the trees. The trees in the woods as well as the villagers mourn for the death of Giles, which is just like a
pastoral elegy. Marty’s love for Giles is related like a poem in front of his grave, but Giles has never known her love. Giles and Marty are not rewarded at all. Their virtues are useless, while Oak and Venn are strong enough to regain their loves. When there is no possibility to marry Grace, Giles loses his will to live and gives up the battle for the survival. In this sense, his death is not a tragic one.

In *The Woodlanders* the background of the novel is not so hostile as Egdon Heath. The villagers do not play a role of Greek chorus for the first time in Hardy’s main works. From the viewpoint of the death of Giles, this novel may be called a pastoral elegy, which is only in the latter part of the novel. Five main characters are not so distinctive. Above all, Grace Melbury is not so attractive. This is because the writer himself is lack of emotional involvement and sympathy with Grace, unlike Tess and Eustacia.

v) **Tess of the d’Urbervilles**

Soon after *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (1891) was published, its sales assured Hardy’s financial future. But the novel also aroused a substantial amount of controversy.

The poor peddler John Durbeyfield is stunned to learn that he is the descendent of an ancient noble family, the d’Urbervilles. Meanwhile, Tess, his eldest daughter, joins the other village girls in the May Day dance, where Tess briefly exchanges glances with a young man. Mr. Durbeyfield and his wife decide to send Tess to the d’Urberville mansion, where they hope Mrs. d’Urberville will make Tess’s fortune. In reality, Mrs. d’Urberville is no relation to Tess at all: her husband, the merchant Simon Stokes, simply changed his name to d’Urberville after he retired. But Tess does not know this fact, and when the lascivious Alec d’Urberville, Mrs. d’Urberville’s son, procures Tess a job tending fowls on the
d’Urberville estate, Tess has no choice but to accept, since she blames herself for an accident involving the family’s horse, its only means of income.

Tess spends several months at this job, resisting Alec’s attempts to seduce her. Finally, Alec takes advantage of her in the woods one night after a fair. Tess knows she does not love Alec. She returns home to her family to give birth to Alec’s child, whom she christens Sorrow. Sorrow dies soon after he is born, and Tess spends a miserable year at home before deciding to seek work elsewhere. She finally accepts a job as a milkmaid at the Talbothays Dairy.

At Talbothays, Tess enjoys a period of contentment and happiness. She befriends three of her fellow milkmaids—Izz, Retty, and Marian—and meets a man named Angel Clare, who turns out to be the man from the May Day dance at the beginning of the novel. Tess and Angel slowly fall in love. They grow closer throughout Tess’s time at Talbothays, and she eventually accepts his proposal of marriage. Still, she is troubled by pangs of conscience and feels she should tell Angel about her past. She writes him a confessional note and slips it under his door, but it slides under the carpet and Angel never sees it.

After their wedding, Angel and Tess both confess indiscretions: Angel tells Tess about an affair he had with an older woman in London, and Tess tells Angel about her history with Alec. Tess forgives Angel, but Angel cannot forgive Tess. He gives her some money and boards a ship bound for Brazil, where he thinks he might establish a farm. He tells Tess he will try to accept her past but warns her not to try to join him until he comes for her.

Tess struggles. She has a difficult time finding work and is forced to take a job at an unpleasant and unprosperous farm. She tries to visit Angel’s family but overhears his brothers discussing Angel’s poor marriage, so she leaves. She hears a wandering preacher speak and is stunned to discover that he is Alec
d’Urberville, who has been converted to Christianity by Angel’s father, the Reverend Clare. Alec and Tess are each shaken by their encounter, and Alec appallingly begs Tess never to tempt him again. Soon after, however, he again begs Tess to marry him, having turned his back on his -religious ways.

Tess learns from her sister Liza-Lu that her mother is near death, and Tess is forced to return home to take care of her. Her mother recovers, but her father unexpectedly dies soon after. When the family is evicted from their home, Alec offers help. But Tess refuses to accept, knowing he only wants to obligate her to him again.

At last, Angel decides to forgive his wife. He leaves Brazil, desperate to find her. Instead, he finds her mother, who tells him Tess has gone to a village called Sandbourne. There, he finds Tess in an expensive boardinghouse called The Herons, where he tells her he has forgiven her and begs her to take him back. Tess tells him he has come too late. She was unable to resist and went back to Alec d’Urberville. Angel leaves in a daze, and, heartbroken to the point of madness, Tess goes upstairs and stabs her lover to death. When the landlady finds Alec’s body, she raises an alarm, but Tess has already fled to find Angel.

Angel agrees to help Tess, though he cannot quite believe that she has actually murdered Alec. They hide out in an empty mansion for a few days, then travel farther. When they come to Stonehenge, Tess goes to sleep, but when morning breaks shortly thereafter, a search party discovers them. Tess is arrested and sent to jail. Angel and Liza-Lu watch as a black flag is raised over the prison, signaling Tess’s execution.

A close review of the novel reveals that Unfairness dominates the lives of Tess and her family to such an extent that it begins to seem like a general aspect of human existence in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*. Tess does not mean to kill Prince,
but she is punished anyway, just as she is unfairly punished for her own rape by Alec. Nor is there justice waiting in heaven. Christianity teaches that there is compensation in the afterlife for unhappiness suffered in this life, but the only devout Christian encountered in the novel may be the reverend, Mr. Clare, who seems more or less content in his life anyway. For others in their misery, Christianity offers little solace of heavenly justice. Mrs. Durbeyfield never mentions otherworldly rewards. The converted Alec preaches heavenly justice for earthly sinners, but his faith seems shallow and insincere. Generally, the moral atmosphere of the novel is not Christian justice at all, but pagan injustice. The forces that rule human life are absolutely unpredictable and not necessarily well-disposed to us. The pre-Christian rituals practiced by the farm workers at the opening of the novel, and Tess’s final rest at Stonehenge at the end, remind us of a world where the gods are not just and fair, but whimsical and uncaring. When the narrator concludes the novel with the statement that “Justice’ was done, and the President of the Immortals (in the Aeschylean phrase) had ended his sport with Tess,” we are reminded that justice must be put in ironic quotation marks, since it is not really just at all. What passes for “Justice” is in fact one of the pagan gods enjoying a bit of “sport,” or a frivolous game.

*Tess of the d’Urbervilles* presents complex pictures of both the importance of social class in nineteenth-century England and the difficulty of defining class in any simple way. Certainly the Durbeyfields are a powerful emblem of the way in which class is no longer evaluated in Victorian times as it would have been in the Middle Ages—that is, by blood alone, with no attention paid to fortune or worldly success. Indubitably the Durbeyfields have purity of blood, yet for the

39. Hardy, Thomas: *Tess of D’Urbervilles*, p.444
parson and nearly everyone else in the novel, this fact amounts to nothing more than a piece of genealogical trivia. In the Victorian context, cash matters more than lineage, which explains how Simon Stokes, Alec’s father, was smoothly able to use his large fortune to purchase a lustrous family name and transform his clan into the Stoke-d’Urbervilles. The d’Urbervilles pass for what the Durbeyfields truly are—authentic nobility—simply because definitions of class have changed. The issue of class confusion even affects the Clare clan, whose most promising son, Angel, is intent on becoming a farmer and marrying a milkmaid, thus bypassing the traditional privileges of a Cambridge education and a parsonage. His willingness to work side by side with the farm laborers helps endear him to Tess, and their acquaintance would not have been possible if he were a more traditional and elitist aristocrat. Thus, the three main characters in the Angel-Tess-Alec triangle are all strongly marked by confusion regarding their respective social classes, an issue that is one of the main concerns of the novel.

One of the recurrent themes of the novel is the way in which men can dominate women, exerting a power over them linked primarily to their maleness. Sometimes this command is purposeful, in the man’s full knowledge of his exploitation, as when Alec acknowledges how bad he is for seducing Tess for his own momentary pleasure. Alec’s act of abuse, the most life-altering event that Tess experiences in the novel, is clearly the most serious instance of male domination over a female. But there are other, less blatant examples of women’s passivity toward dominant men. When, after Angel reveals that he prefers Tess, Tess’s friend Retty attempts suicide and her friend Marian becomes an alcoholic, which makes their earlier schoolgirl-type crushes on Angel seem disturbing. This
devotion is not merely fanciful love, but unhealthy obsession. These girls appear utterly dominated by a desire for a man who, we are told explicitly, does not even realize that they are interested in him. This sort of unconscious male domination of women is perhaps even more unsettling than Alec’s outward and self-conscious cruelty.

Even Angel’s love for Tess, as pure and gentle as it seems, dominates her in an unhealthy way. Angel substitutes an idealized picture of Tess’s country purity for the real-life woman that he continually refuses to get to know. When Angel calls Tess names like “Daughter of Nature” and “Artemis,” we feel that he may be denying her true self in favor of a mental image that he prefers. Thus, her identity and experiences are suppressed, albeit unknowingly. This pattern of male domination is finally reversed with Tess’s murder of Alec, in which, for the first time in the novel, a woman takes active steps against a man. Of course, this act only leads to even greater suppression of a woman by men, when the crowd of male police officers arrest Tess at Stonehenge. Nevertheless, for just a moment, the accepted pattern of submissive women bowing to dominant men is interrupted, and Tess’s act seems heroic.

In Tess of the d’Urbervilles and other novels, Hardy demonstrates his deep sense of moral sympathy for England’s lower classes, particularly for rural women. He became famous for his compassionate, often controversial portrayal of young women victimized by the self-righteous rigidity of English social morality. Perhaps his most famous depiction of such a young woman is in Tess of the d’Urbervilles. This novel and the one that followed it, Jude the Obscure (1895), engendered widespread public scandal with their comparatively frank look at the sexual hypocrisy of English society.
vi) Jude the Obscure:

When Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* was first published in 1895, its critical reception was so negative that Hardy resolved never to write another novel. *Jude the Obscure* attacked the institutions Britain held the most dear: higher education, social class, and marriage. It called, through its narrative, for a new openness in marriage laws and commonly held beliefs about marriage and divorce. It introduced one of the first feminist characters in English fiction: the intellectual, free-spirited Sue Bridehead.

Jude Fawley dreams of studying at the university in Christminster, but his background as an orphan raised by his working-class aunt leads him instead into a career as a stonemason. He is inspired by the ambitions of the town schoolmaster, Richard Phillotson, who left for Christminster when Jude was a child. However, Jude falls in love with a young woman named Arabella, is tricked into marrying her, and cannot leave his home village. When their marriage goes sour and Arabella moves to Australia, Jude resolves to go to Christminster at last. However, he finds that his attempts to enroll at the university are met with little enthusiasm.

Jude meets his cousin Sue Bridehead and tries not to fall in love with her. He arranges for her to work with Phillotson in order to keep her in Christminster, but is disappointed when he discovers that the two are engaged to be married. Once they marry, Jude is not surprised to find that Sue is not happy with her situation. She can no longer tolerate the relationship and leaves her husband to live with Jude.

Both Jude and Sue get divorced, but Sue does not want to remarry. Arabella reveals to Jude that they have a son in Australia, and Jude asks to take him in.
Sue and Jude serve as parents to the little boy and have two children of their own. Jude falls ill, and when he recovers, he decides to return to Christminster with his family. They have trouble finding lodging because they are not married, and Jude stays in an inn separate from Sue and the children. At night Sue takes Jude’s son out to look for a room, and the little boy decides that they would be better off without so many children. In the morning, Sue goes to Jude’s room and eats breakfast with him. They return to the lodging house to find that Jude’s son has hanged the other two children and himself. Feeling she has been punished by God for her relationship with Jude, Sue goes back to live with Phillotson, and Jude is tricked into living with Arabella again. Jude dies soon after.

*Jude the Obscure* focuses on the life of a country stonemason, Jude, and his love for his cousin Sue, a schoolteacher. From the beginning Jude knows that marriage is an ill-fated venture in his family, and he believes that his love for Sue curses him doubly, because they are both members of a cursed clan. While love could be identified as a central theme in the novel, it is the institution of marriage that is the work’s central focus. Jude and Sue are unhappily married to other people, and then drawn by an inevitable bond that pulls them together. Their relationship is beset by tragedy, not only because of the family curse but also by society’s reluctance to accept their marriage as legitimate.

The horrifying murder-suicide of Jude’s children is no doubt the climax of the book’s action, and the other events of the novel rise in a crescendo to meet that one act. From there, Jude and Sue feel they have no recourse but to return to their previous, unhappy marriages and die within the confinement created by their youthful errors. They are drawn into an endless cycle of self-erected oppression and cannot break free. In a society unwilling to accept their rejection
of convention, they are ostracized. Jude's son senses wrongdoing in his own conception and acts in a way that he thinks will help his parents and his siblings. The children are the victims of society's unwillingness to accept Jude and Sue as man and wife, and Sue's own feelings of shame from her divorce.

Jude's initial failure to attend the university becomes less important as the novel progresses, but his obsession with Christminster remains. Christminster is the site of Jude's first encounters with Sue, the tragedy that dominates the book, and Jude's final moments and death. It acts upon Jude, Sue, and their family as a representation of the unattainable and dangerous things to which Jude aspires.