Chapter 6

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A single theme that may be said to run from end to end through the bulk of Hardy's poetry is love. Hardy viewed love as an emotion which can manifest in many directions. His poems exhibit the manifold and continually changing facets of love. Each poem reveals a different perspective or a kind of truth in the prism of love. But love for Hardy always remains a unitary phenomenon. His attitude towards love, through the various portrayals in his poems, basically remains the same — humanitarian. As discussed in the preceding chapters, on the one hand, there are poems in which love is merely an irresistible sexual desire and physical indulgence may seem the only end in such poems. On the other hand, there are the poems — and
they are more important – wherein higher emotions and attachments grow from what may be called pure appetite. Even here physical hunger may not be absent; it is subordinated to the anxiety for the welfare of the beloved. There are also convincing portrayals in Hardy’s poetry where the physical facet of love is altogether missing and the lover is much more than satisfied in a feeling which may be called higher than happiness:

Hardy chooses rather to show how, at its worst – perhaps at its normal, the flesh may be a drag and degeneration. . . . Certainly there is far more in Hardy of the love that is spirit than the love that is animal.

It is a feeling which is self sufficient and requires no presence of the object. Thus, the changing object towards which love is focused provides plurality to love in Hardy’s poetry. Though Hardy may pity the victims of animal sensuality and selfishness, no relationship is agreeable to him, if it does not operate within the humanitarian framework of love – which remains an ideal in all his portrayals.

Love for Hardy symbolises the universal, existential need. It is the force that keeps the human race together as family, clan and society. It is the most powerful striving in human-beings that impels the desire for interpersonal fusion. Hardy sees love as an active power which breaks through the walls that separate human-beings. It has the capacity to unite them with others and make them overcome a sense of isolation. But it would be wrong to limit his portrayals of love to individual relationships only. He saw love as an energy that can be redirected and transformed
for the betterment of the whole world. Basically, he saw love as compassion, in which all ethics must take root. Love can only attain its full breadth and depth if it embraces all living creatures and does not limit itself to mankind. Erich Fromm in ‘Theory of Love’ maintains that:

Man—of all ages and cultures—is confronted with the solution of one and the same question: the question of how to overcome separateness, how to achieve union, how to transcend one’s own individual life and find at onement.²

Hardy, in his poems, endeavours to achieve the same aim—the solution to the problem of separateness, isolation, which has haunted human-beings for centuries. His poetry reflects, among other things, man’s loneliness caused by his alienation from God, Nature and Society.

Hardy questions the very existence of God in poems like ‘Hap’ (CP, 7), ‘God’s Funeral’ (CP, 307) among a host of other poems. He believed in naturalistic order and theological disorder. Hardy was pained to experience the presence of rigid naturalistic order against the absence of scriptural religious law. Life as the cause of religion and destined by God failed to appeal and substantiate his worldly experience whereas life governed by nature, with its indifference towards human joy or suffering, appeared more convincing to him. Hardy longed for some divine scheme but to his utter dismay, he found only natural order indifferent to human hopes and beliefs. The religion of his childhood was simple. The Bible was taken literally and it promised a
harmonious bond between man and God. Though it impressed Hardy in his early years, it could not sustain his knowledge acquired from Darwin's *Origin of Species*, astronomy and geology. Hardy's views, expressed in *Jude the Obscure* and later in the poems, branded him as 'Agnostic', 'Atheist', 'Pessimist', 'Immoralist', 'Infidel' and 'Heretic'. A generation that was torn between science and religion was still not ready to dismiss the presence of God. His poems have recorded disbelief in God and religion. He calls God by several names - 'Power', 'Fate', 'Will', 'Immanent Will', 'Chance', 'the Silent Head', 'the Maker', 'the Creator', the 'Willer', 'the Laws', and 'the Purpose'. His disbelief in God and religion springs not from some theological or religious concerns but from a sense of helplessness in comprehending human suffering and alienation. John Wain's comments appropriately support this view:

As a poet, Hardy not unnaturally works over the same themes that we find in his prose. His work is concerned mainly with suffering and in particular with the human sense of impotence in the face of a ruthless destiny. He described himself as an agnostic, but he was in many ways closer to being an atheist in the high Victorian manner, combining disbelief in God with a venomous dislike of Him for not existing. The strength of Hardy's work comes mainly from a
tragic stoicism, a blind will to go on living
despite of the malignancy of fate; and also from
a considerable curiosity about human nature. 3

Hardy's views on God as expressed in his poems must have shocked
many in his generation. Even the titles of some of his poems throw light on his
attitude towards God. ‘God-Forgotten’ is a philosophical fantasy. The poetic
persona imagines being in the presence of God as a representative of "the sons
of earth" seeking "Some answer to their cry"(CP, 112). But the Lord, mindless
and even careless of the world, believed to have been created by Him, asks a
series of short and abrupt questions which speak for man's alienation from
God:

- "The Earth, sayest thou? The Human race?
  By me created? Sad its lot?
  Nay: I have no remembrance of such place:
  Such world I fashioned not" – (CP, 112).

On being reminded of the "Word that made it all" (CP, 112), God speaks in a
characteristic indifferent manner:

...“The Earth of men–let me bethink me. ... Yea!
  I dimly do recall.”

"Some tiny sphere I built long back
(Mid millions of such shapes of mine)
So named . . . It perished, surely—not a wrack
  Remaining, or a sign?"(C.P, 112).
The adverb 'dimly' and the verb 'bethink' stress God's indifference towards His own Creation. Being oblivious of the Earth, God had thought that it must have perished, leaving behind "not a wrack" or "a sign" (CP, 112). In response to the poet's announcement and assertion God says:

"Dark, then, its life! For not a cry
Of ought it bears do I now hear;
Of its own act the threads were snapt whereby
Its plaints had reached mine ear." . . .

"All other orbs have kept in touch;
Their voicings reach me speedily;
Thy people took upon them overmuch
In sundering them from me!" (CP, 112-13).

God was grieved to learn that the Earth is distraught by pangs, strife and silent suffering. He says:

"Thou shouldst have learnt that Not to Mend
For me could mean but Not to Know:
Hence, messengers! And straightway put an end
To what men undergo." . .

Homing at dawn, I thought to see
One of the Messengers standing by.
- Oh, childish thought! . . . Yet oft it comes to me
When trouble hovers nigh (CP,113).

'The Bedridden Peasant' subitled 'To an Unknown God' (CP, 113) is yet another poem that presents an earnest plea of the bed-ridden peasant to an unknown God, requesting Him to bestow some mercy. The opening stanza is a plain and direct statement of the distance between human-beings and God and their loss of communion with Him:
Much wonder I—here long low-laid -
   That this dead wall should be
Betwixt the Maker and the made,
   Between Thyself and me!

For, say one puts a child to nurse,
   He eyes it now and then
To know if better 'tis, or worse,
   And if it mourn, and when.

But Thou, Lord, giv'st us men our clay
   In helpless bondage thus
To Time and Chance, and seem'st straightway
   To think no more of us! (CP, 113).

The seeming disregard and neglect of man to be left by God in "helpless bondage to 'Time and Chance' bewilders the peasant. He feels a strong need for believing in a benevolent God. He aspires to win God's grace and support by 'a word' of a hymn or prayer. The peasant is confident that God would not let him suffer in his remaining years but will "heal the ills with quickest care / Of me and all my kind" (C.P.113). The peasant feels that some external factor or some strange disaster must have been responsible for the shattered ties between man and God, that God would not allow needless human suffering if He were aware of it:

   But, seeing how much Thy creatures bear -
      Lame, starved, or maimed, or blind -
   Thou'dst heal the ills with quickest care
      Of me and all my kind.

   Then, since Thou mak'st not these things be,
      But these things dost not know,
   I'll praise Thee as were shown to me
      The mercies Thou would'st show! (CP, 114).
Similarly, 'By the Earth's Corpse' (CP, 115) presents the chill, bleak, dry, dreary and lifeless face of the earth which resembles the one depicted in 'The Darkling Thrush.' Hardy found contemporary times dull and depressing. He has employed in this poem the Biblical myth of man's destruction as narrated in the Genesis. The poem is in four stanzas of which the first is about the question asked to God by Time and the remaining three are devoted to God's reply. Hardy's God, who is subservient to Time, says that "things now are not the same/ As they have earlier been." (CP, 115) It was God who created the earth and man on it "with interest close and keen" (CP, 115) and the same God has reduced the earth now to the "corpse" (CP, 115). Man's alienation from God is voiced in the following lines which recapitulate His indignation against man and His repentance for the creation of the earth and life and man on it:

"As when, in Noe's days,
I whelmed the plains with sea,
So at this last, when flesh
And herb but fossils be,
And, all extinct, their piteous dust
Revolves obliviously,
That I made Earth, and life, and man,
It still repenteth me!"(CP,115).

'New Year's Eve' presents an imaginative dialogue between the poet and an unkind, merciless, malevolent God. He is the God who once created the world and let it go of its own accord, who created not only leaves but also worms, not only good but also evil, and not only pleasure but also pains. The poet asks God: "What reasons made you call / From formless void this earth we tread," and "Why shaped you us, 'who in/ This tabernacle groan'"(CP, 260). God's
unsatisfactory reply evades not only the poet's question but also his own responsibility towards His creatures. In 'God's Funeral' (CP, 307), which is an allegory, Hardy depicts the spectacle of god-fearing men and women following the corpse of the dead God. The poem also narrates briefly the development of the concept called God. God in earlier times was jealous, fierce and powerful but in the later ages man made Him just, merciful and patient. In the nineteenth century Darwin disproved the legendary nature of the *Genesis* and thereby refuted the myth of creation by God and this sounded the death knell for God:

"Till, in Time's stayless stealthy swing,  
Uncompromising rude reality  
Mangled the Monarch of our fashioning,  
Who quavered, sank; and now has ceased to be  

Man's isolation from God is dead is reflected in the following questions:

:"And who or what shall fill his place?  
Whither will wanderers turn distracted eyes  
For some fixed star to stimulate their pace  
Towards the goal of their enterprise?"  

And the answer is found in these lines:

Still, how to bear such loss I deemed  
The insistent question for each animate mind,  
And gazing, to my growing sight there seemed  
A pale yet positive gleam low down behind,  

Whereof to lift the general night,  
A certain few who stood aloof had said,  
"See you upon the horizon that small light - 
Swelling somewhat?" Each mourner shook his head.
And they composed a crowd of whom
Some were right good, and many nigh the best . . .
Thus dazed and puzzled 'twixt the gleam and gloom
Mechanically I followed with the rest (CP, 309).

The poem ends on the note of the poet's agnosticism which enhances man's, including the poet's, dismissal from God. The creator of the world is finally killed by his own creation. But in a bid to cling to something they recreate Him instantaneously. Hardy asks a very pertinent question through this poem: Did God create man or was it, in fact, the alienated man who created God? Only thoughtful poets, out of their concern for the world, dare to question God.

Hardy was a reluctant disbeliever. The rift between the traditional religious belief and the logical scientific intellect becomes the most fructifying and fundamental element of his art. His emotions were pious though not mystical or devotional in the religious sense. Hardy sought an explanation of the universe in the religious sense. His institutional attachment to the Church made him wander between Darwin and Jehovah instead of exploring other oases. At the age of eighty he wrote:

Felt I would prefer to be a cathedral organist to anything in the world, [and] the scheme of things is indeed incomprehensible . . . perhaps for the best. Knowledge might to terrible.4

Hardy struggled to promote a rationally acceptable religion devoid of dogmas and unnecessary rituals. He always looked for God as an external personality and was frustrated not to find Him. He once said:
I have been looking for God for fifty years, and I think that if he had existed I should have discovered him. . . . I have called this power all sorts of names—never supposing they would be taken for more than fancies (Life, 24).

At the age of eighty-five, in a conversation with Frederic Lefe'vre, he explained his concept of religion:

By religion I mean the religious spirit. . . . I believe that we are moving toward the disappearance of dogmas. I dream of an alliance between religions freed from dogmas. The religion which ought to be preserved if the world is not to perish absolutely and which we must achieve if the world is not to perish, an alliance of rationalism and religion, would be created by poetry. . . . Poetry, pure literature, and religion are the visible points of the most authentic mental and emotional life.5

Even Nature fails to provide the much needed solace for mankind in Hardy's poetry. Human characters feel out of place in their relationship with Nature, as compared to other creatures and their relationship with Nature. His poems reveal a sense of alienation felt by human beings which springs from a conflict between
human aspirations and natural law. Just as God, Nature too acts as an indifferent background to the human action in his poems. It enhances a sense of loneliness caused by man's alienation from Nature. Hardy had the advantage of living amidst rural Nature. His close observation of natural phenomena, investigations into its reality and speculation on its role in relation to human life and predicament finds predominance in his writings. So far as his sensibility towards Nature is concerned, he was ahead of his contemporaries like Tennyson, Browning and Matthew Arnold who have also recorded in their poems, though in a minor form, the split between man and Nature. Providence, harmony, and conscious design have little place in Hardy's view of Nature. Nature in Hardy's poems serves only as a background against which he depicts the dismal as well as delightful states of human life. The picture of cold, adverse and menacing Nature can be discerned in the poems like 'Nature's Questioning' (CP, 58), 'The Darkling Thrush' (CP, 137), 'She Hears the Storm' (CP, 258), 'Winter in Durnover Field' (CP, 136), 'A Backward Spring' (CP, 468), 'Night-Time in MidFall' (CP, 693), and 'Weathers' (CP, 533) to name only a few. 'In a Wood' expresses the "City-opprest" (CP, 56) poetic persona's venturing into the forest:

Dreaming that sylvan peace
Offered the harrowed ease--
Nature a soft release
From men's unrest (CP, 56).

But the great growths rivalling with other vegetation seemed in an internal combat appeared unwelcoming to the narrator. His escape from society into the lap of Nature proved a misadventure. The end result is an antithesis of the romantic perception of Nature:
Since, then, no grace I find
  Taught me of trees,
Turn I back to my kind,
  Worthy as these.
There at least smiles abound,
There discourse trills around,
There, now and then, are found
  Life-loyalties (CP,57).

In ‘Nature's Questioning’ the poet looks out of the window at early dawn and notices "Field, flock, and lonely tree" gazing at him "Like chastened children sitting silent in a school" with "Their faces dulled, constrained, and worn" (CP,58). These natural phenomena ask questions regarding their creator and their creation by Him. They are struck with the sense of wonder at God's indifferent and mysterious ways. The poet has obviously no answers to their questions:

    Thus things around. No answerer I . . .
    Meanwhile the winds, and rains,
    And Earth's old glooms and pains
    Are still the same, and gladdest Life Death neighbours nigh (CP, 59).

‘The Darkling Thrush’ written on the eve of the twentieth century, owes a good deal to Shelley's ‘To a Skylark’, Keats’ ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ and to Arnold's ‘Dover Beach.’ The poet looks upon the nineteenth century as a period of darkness and suffering, and of faithlessness, caused by science and rationalist philosophies. Both the earth and the century appear dead and desolate:

    The land's sharp features seemed to be
    The Century's corpse outleant,
    His crypt the cloudy canopy,
    The wind his death-lament (CP, 137).
In this poem the images drawn from Nature like "the spectre-grey frost", "winter's dregs", "the weakening eye of day" and "the tangled bine-stems" scoring the sky "like strings of a broken lyre" (CP, 137) create a picture of adverse and hostile Nature. Mankind feels severed and isolated because instead of encouraging and invigorating human life, the harshness of Nature obliterates all the signs of it:

The ancient pulse of germ and birth
   Was shrunken hard and dry,
And every spirit upon earth
   Seemed fervourless as I (CP, 137).

Even the "full-hearted evensong! Of joy illimited", emanating from an aged thrush, fails to regenerate "Some blessed Hope" (CP, 137), known to bird but unfamiliar to the poet. This is a powerful instance of the communication-gap between man and Nature. Unable to comprehend the working of Nature human beings are forced to confine themselves into the interiors of their homes for comfort:

And all mankind that haunted nigh
   Had sought their household fires (CP, 137).

'She Hears the Storm' is a widow's meditation on what nature meant to her in the past and what it means to her in the present. The poem records the memories of her anxiety. When her husband was alive, she would have been distressed by fears during a stormy night:

I should have murmured anxiously,
   "The pricking rain strikes cold;
His road is bare of hedge or tree,
   And he is getting old" (CP, 259).
But his death has put an end to such worries and anxieties. Now a widow, she is totally mindless and heedless of the natural forces near her residence. Though the storm, heard by her has stirred her memories, she is relieved in that her husband is safe in a "Storm-tight" (CP, 259) place in his grave. The poem points towards the indifference of nature. The storm as a natural phenomenon recurs but the altered situation changes the human response.

Though Nature is indifferent towards human aspirations it enhances the human tragedy. It provides a natural background to the human emotions and feelings portrayed in the poems. ‘Neutral Tones’ provides an apt example. The poem is a jewel in Hardy’s poetic pieces with its meticulously controlled narrative, strong feelings masked in appropriate language. It analyses the strategies of human consciousness and reveals mental tensions in a state of emotional excitements. The poem begins with a brief picture of Nature. The lovers standing by a pond on a winter day when the sun shone white as if scolded by God presents a photographic image. Few grey leaves fallen from an ash tree lay on the starving grass. The poem ends recapturing the picture of reminiscent love and the face of the beloved becomes an inseparable part of the surrounding:

The smile on your mouth was the deadest thing
Alive enough to have strength to die;
And a grin of bitterness swept thereby
   Like an ominous bird a-wing . . .

Since then, keen lessons that love deceives,
And wrings with wrong, have shaped to me
Your face, and the God-curst sun, and a tree,
   And a pond edged with grayish leaves (CP, 9).
‘A Conversation at Dawn’ brings the threatening consequences of the unfaithful married relationship to the fore with the prominent use of Nature. The terror at the centre of the poem is very real. Fate plays an important part catching two incongruous individuals as couple in the net of circumstantial coincidence. With its ballad like stanza-form the narrator only sets the drama in motion and disavows omniscience:

He lay awake, with a harassed air,
And she, in her cloud of loose lank hair,
Seemed trouble-tried
As the dawn drew in on their faces there.
The chamber looked far over the sea
From a white hotel on a white-stoned quay,
And stepping a stride
He parted the window-drapery.

Above the level horizon spread
The sunrise, firing them foot to head
From its smouldering lair,
And painting their pillows with dyes of red (CP, 344-45).

Nature remains in the background only to enhance the theatrical effect. The sun, as described in the third stanza, emphatically presents the rage of the wife who feels forced to drag a forced conjugal relationship while the husband adopts pressure tactics to tie his wife to the social vow. The sun, ‘firing them from foot to head’ and ‘painting their pillows with dyes of red’ suggests a cruel outcome of the conversation between the husband and wife, whichever way it may lead. Image of sun ‘From its smouldering lair’ ‘Heaving’ and ‘peering’ casting an ‘angry’ light upon the morning cloud enhance the human tragedy. But Nature, though presented as a living entity, affecting human action, remains as passive
and indifferent as God. David Cecil’s remark about Hardy’s characters seems appropriate even for his poetic personae: “Hardy’s characters linger in our imagination as grand typical figures silhouetted against the huge horizon of the universe.”

Hardy bestows the same concern for the natural animal world as he cherishes for the human beings. ‘The Bird Catcher’s Boy’ presents the genuine sympathies of an innocent boy who is yet to learn his father’s trade:

“Father I fear your trade
Surely it’s wrong!
Little birds limed and made
Captive life long” (CP, 785).

The poet depicts the tragedy of three birds, Rook, Starling and Pigeon, during an adverse and hostile winter in the poem entitled ‘Winter in Dumover Field’. It presents a scene near Max Gate, or the one in Dorset, as stage-directions indicate. The suffering of the birds is enhanced against the background of the dull grey sky and the keen north-east wind. The ground, in which wheat is recently sown, is frozen to iron hardness. The whole scene is filled with starkness and blankness. There is "no grain" (CP, 136) available to the inhabitants of the locality. The repeated phrases like "the cruel frost" and "I find no grain"(CP, 136) amply reflect nature's cruelty to birds, animals and human beings. The poet's sense of pity for the suffering, starving birds alienates him from such horrible Nature. The brief poem is quoted in full:
SCENE. – A wide stretch of fallow ground recently sown with wheat, and frozen to iron hardness. Three large birds walking about thereon, and wistfully eyeing the surface. Wind keen from north-east: sky a dull grey.

(TRIOLET)
Rook.--Throughout the field I find no grain;
The cruel frost encrusts the cornland!
Starling.--Aye: patient pecking now is vain
  Throughout the field, I find . . .
Rook.-- No grain!
Pigeon.--Nor will be, comrade, till it rain,
  Or genial thawings loose the lorn land
  Throughout the field.
Rook.-- I find no grain:
  The cruel frost encrusts the cornland! (CP, 136).

Hardy, unlike Keats and Shelley, was a terrestrial poet. He refrains from escaping to ethereal heights like the romantic poets. He remains thoughtfully confined to the earth seeking remedy for the worldly woes in the world itself. He knew how easy it would have been for him to temporarily fly “on the viewless wings of poesy”7 to the happy abode of the nightingale. Similarly, he was aware of:

. . . the lark that Shelley heard,
And made immortal through times to be; -
Though it only lived like another bird,
And knew not its immortality.

Lived its meek life; then, one day, fell -
A little ball of feather and bone;
And how it perished, when piped farewell,
And where it wastes, are alike unknown (CP, 92).
And he was severely critical and perplexed that:

... it inspired a bard to win
Ecstatic heights in thought and rhyme (CP, 92).

The narrator in one of his poems, ‘In Vision I Roamed’ describes the poetic persona’s experience of roaming much higher than Shelly’s ‘Skylark’ or even the abode of Keats’ ‘Nightingale’. But even such enormous heights do not betray his thoughts from the Earth:

In vision I roamed the flashing Firmament,
So fierce in blazon that the Night waxed wan,
As though with an awed sense of such ostent;
And as I thought my spirit ranged on and on

In footless traverse through ghast heights of sky,
To the last chambers of the monstrous Dome,
Where stars the brightest here to darkness die:
Then, any spot on our own Earth seemed Home! (CP, 7).

The poem presents an exploration of man’s visionary proclivities. It employs dream vision to reach the outer sphere of the Earth. The poet is excited by the journey but longs to return to the Earth. He roamed through ‘the flashing Firmament, / So fierce in blazon that the Night waxed wan’. He also passed through ‘ghast heights of sky/ To the last chambers of the monstrous Dome’. He was so close to the stars and so far away from the earth that he felt lonely and isolated. From such a height he says:

Then, any spot on our own Earth seemed Home! (CP, 7).

The journey increases the poet’s love for the Earth. Many poems can be cited to show that love did not make Hardy an escapist. He wished to love and enjoy the earthly glories. His aspired to make love reign on earth through which he wished
to make this world a better place to live. He sought to grasp the harsh realities of
the world courageously and endeavoured to change them into finer form. But the
change, for Hardy, had to be real and tangible, not simply notional or visionary.
He was anxious to evolve thoughts that could reshape the raw and the earthly real.
And it is this love for the world that induces him to seek remedy for social
ailments from within the society. He was not a life denier. His strong love for the
earth and the earthly is also perceptible in poems like 'Weathers' (CP, 535), 'Let
Me Enjoy' (CP, 222), 'Great Things' (CP, 445), to name only a few. The pleasure
Hardy derived from the simple sensuous joys of the earth is obvious from his
poems. But most of all, the title of one of his poems, 'He Prefers Her Earthly'
aptly suggests the extent of his love for the terrestrial:

Yet if that chasm of splendour claim your presence
Which glows between the ash cloud and the dun,
    How changed must be your mortal mould!
Changed to a firmament-riding earthless essence
    From what you were of old:
All too unlike the fond and fragile creature
Then known to me. . . Well, shall I say it plain?
    I would not have you thus and there,
But still would grieve on, missing you, still feature
    You as the one you were (CP, 466).

Hardy believed that Nature exists in itself oblivious of human affairs. It
has no impact on human affairs. 'Suspense' aptly expresses this notion:

    But it matters little, however we fare –
    Whether we meet, or I get not there;
The sky will look the same thereupon,
    And the wind and the sea go groaning on (CP, 851).
Hardy firmly believed that since both the concept of God and Nature are indifferent towards human aspirations, feelings and even their sense of wellness human beings should turn to themselves for sympathy and support:

Although his optimism about the laws which govern the world and man has, for the most part, failed him his optimistic view of most men and women continued.

His main intention in expressing the sordid reality of the world was to convey his true concern regarding man's notion of himself and the world he inhabits. He could not bring himself to believe in the existence of paradise and so wanted human being to create one for themselves on this Earth:

. . . The truth should be told, and the fact be faced
That had best been faced in earlier years:

The fact of life with dependence placed
On the human heart's resource alone,
In brotherhood bonded close and graced

With loving-kindness fully blown,
And visioned help unsought, unknown (CP, 306).

He wished that men and women would sympathise with each other. Through his writing, he suggests that if love is natural so should be sex. He does not despise premarital sex but calls it necessary education. He craves for compatibility between man and woman and advocates divorce and even remarriage instead of life long suffering due to one wrong decision or social ritual. He is of the view that marriage should be a healthy institution. He believed in the inherent nobility of individuals. He was of the view that men and women are less cruel to each other. It is mainly
the society with its laws and customs, the imposition of which results in cruelty to one’s fellow beings.

Hardy, while dealing with love in the wider context, narrates the desire for interpersonal fusion. Poems in which the poetic personae achieve such a fusion feel happy, failure to do so makes them feel isolated. ‘At the word Farewell’ (CP, 405) aptly describes the feeling of love when the two characters in the poem attain closeness. This poem was written for Emma and narrates the author’s personal experience. In yet, another poem voicing through the lips of an imaginary lover, Hardy declares:

Foremost in my vision
   Everywhere goes she;
Change dissolves the landscapes,
   She abides with me (CP, 210).

love is not primarily a relationship to a specific person. It is an attitude, an orientation of character which determines the relatedness of a person to the world as a whole not towards one object of love. If a person love’s only one person and is indifferent to the rest of his fellow beings, his love is not love but a symbiotic attachment or an enlarged egotism. Love is constituted not by the object but by the faculty. If somebody truly love’s a person he can’t help loving all persons or even the entire world.

It could be said, then that love for Hardy is an orientation that reveals its all inclusiveness through the various facets that congregate in his poetry. It underlines the sense of responsibility, care, respect, knowledge and concern for all creatures. This is the kind of love the Bible speaks of when it says ‘love your neighbour as
‘thysel.’ It is characterized by its very lack of exclusiveness. ‘The Man He Killed’ emphasises the fundamental irrationality of war. Two individuals who confront each other on the war-front feel compelled to kill the other without any personal rivalry or grudge. Same individuals under normal circumstances might have shown considerable kindness:

"Had he and I but met
By some old ancient inn,
We should have sat us down to wet
Right many a nipperrkin!

"But ranged as infantry,
And staring face to face,
I shot at him as he at me,
And killed him in his place.

"I shot him dead because -
Because he was my foe,
Just so: my foe of course he was;
That's clear enough; although

"He thought he'd 'list, perhaps,
Off-hand like--just as I -
Was out of work--had sold his traps -
No other reason why.

"Yes; quain't and curious war is!
You shoot a fellow down
You'd treat if met where any bar is,
Or help to half-a-crown" (CP, 269).
The First World War was a profound shock to Hardy. He had been fascinated by the European wars of the previous century. In fact, *The Dynasts* was based on the Napoleonic War. Hardy imaginatively recreated a historical situation of the past in the epic drama but his personal response to the devastations caused by the Great War was of utter disillusionment.

The complex feeling of compassionate regret and unmistakable protest characterizes Hardy's poems, associated with the First World War. In a tone of pity distilled of war Hardy points out that the common soldiers are mere "puppets in a playing hand" (CP, 78) and asks in a tone of violent bitterness:

*When shall the saner softer polities
Whereof we dream, have play in each proud land,
And patriotism, grown Godlike, scorn to stand
Bondslave to realms, but circle earth and seas?*" (CP, 79).

The undertone of disillusionment that marks the war poems actually emanates from Hardy's life-long concern and solicitude for the ordinary mortals - the common folk. His poems focus on the injury caused by war to the human relationships and tender domestic sentiments. In 'A Wife in London' (CP, 83) Hardy highlights the shattered dreams of a young couple, due to the ruthlessness of war. In this ironically structured poem, the "flashed news" conveys the death of the husband, in war away from home in a foreign land. The following day she receives a letter from her husband - obviously posted long before the casualty - illustrating his plans for their future. The letter only adds poignancy to the distress of the girl widowed by war at the prime of her youth. 'The Going of the Battery' (CP, 80) pictures a wife's lament and the pathos of departure coinciding with the band music and sound of bells. It enhances the ironical relationship of the situation. The illusory jubilation is completely demeaned
by real sorrow. In ‘The Souls of the Slain’ (CP, 84), Hardy provides a realistic perspective to the poem in which the dead soldiers realize that the glory of war is only an illusion. Caught in a nostalgic mood, they speculate about the hardships their absence would have caused to their families:

"Some mothers muse sadly, and murmur
Your doings as boys -
Recall the quaint ways
Of your babyhood's innocent days... .

"A father broods: 'Would I had set him
To some humble trade, . . .
"And our wives?" quoth another resignedly,

"Dwell they on our deeds?"
--"Deeds of home; that live yet
Fresh as new—deeds of fondness or fret;
Ancient words that were kindly expressed or unkindly,
These, these have their heeds."

--"Alas! then it seems that our glory
Weighs less in their thought
Than our old homely acts, (CP, 85-86).

Significantly, ‘Song of the Soldiers' Wives and Sweethearts’ (CP, 87) captures the mood of jubilation felt by the wives and the sweethearts as the soldiers return home. But the poem maintains a meaningful silence about their heroism or glory, in the warfield.

War blights possibilities. "In Time of Wars and Tumults’ (CP, 510) the narrator says that war uproots"by the night-gun's stroke/Of what the Yester moonshine brought to flower." In ‘Cry of the Homeless’the people rendered homeless
after the Prussian invasion of Belgium, curse the conqueror:

'May thy loved be slighted, blighted,
And forsaken,' be it said
By thy victims,
'And thy children beg their bread!' (CP, 512).

But then comes the 'richer malediction':

"Nay: a richer malediction! -
Rather let this thing befall
In time's hurling and unfurling
On the night when comes thy call;
That compassion dew thy pillow
And bedrench thy senses all
For thy victims,
Till death dark thee with his pall" (CP, 512).

In 'The Colonel's Soliloquy' (CP, 79) the colonel realizes the folly of war, rather late in life. Hardy thinks that lasting peace can be achieved only through universal brotherhood in the form of internationalism. The idea of internationalism is echoed in a later poem, 'His Country' where it dawns on the persona that his country is not confined to any particular region. He muses:

..."What is there to bound
My denizenship? It seems I have found
Its scope to be world-wide"(CP, 507).

In yet another poem To an Unborn Pauper Child', his grief for the child who is sure to be brought up as an orphan due to the social apathy towards illegitimate children comes alive. He says:

Fain would I, dear, find some shut plot
Of earth's wide wold for thee, where not
One tear, one qualm,
Should break the calm (CP, 117).
Another poem that very appropriately expresses Hardy’s observation of seemingly simple incident wrapped in innocent happiness of the commonest of the common lot is portrayed in ‘At the Railway Station, Upway’. The poem is quoted in full to bring alive the humanitarian concerns revealed in the momentary observation, at a public place, that mostly remains unnoticed even today for the want of a concerned poet like Hardy. The orphan, the convict and the constable, of the poem, still remain an alienated group even among the human lot, in the contemporary world, and substantiate Hardy’s concern:

"There is not much that I can do,
For I’ve no money that’s quite my own!"
Spoke up the pitying child -
A little boy with a violin
At the station before the train came in, -
"But I can play my fiddle to you,
And a nice one 'tis, and good in tone!"

The man in the handcuffs smiled;
The constable looked, and he smiled, too,
As the fiddle began to twang;
And the man in the handcuffs suddenly sang
   With grimful glee :
"This life so free
Is the thing for me!"
And the constable smiled, and said no word,
As if unconscious of what he heard;
And so they went on till the train came in -
The convict and boy with the violin (CP, 575).
Thus, it could be said that, love, for Hardy, signifies an attitude towards life. The multiple facets of love, portrayed in his poems, lead in an upward direction towards the humanitarian concerns of a poet who wished for a better world through the analysis of the workings of the universe and the social laws that tend to govern individual aspirations and collective conduct. His poems portray raw desires, pure passions and even animal instincts but they also convey that pure lust for lasting physical passion is nothing more than the dream. Similarly, passionate love may depend on the as ifs of the imaginative lovers who tend to live in constant illusion of emotions blinded by cupid. His poems do not deny the delusion experienced by the poetic personae. In fact, many poems even celebrate the feeling of falling in love, as has been discussed, but to say that the essence of love should be illusion seems utterly absurd. Hardy advocates sublimation of passion as can be seen in ‘He Abjures Love’ (CP, 220). That love should lead individuals towards shared conjugal bliss is obvious in his poems about man-woman relationship. Marriage should be a shared camaraderie rather than a shared trap becomes the message of his poems. He wanted marriage to be a bond and not bondage. The dilemmas arising due to incongruous marital relationships, as portrayed in his poems, are not mere causes to be analysed but also the expressions of agonies that individuals have lived through. The experience of these agonies and surviving through them becomes the history of mankind, in his poems. And since man-woman relationships and their allied dilemmas, concern sociological as well as psychological aspects, because they relate to a hiatus between law and love, collective history of conjugal life becomes the history of
human social structures and the political history of mankind. Phallocentric images and individual as well as collective responses to patriarchy become the referents of power structures affecting man-woman relationships. Thus, love, in Hardy’s poetry, cannot be limited to mere feeling, sentiment, desire, romance, friendship, responsibility, care, concern or even selflessness. It is an attitude that defines the relationship of an individual towards the world as a whole. It only becomes manifest in the multiple facets of love. Though it is easy to say that the multiple facets of love portrayed in Hardy’s poetry convey a range of meanings from instinctive love to intellectual humanitarian concerns the comprehensive totality evades in individual aspects. Moreover, Hardy’s inability to believe in a benevolent God or Nature does not lead the development of love towards spirituality or the abstractions of philosophy. His poems depict the experience of love that encompasses the humanitarian concerns of the world and courageously remain confined to the gravitational orbit of the real world.
NOTES


