Chapter Two

THOMAS HARDY

Hardy's placement in English literary history is unique. He may legitimately be called the first of the moderns and the last of the Victorians. His writings show us the traditional, conscientious, thoughtful, characteristic late Victorian poet and novelist. As such his critical equipment is well worth observing before we engage the masters of the English theory of fiction.

Critics of Hardy, although acknowledging his greatness both as a poet and as a novelist, seem to be divided on the comparative merit of his achievements in either form of literary expression. There is a school of thought which bisects Hardy as an artist, suggesting that he must be either a novelist or a poet. F.R. Leavis, as George Wing points out, is at the poetic pole in this matter; ¹ H.C. Duffin in his Thomas Hardy (1916) stands on the other side. The better course for our understanding of Hardy would, no doubt, be to look at his works as a whole and to recognize in them the latent inter-relationship. To some extent Hardy himself is responsible for this division of opinion among his critics. In his journals and letters he indefatigably suggests his devotion to poetry and implies that his novels were just the product of 'necessity', mere 'serial-stuff' indulged in

¹ G. Wing, Thomas Hardy (1963), p. 100
for earning a living. He further emphasizes that the best of his philosophy and weltanschaung is to be found in his poems and the dramatic epic The Dynasts rather than in his novels.\(^2\)

Hardy's casual attitude towards his novels has led critics like David Cecil to suggest that the novels are just 'a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' and that they lack the discipline characteristic of the works of masters like Flaubert or Henry James:

> Indeed, it is the inevitable defect of a spontaneous genius like Hardy's that it is impervious to education. No amount of painstaking study got him within sight of achieving that intuitive good taste, that instinctive grasp of the laws of literature, which is the native heritage of one bred from childhood in the atmosphere of a high culture. \(^3\)

This opinion may largely be attributed to the critic's failure to grasp the basic tenets of Hardy's art. C.D. Lewis was quick to perceive it. In her review of "Hardy and criticism" in the Scrutiny, she asserted:

> Hardy, we may justly reply, had a good Victorian education, was further equipped in the special arts and crafts of music and architecture, was generally well-read, as his note books show, had a remarkably accurate grasp of literary theory and a most intelligent response to its practice. \(^4\)

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3. Lord David Cecil, *Hardy the novelist* (1943)


*C.D. Lewis: "Hardy and criticism", p. 232*
That Hardy was a self-conscious artist and had a
definite theory of the art of novel-writing is borne out not
only by his cogitations throughout his journals and letters but
also in his essays on contemporary novels and his attitude to
some of the greatest masters in the craft of fiction. The
Prefaces to the Collected Edition of his novels and poems
further supplement our view of Hardy's seriousness as a novelist.
His critical powers were invariably perceived by his reviewers
and keen students of his novels. As early as 1916, H.C. Duffin
had remarked in his prefatory note to the First edition of his
study of Hardy:

But, in fact, Mr. Hardy is conspicuous, even among
writers of his rank, for complexity of critical
appeal — for the wealth of original perception,
of challenging thought, of strange and elusive
beauty that lurks under the familiar, almost
lonely semblance of his art. 5

Arthur, MC Dowall in his study Thomas Hardy (1931) acknowledged
Hardy's critical acumen:

... he was much more conscious as an artist than
he was generally supposed to be ... 6

About a decade later, Edmund Blunden in Thomas Hardy (1942)
remarked about Hardy's critical faculties:

5. H.C. Duffin, Thomas Hardy (Prefatory Note, p.4)
6. A. MC Dowall, Thomas Hardy, p. 67
In this "Candour in English Fiction" and other papers of Hardy, such wealth of original content appears that a wish springs up aside from their actual occasion ... Those he has left us, few as they are, emerge from the mass of literary casuistry in his age as specimens of powerful yet unforced grappling with the important and profound factors in the imaginative illustration of life. 7

True, Hardy was not a professional critic or a theorist like Walter Pater or Henry James. But he understood and assimilated the principles of the art of novel-writing and, to a considerable extent, succeeded in applying them to his novels in all conscience. He was not systematic in his pronouncements and he had little opportunity of codifying his theories on the art of fiction. But this should not lead us to underestimate his position as an intelligent critic of his craft and as a self-conscious artist.

Hardy's own scepticism about critical theory has led many a critic astray. Florence Hardy in the Preface to The life of Thomas Hardy warns us:

The opinions quoted from these pocket-books and fugitive papers are often to be understood as his passing thoughts only, temporarily jotted there for consideration, and not as permanent conclusion — a fact of which we are reminded by his frequent remarks on the tentative character of his theories. 8

7. Edmund Blunden, Thomas Hardy, p. 83
8. Early Life of Thomas Hardy, ed. F.E. Hardy (London, 1928); Preface, pp. VII-VIII
Hereinafter cited as LH I
Mrs. Hardy failed to remember that Hardy had made a rigorous selection of the wealth of material at his disposal before finalizing his Notebooks. As such, it is no longer proper to treat his statements as just 'passing thoughts'. Hardy retained what he found relevant and valuable and ignored what he thought to be out-dated or tentative. Perhaps she was deceived by some of Hardy's casual and rather cynical remarks about 'theory'. As for example, Hardy said in 1882: "Since I discovered that I was living in a world where nothing bears out in practice what it promises incipiently, I have troubled very little about theories ... Where development according to perfect reason is limited to the narrow region of mathematics, I am content with tentativeness from day to day". Obviously, Hardy was not denying the critical faculty, he was only suggesting the futility of rigid theory. No one knew better than him that critical vision is as vital for a creative artist as, say, pure inspiration. What he was emphasizing was that no amount of 'theorization' can make one a really great artist. His views on authors bred on 'theory and bred on 'correct education' is very revealing:

The literary productions of men of rigidly good family and correct education, mostly treat social conventions and contrivances — the artificial forms of living — as if they were cardinal facts of life.

9. Ibid., p. 201
10. Ibid., p. 279
As far as Hardy was concerned, he could write to good purpose when he followed his own aesthetics. His modest aim when he embarked upon novels seemed to commit himself to write like other people. He was emulating Thackeray and Charles Kingsley in his first novel *The Poor Man and the Lady* and was imitating Wilkie Collins and perhaps Trollope in *Desperate Remedies*. It was a time when modes of writing were constantly changing. The first creative wave of the Victorian novel, the period of the Brontës and Thackeray and the liveliest strength of Dickens had ended in the fifties. The next decade had less spontaneous force, the first of Meredith and George Eliot and the mid-flow of Trollope and Wilkie Collins. The sixties were the turning point of old and new. But Hardy seems to have contributed little in his earlier phase. He showed small interest in the modern man's sceptical consciousness. He saw the growth of sophistication and critical intellect in art as evils at its root. His scruples as a workman and his methodical seriousness as a student, even his systematic ambition for literary fame, seem to have been out-balanced by his sense of being an outsider to art's higher mysteries. He was a contemporary, in other words, of Baudelaire, Flaubert and Turgenev, of James, Moore, Yeats, Proust, Pound, Valéry and Eliot, but a colleague of none of them. This sense

11 This point is beautifully suggested by M.D. Zabel in *Craft & Character*, pp. 73-77
of isolation from the main stream of writers and the uniqueness of his own perception, perhaps, led him to shape his personal aesthetics, which, despite its occasional arbitrariness, demands attention from anyone concerned with the artistic progress of the modern novel and with the inter-relation of modern fiction and poetry.

**Literary Heritage**

As I have maintained earlier, Hardy was no adept at formal critical or aesthetic reasoning. He felt a life-long suspicion of its practitioners and his literary notes invariably suggest an element of impatience towards them. Yet his methodical habit of mind exercised itself over many years in notations on structure, form, style and aesthetic ideas, and in a continuous effort to generalize these into working principle.

It is interesting to note that his first critical remark is about Thackeray and his appreciation of the novelist's realistic presentation of life.\(^{12}\) The craft of fiction had not come to him easily. He was nibbling at poetry as an apprentice in architecture, but while leading a "triple existence",\(^{13}\) he was also unconsciously preparing himself as a novelist. He had his hesitations and doubts. The groping awkwardness he showed

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in mastering the technique of fiction-writing is equalled by the step-by-step pains he took to come into some kind of conscious knowledge of his aesthetic purpose. He felt the pull of older tradition of romance and a brotherhood with masters of Victorian fiction, especially Scott, Thackeray, George Eliot, Trollope and Wilkie Collins. The dramatic and sensationalist novelists of the sixties provided him with the skill of the trade. In drama, Hardy was a devoted student of Aeschylus and Sophocles and invariably showed his interest in Shakespeare's tragedies for the "plot" and the "tragic vision". His poetic loyalties rooted in the romanticism of Keats, Shelley and Tennyson, spent their last enthusiasm on Browning and Swinburne.

Apart from this literary heritage, Hardy was also influenced by his study of the theories and practice in music, architecture and painting. The influence of painting was, perhaps, the most vital. The full extent of Hardy's saturation in European art has never been fully recognized, but it is an essential key to the proper understanding of Hardy as a writer and craftsman. The number of his references to art, in his journals and in his novels, is quite unusually large, and

14. A study by A. Smart in The Review of English Studies (Aug. 1961), under the title "Victorian Imagery in the Novels of Thomas Hardy" (pp. 262-280) is a successful attempt to trace the influence of visual arts on Hardy's theory and practice in fiction.
reflects a long and profound study which was most intense in his early days in London, when he made frequent visit to the South Kensington Museum and the National Gallery. It is doubtful whether any other English novelist with the possible exception of George Moore, possessed so intimate a knowledge of the visual arts; certainly no other writer of fiction (barring Henry James) has ever used such knowledge with equal skill or imagination. Hardy saw a closer correspondence between his own art as a novelist and the art of painting. This was suggested at the outset of his career by his choice of "A Rural Painting of the Dutch School" as the sub-title of Under the Greenwood Tree. It is not therefore surprising to find him in his journal comparing his own work with that of the painters whom he particularly admired. Thus he wrote in 1886:

"My art is to intensify the expression of things, as is done by Crevilli, Bellini, etc. so that the heart and inner meaning is made vividly visible." 15

Turner, Correggio, Ruisdael and the French Impressionists, particularly, Manet and Courbet, seem to be his special favourites. As he reflected upon the visual arts, Hardy discovered in them unexpected resources which excited his imagination and stimulated his descriptive powers.

15. LH 1, pp. 231-32
Part of Hardy's literary theory is suggested only by implication or by his practice as a novelist. That the literary and artistic influences were in a way responsible for Hardy's aesthetics, his "subject matter" also demanded a set of theories or principles different from those of his contemporaries. Hardy was no 'historian of fine consciences'. He was as much concerned with 'life' as with 'living'. Hence the need to formulate not the Jamesian "poetics" but a kind of personal aesthetics. True, as a novice in the field he did grope for a method but when he came to himself and recognized his powers, he was convinced that the chronicler of Wessex life should strike a balance between the techniques of Victorian masters and that of the emerging school of highly self-conscious novelists — Flaubert, Proust and Henry James.

**Attitude to Art** :

A consideration of Hardy's theory of art may be valuable in the assessment of his theory of fiction and his own practice as a novelist. As early as 1877, we find him preoccupied with his search for a 'method'. His cogitations on the working of the artist's mind are, thus, very revealing. He wrote in his journal of June 1877:
There is enough poetry in what is left (in life), after all the false romance has been abstracted, to make a sweet pattern; e.g. the poem by H. Coleridge:

'She is not fair to outward view'.

So, then, if Nature's defects must be looked in the face and transcribed, whence arises the art in poetry and novel-writing? which must certainly show art, or it becomes merely mechanical reporting. I think the art lies in making these defects the basis of a hitherto unperceived beauty, by irradiating them with 'the light that never was' on their surface, but is soon to be latent in them by the spiritual eye. 16

This passage clearly defines Hardy's literary attitude and this romantic view of nature remained with him throughout his career as a poet and as a novelist. He will no longer paint Nature in her benign moods. Rather, he will find 'beauty in ugliness' by showing the mysteries of Nature. Not only this, he will also emulate the romantic poets by following a pattern that suits his 'idiogyncrasy':

As in looking at a carpet, by following one colour a certain pattern is suggested, by following another colour, another; so in life the seer should watch that pattern among general things which his idiogrcnacy moves him to observe, and describe that alone. This is, quite accurately, a going to Nature; yet the result is no more photograph, but purely the product of the writer's own mind. 17

This emphasis on selection of the 'uncommon' and perception of

16. Ibid, p. 151

Cf. "To find beauty in ugliness is the province of the poet?" (Ibid, p. 279)

Also "... I feel that Nature is played out as a Beauty, but not as a Mystery... I want to see the deeper reality underlying the scene, the expression of what are sometimes called abstract imaginings. (Ibid, p. 242)

17. Ibid, p. 190 (Italics mine)
the unseen and unheard beauties of Nature is a re-echoing of the
romantic theory of art. Hardy knew it from his own practice and
also from a study of the art of contemporary French Impressionists
that what is abiding in art is not social or public truth but
individual truth — truth perceived by the artist's individual
vision.

Referring to his experience in the British Academy of
Arts, Hardy wrote in his journal of 1886:

At the society of the British Artists there is good
technique in abundance; but ideas for subjects are
lacking. The Impressionist school is strong. It is
even more suggestive in the direction of literature
than in that of art. As usual it is pushed to
absurdity by some. But their principle is, as I
understand it, that what you carry away with you
from a scene is the true feature to grasp; or in
other words, what appeals to your individual eye
and heart in particular amid much that does not so
appeal, and which you therefore omit to record. 18

This predominantly romantic attitude to life and art partly
explains Hardy's aversion to 'realism'. True, he had announced
earlier that the greatness of a novelist (like Thackeray) lay in
a "perfect and truthful representation of actual life", 19 but
Hardy's definition of "realism" is different from those of Zola,
Wells and Dreiser. Perhaps few novelists are more careful than

18. LH I, p. 241 (Italics mine)
19. Ibid. p. 46 (letter to Mary Hardy, dated 13th. December, 1865)
Hardy in the meticulous details of his stories and in the delineation of the background against which his dramas are staged. The Prefaces to the novels more than prove Hardy's concern for realism or vraisemblance, as he calls it. His Wessex with its Green hill, Little Hintock and the Egdon are perfect representations but we also know that in order to heighten their impression he throws a glamour of romance over them. So that his Wessex, as he points out in the preface to Far From the Madding Crowd, becomes "a dreamland" for the reader.

In his critical writings, Hardy repeatedly stresses the impossibility of recording "the whole truth". The "truth" that the artist extracts from a scene turns out to be only the truth of the impression that the scene makes on him. As the artist works upon his impressions of reality, shaping them into some tangible piece of art, he must ever fall short of reproducing them as they originally existed in his perceptions. In one of his illuminating passages in "The Profitable Reading of Fiction" Hardy defines his attitude towards "imaginative truth" and "realistic truth":

To distinguish truths which are temporary from truths which are eternal, the accidental from the essential, accuracies as to the perennial procedure of humanity, is of vital importance in our attempts to read for something more than amusement. There are

20. See William J. Hyde: "Hardy's view of realism" in Victorian Studies (Sept. 1956)
certain novels, both among the works of the living and the works of deceased writers, which give convincing proof of much exceptional fidelity, and yet they do not rank as great productions; for what they are faithful in is life garniture and not life. 21

Three years later, in his contribution to The New Review, Hardy emphatically condemned ‘realism’ and tried to uphold the imaginative theory of art. “The Science of Fiction”, 22 thus, sums up Hardy’s view on realism more systematically than any of his casual remarks. Admitting the desirability of “truth”, Hardy argues that it is not in the reproduction of experience with “infinite and atomic truth” but in “the illusion of truth” that the greatness of art lies. The realists in their enthusiasm for embracing the whole of life seldom produce anything more than “life garniture”. Hence his fulmination on “realism” and its apostles:

Realism is an unfortunate, an ambiguous word, which has been taken up by literary like a view-halloo, and has been assumed in some places to mean copyism, and in others prurience, and has led to two classes of delineators being included in one condemnation. 23

Hardy is no less prejudiced against photographic realism than Turgenev and Flaubert or James and Conrad. They all, in the

Herein after cited as L.A.
22. Ibid., pp. 85-90
23. Ibid., pp. 87
final analysis, emphasize the validity of the truth of impression in works of art.

During the 'nineties, Hardy seems to have been reflecting more profoundly on the problems of art. For, apart from his famous essays that appeared between 1888 and 1891 in contemporary journals, we have the specific note in the diary, dated August 5, 1890:

Art is a changing of the actual proportions and order of things, so as to bring out more forcibly than might otherwise be done that feature in them which appeals most strongly to the idiosyncrasy of the artist. The changing or distortion, may be of two kinds:

(1) The kind which increases the sense of vraisemblance;
(2) That which diminishes it.

(1) is high art; (2) is low art. High art may choose to depict evil as well as good, without losing its quality. Its choice of evil, however, must be limited by the sense of worthiness.

This passage also, like other quotations, brings out some basic points of Hardy's theory: the choice of one sort of 'colour' or 'feature' in experience; the obedience to one's own 'idiosyncrasy' and to the effect of 'that alone' which heightens the impression. Hardy's comment, for all its reference to things in general, underlines a personal and subjective art. What the vision finds may be magnified, as his was, by that extremely concentrating lens.

24. HR I, p. 299
In Hardy's art, an emotional penetration was the essential and his remarks, while they turn on reality, emphasise imagination as the discoverer. They belong to the period of the novels and it is from the novels that one remembers those moods of place and time he truly saw "into the heart of natural things". The same power works also in invention, with less difference perhaps, than Hardy supposed. If his invention was one of the clearest traits in his capacity, the happiest finds of it are surely those where it was most poetic. We know the aesthetic pleasure of such moments in the novels when the atmosphere and the tenor of the story are so imaged that brings a person, a place and time together with an arresting vividness. Hardy's sense of reality, thus, transcends that of social propagandists. Since he did not present an atomistic photograph of life, his portraits of the countryside do not possess the documentary interest of those of Jefferies (The Toilers of the Field), Kingsley (Yeast) and Zola (La Terre). Based as they are on the integrity of his individual power of selection, they appear to go much deeper, revealing character, as painting does, by the stressing of individual details. His representation or reproduction is invariably achieved by "the imaginative reason".

Hardy's theory of art, thus, corresponds closely to the
romantic theory which emphasizes "the imagination" and the personal traits" (call it 'idiomsynecrasy' or 'temperament' or whatever you like) in a work of art. Seeing "beauty in ugliness", showing "the sorriness underlying the grandest things and the grandeur underlying the sorriest things" and recording "impressions, not convictions", is Hardy's ideal of a poet's and a novelist's vocation. And I feel, in essence, this remained Hardy's guiding principle throughout his literary career.

It was Hardy's emphasis on "the romantic vision" and "the personal aspects" of art that led T.S. Eliot to single him out as the last of decadents for an exposition of his theory. In the final chapter of After Strange Gods he maintains that Hardy had written for the sake of "self-expression" and his works show "the intrusion of the diabolic into moral literature". But as J.I.K. Steuart argues in his essay "The Integrity of Hardy", the charges have been made more on "moral" grounds than "aesthetic". It was to be expected, for Hardy with his moral candour in Tess and Jude, more than shocked the Eliots of his age. Eliot's attack, in essence, was against the romantic theory of art which Hardy so seductively represented in his creative writings.

25. T.S. Eliot, After Strange Gods (1934), p. 54
However, in fairness to Eliot's critical remarks, one may admit that Hardy is a powerfully emotional writer and his works do reflect a direct transcription from experience. One may even go to the extent of making a case, like Mr. Stewart, for the novels "representing some interior drama of Hardy's soul, with Wessex as merely a staging". But all this does not necessarily prove Hardy's "morbidity". For neither in his diary nor in his letters or Prefaces he is ever seen parading his "self". He is, on the other hand, represented as a shy person, avoiding company. Even in his novels he is no more guilty of self-expression than, say, Tolstoy or Flaubert or Conrad. Hardy distills and controls his material though the method is not that of Eliot. He believed that the prime task of the artist consisted in rendering his own emotional apprehension of experience but he also stood for the universalization of such experiences, which he could never have achieved by insulating his sensibility. To a humanist of Hardy's calibre who craves for the "still, sad music of humanity" in his art, and who reflects on the fundamentals of life — "We are such stuff, as dreams are made of", the charge of 'morbidity' and 'self-absorption' can hardly hold good. 27 Hardy's so-called morbidity was not uncontrolled or disintegrative. His critical vision invariably curbs his spontaneity and rescues him from

27. LA, pp. 89-90 ("The science of Fiction")
lapsing into Baudelairean 'morbidity'. In Hardy the novelist we find a notable effort for some synthesis between the freely outpouring spirit of the time and the stabilizing force of a strong historical sense. Almost his last statement on the poet's task (and here there seems no dichotomy between a poet and a novelist) is recorded in his journal of May 6, 1918:

My opinion is that a poet should express the emotion of all the ages and the thought of his own. 28

Art of the Novel:

The foregoing discussion on Hardy's attitude to art simply clarifies the novelist's views on the art of fiction. We may probe further in order to present Hardy's theory of novel in a better light. Fortunately for us, he has himself given a suggestive definition of the novel:

Good fiction may be defined here as that kind of imaginative writing which lies nearest to the epic, dramatic, or narrative masterpieces of the past .... The higher passion must even rank above the inferior —— intellectual tendencies above animal, and moral above intellectual —— whatever the treatment, realistic or ideal. Any system of inversion which should attach more importance to the delineation of man's appetite than to the delineation of his aspirations, affections or humours, would condemn the old masters of imaginative creation from Aeschylus to Shakespeare. Whether we hold the arts which depict mankind to be, in the words of Dr Matthew

28. MH II, p. 188
Arnold, a criticism of life, or, in those of Mr. Addington Symonds, a revelation of life, the material remains the same, with its sublinitles, its beauties, its uglinesses, as the case may be. 29

This passage may be taken to represent the quintessence of Hardy's theory of fiction. He is fully conscious of the fact that the novel as a "form" is nearest to the "imaginative writings" of the past and in "scope" shares some of the characteristics of the epic, dramatic and narrative poetry. He also emphasizes the fact that in order to heighten the impression of things observed, the novelist has to be selective in his treatment. Again, without bothering about the jargons of professional critics, he attributes to the art of fiction "the sublimities, the beauties and the uglinesses", as they come into the observer's ken.

That Hardy also attached great importance to the "form" of the novel should not be lost sight of because of his casual remarks about the superiority of "poetry". In the final analysis, imaginative writing, whether prose or verse, becomes poetry for Hardy. In his essay "The science of Fiction", he recognizes the scope of the novel:

Since Art is science with an addition, since some science underlies all Art, there is seemingly no

29. IA ("The Profitable Reading of Fiction"), p. 61
paradox in the use of such a phrase as "the science of fiction..."

The particulars of this science are the generals of almost all others. The materials of fiction being human nature and circumstances, the science thereof may be dignified by calling it the codified law of things as they really are. The Science of Fiction is contained in that large work, the cyclopaedia of life. 30

Hardy's view of the comprehensiveness of novel as a literary form and his own preference for it is further illustrated by his reply to The Pall Mall Gazette (1892). William Archer, writing in the Fortnightly Review, had urged the desirability of a reunion between literature and the drama, had suggested that living novelists were to blame for the divorce, and that they owed it to themselves to make some attempt in dramatic form. Thereupon The Gazette invited the leading novelists to answer questions regarding the desirability of unifying the two forms and the reasons for the comparative merit of the novel or the drama. Hardy's preference revealingly goes to the novel:

Because, in general, the novel affords scope for getting nearer to the heart and meaning of things than does the play. 31

Recognizing the wider scope of the novel, Hardy did not rule out the variety of treatment of life by writers of diverse temperament and "idiocracy". By 1908 he had passed over his

30. LA, p. 85 (Italics mine)
31. Ibid., ("Why I Don't Write Plays"), p. 116
phase of early straggling for method. Much as he had to suffer for his dabbings in sensation-stuff (following Meredith literally for his remarks on Desperate Remedies), Hardy still thought that sensation-alistic novel should not be condemned wholesale. There is still a case for its justification. He wrote in his journal of January 14, 1888:

A sensation novel is possible in which the sensationalism is not casualty, but evolution, not physical but psychical. The difference between the latter kind of novel and the novel of physical sensationalism — i.e., personal adventure, etc. — is this: that whereas in the physical the adventure itself is the subject of interest, the psychical results being passed over as commonplace, in the psychical the casualty or adventure is held to be of no intrinsic interest, but the effect upon the faculties is the important matter to be depicted.

This passage partly explains Hardy's use of the marvellous and the supernatural in his novels. Hardy always finds a justification for these elements provided their effect on the faculties is psychological and not just physical. Their purpose should not be to pile horror upon horror in the manner of the "Terror Novels" of Mrs Radcliffe but to play upon the emotions of the readers.

Apart from the sensationalistic novel, Hardy also takes into account the social novel, the exotic novel, the didactic.

32. LH I, p. 268
novel and the novel of adventure. He finds justification for such genres so long as they are imaginative transcripts of life. But at the same time he reacts against the social novel becoming "a photographic transcription of life"; the exotic novel delighting in mere "far-off things" and the didactic novel presenting a treatise on moral and religious problems. Hardy does not deal explicitly with all these forms of contemporary novel but his attitude is well defined. For example, discussing 'the didactic' and the imaginative or artistic novel in "The Profitable Reading of Fiction," he says:

... the didactic novel is so generally devoid of vraisemblance as to teach nothing but the impossibility of tampering with natural truth to advance dogmatic opinion. Those, on the other hand, which impress the reader with the inevitableness of character and environment in working out destiny, whether that destiny be just or unjust, enviable or cruel, must have a sound effect, if not what is called a good effect, upon a healthy mind. ... A novel which does moral injury to a dozen imbeciles, and has bracing results upon a thousand intellects of normal vigour, can justify its existence. 33

This brings us to the problem of morality in the novel. Hardy, it may be conceded, believed in the ethical values of art but he had his own ways of presenting them. Lionel Johnson remarked that Hardy used, in the English way, powers with many likenesses

33. LA, p. 66
to the French genius of his time. If that remark will apply, it applies best to a kind of logic of candour in him, a disillusioned and pungent use of reason that ignores the conciliatory philosophies of the Victorians. It was he as much as any one who during the nineties declared the necessity of exploring in daylight the relationships and the complications which make up the history of men and women. He offered a prologue to his own full declaration, through the novel, on the subject when in the *New Review* for January 1890, he published his opinions on "Candour in English Fiction".

Hardy, as Edmund Blunden points out, was at the time weary of the long years he had spent in a literary compromise. He had toiled long enough in the factory of household reading, supplied in monthly or weekly rations by the magazines and in other forms by the circulating libraries, and now he would have a day off to release his natural indignation. As early as 1874 when he was serializing *Far From the Madding Crowd*, Hardy had realized the crippling effect of a domestic magazine on his art, in his letter to Mr. Stephen he wrote:

> The truth is that I am willing, and indeed anxious, to give up any points which may be desirable in a story when read as a whole, for the sake of others

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34. Edmund Blunden, *Thomas Hardy* (1941), pp. 64-66
which shall please those who read it in numbers. Perhaps I may have higher aims some day, and be a great stickler for the proper artistic balance of the complete work, but for the present, circumstances lead me to wish merely to be considered a good hand at a serial. 35

Even in the early phase of his career Hardy knew that no proper "artistic balance" was possible in a family magazine and that one has always to make compromises if one has to live by his pen. Sixteen years of grim experience with the puritans of the age as 'patrons' only served to confirm Hardy's views as to the bondage imposed upon imaginative writing by the magazines. In his essay "Candour in English Fiction", 36 he ruthlessly condemned the magazine both on moral and aesthetic grounds. He asserted that "the object of the magazine and circulating library is not upward advance but lateral advance." 37 Hence, the magazine in particular and the circulating library in general "do not foster the growth of the novel which reflects and reveals life". Hardy knew it to his own cost how his own imaginative works were mutilated to satisfy the prudery of the Victorian parents:

It is in the self-consciousness engendered by interference with spontaneity, and in aims at a compromise to square with circumstances, that the real secret lies of the charlatanry pervading so much of English fiction. 38

35. LH I, p. 131
36. LA, pp. 75-84
37. Ibid., p. 79
38. Ibid., p. 80
That Hardy had his own moral scruples about art is amply borne out by his letters, notes and prefaces. But his frankness in dealing with "explosive material" brought an avalanche of criticism from the press and the pulpit alike.

Such was Hardy's loathing of Victorian prudery that he refused to oblige his readers by mutilating his art. He was no more willing to compromise with the charlatanism of his age. In his Preface to *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* he declared:

— Though the novel was intended to be neither didactic nor aggressive but in the scenic parts to be representative simply, and in the contemplative to be often charged with impressions than with convictions, there have been objectors both to the matter and to the rendering.

Let me repeat that a novel is an impression, not an argument ... As soon as I observe that any one, when judging of poetical representations, considers anything more important than the inner necessity and Truth, I have done with him. 39

Again, he wrote about *Jude the Obscure*:

Like former productions of this pen, *Jude the Obscure* is simply an endeavour to give shape and coherence to a series of seemings, or personal impressions, the question of their consistency or their discordance, of their permanence or their transitoriness, being regarded as not of the first moment. 40

By way of counter-attack to the campaign of vilification

39. Preface to *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1892); Italics nine.
40. Preface to *Jude the Obscure* (August, 1895).
launched by his critics, Hardy added the Postscript to his Preface in 1912:

Artistic effort always pays heavily for finding its tragedies in the forced adaptation of human instincts to rusty and irksome moulds that do not fit them. To do Bludger and the conflagratory bishop justice, what they meant seems to have been only this: "We Britons hate ideas, and we are going to live up to that privilege of our native country. Your picture may not show the untrue or the uncommon, or even be contrary to the canons of art; but it is not the view of life that we who thrive on conventions can permit to be painted.

Hardy was, in a way, in line with the writers like Shelley and Swinburne. His moral candour, though appreciated by the genial critics, also brought such statements as: "Swinburne planteth, Hardy watereth and Satan gives the increase." This persistent hostility of the critics and the public forced him to take the drastic step of giving up fiction for good. The choice of poetry as his future form of expression was not just a matter of convenience. Hardy knew that if he expressed himself in verse, he would be spared of a good deal of vituperative criticism. In this connection his note of Oct. 17, 1896 is significant:

perhaps I can express more fully in verse ideas and emotions which run counter to the inert crystallized opinion — hard as rock — which the

41. LH I, p. 111
Thus the most original and imaginative English novelist of the last part of nineteenth century, after strenuous discussions, arrived at the decision of writing no more 'prose'. He was even glad that a decision had been forced upon him. Obviously having said all that he had to say, he wished to resume his earlier vocation of "poetry" which was to afford him not only mental relaxation but also a "strategic" victory over his critics.

Form of the Novel:

As for Hardy's formal aesthetics of the novel, it needs hardly be emphasized that his idea of "form", "structure" or the "point of view" is not modern. He did not bring about a change in the plot structure or the methods of presenting character. Hardy does new things with the novel, but he does not, like

42. iH II, p. 56 (Italics mine)
George Eliot, Henry James or Joseph Conrad, invent something like a new shape for it. Hardy’s conception of a ‘well-rounded tale’ is not different from the Victorian idea of a plot. In his article "The Profitable Reading of Fiction", he defined it as follows:

Briefly, a story should be an organism. To use the words applied to the epic by Addison, whose artistic feeling in this kind was of the subtlest, 'nothing should go before, or follow after it, that is not related to it'.

Applying this standard, Hardy discusses in the same essay some of the most famous of English novels. *Tom Jones*, though great in character-drawing, feeling and philosophy is 'not superior in artistic form over some other novels of lower reputation'. *The Bride of Lammermoor* is an ‘almost perfect specimen of form, which is the more remarkable in that Scott, as a rule, depends more upon episode, dialogue, and description, for exciting interest, than upon the well-knit interdependence of parts’. And the first thirty chapters of *Vanity Fair* "may be instanced as well-nigh complete in artistic presentation, along with their other magnificent qualities". Lastly, he discusses *Clarissa Harlowe*:

"No person who has a due perception of the constructive art shown in Greek tragic drama can be blind to the constructive art of

43. *IA*, p. 69
Richardson.

Hardy's study of classical Greek drama and his apprenticeship as an architect had obviously great influence on his sense of 'form'. He advocated unity of design and singleness of theme in a really perfect work of art. Although in practice he could apply these theories together with the famous unities of Time and Place only in a few (e.g. The Return of the Native) of his novels, yet he always aspired to achieve classical perfection of form. Hence his adherence to Addison, the neo-classicist. This also shows his sceptical reaction against the Elizabethans. Hardy admired and assimilated Shakespeare but he could hardly approve of the Elizabethan "minglest of the tragic and the comic" or the heresy of 'plot' and 'under-plot' which less gifted artists were bound to make a sorry mess of. This conviction of Hardy is borne out by one of his remarks in his journal, dated Sept. 6, 1896:

Finished reading King Lear. The grand scale of the tragedy, scenically, strikes one, and also the large scheme of the plot. The play rises after the beginning of the third act, and Lear's dignity with it. Shakespeare did not quite reach his intention in the King's character, and the splitting of the tragic interest between him and Gloucester, does not to my mind, enhance its intensity, although commentators assert that it does. 44

No wonder critics of Hardy, more often than not, correlated his

44. IH II, p. 54
art to that of the Greek masters who followed rigorously the
classical design and the laws of Nature and Necessity.

Hardy's definition of "tragedy" also conforms to the
classical patterns of dramatic literature:

The best tragedy — highest tragedy in short — is
that of the Worthy encompassed by the Inevitable.
The tragedies of immoral and worthless people are
not of the best. 45

Obviously, Hardy is considering "tragedy" along Aristotelian
lines. His own heroes and heroines are human beings with
exceptional qualities but they are also plagued by a "tragic
flaw". This is responsible for ensnaring them in a series of
unavoidable circumstances which lead them to final catastrophe.
One has only to look at the long list of Hardy's heroes —
Michael Henchard, Clym Yeobright, Giles Winterborne, Angel
Clare and Jude Fawley — and notice in them the elements of
nobility, fine feelings, greatness of soul and yet each with
his own "tragic flaw". The gallery of his heroines — Tess,
Sue, Eustacia, Elisabeth-Jane, Grace and Earty, also confirms
our view of Hardy's imitation of classical Greek models. They
are also gifted with nobility of soul and mind but they too
have their shares of hamartia, and are flawed gods all. Hardy

45.L.H. II, p. 14
exhibits the swirl and surge of their souls under the stress of circumstances and the problems of existence. They are eventually beaten but they fight bravely. Their fall inspires love and sympathy in us rather than 'morbidity'. We experience a terrible sense of waste in these modern dramas of human struggle against inexorable forces. Hardy called Tess a 'Pure woman' just to signify that she was really pure in 'spirit' though not in 'body' and that she deserved our sympathy for her sufferings.

D.H. Lawrence, in his famous "Study of Thomas Hardy", acknowledges Hardy's greatness as a tragic poet but finds his characters more pathetic than tragic and their stature far more smaller than that of classical tragic heroes. Contrasting Hardy with classical masters, he says:

The difference is that whereas in Shakespeare or Sophocles the greater, uncomprehended morality, or fate, is actively transgressed and gives active punishment, in Hardy and Tolstoy the lesser, human morality, the mechanical system is actively transgressed, and holds, and punishes the protagonist, whilst the greater morality is only passively, transgressed, it is represented merely as being present in background, in scenery, not taking any active part, having no direct connection with the protagonist. 46

But this argument does not necessarily go against Hardy's classical sense of tragedy and its application in modern

46. D.H. Lawrence, Phoenix (Revised Edition 1961)
 "Study of Thomas Hardy", pp. 419-20
literature. If we remember one of Hardy's remarks about "poets", the issue becomes quite clear: "My opinion is that a poet should express the emotion of all the ages and the thought of his own". An artist with such a historically conscious sensibility could not have just transcribed Greek and Elizabethan tragic heroes into Victorian doublets. It would have gone against the spirit of the time. Hardy was much too aware of the intellectual element in his readers to agree to a "willing suspension of disbelief" in Delphic oracles or \textit{deux et machine} \textit{à la} Sophocles or even Macbeth's witches. Equally pertinently Hardy realised that in the age of Darwin, Mill and Spencer, it would be foolish to talk of 'gods' coming in person to undo human aspirations. Though he makes references to 'gods' and 'The President of the Immortals', we know that Hardy's use of the machinery is more psychological than physical. Basically, it is society and its conventional code of morality that is more responsible for the misery and catastrophes of human beings than the curses and blasphemies of the powers above. This becomes very clear if we try to understand \textit{Tess} and \textit{Jude} in the light of Hardy's own development as a writer and thinker. His men and women are not merely 'pathetic' as Lawrence observed but also 'tragic'. They inspire as much 'pity' and 'fear' as any of the
classical tragic characters. But if they appear less violent in transgressing "the uncomprehended morality" and less blind to their limitations, it is because Hardy has humanized (or rather modernized) the entire concept of tragedy. Their worlds end not only with a "bang" but also with a "whimper". By this I do not mean that Hardy has quite "rationalised" tragedy. The symbolic use of the marvellous and the supernatural is a fruitful study of Hardy's craftsmanship. He builds up his atmosphere with ghostly and uncanny presences and adds to our sense of 'more things than are dreamt of in your philosophy'. Hardy, however, was not writing "drama" in the classical sense. His representative novels, though based on Greek patterns of tragedy, are also good stories in the sense that drama can never be. And it is this fact that Hardy never fails to emphasize:

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

'This is done all more perfectly in proportions as the reader is deluded to believe the personages true and real like himself.

'Solely to this latter and a work of fiction should be a precise transcript of ordinary life; but,

'The uncommon would be absent and the interest lost. Hence,

'The writers' problem is, how to strike the balance between the uncommon and the ordinary so as on the one hand to give interest, on the other to give reality.
"In working out this problem, human nature must
never be made abnormal, which is introducing
incredibility. The uncommonness, must be in the
events, not in the characters; and disguising its
unlikelihood, if it be unlikely. 47

This concern with 'story element of his art is not only
revealed in Hardy's reference to the Biblical narratives which,
according to him, have the "spherical completeness of perfect
art", 48 but also in a later entry in his diary:

A story must be exceptional enough to justify its
telling. We tale-tellers are all Ancient-Mariners,
and none of us warranted in stopping wedding Guests
(in other words, the hurrying public) unless he has
something more unusual to relate than the ordinary
experience of every average man and woman.

The whole secret of fiction and the drama —
in the constructional part — lies in the adjustment
of things external and universal. The writer who
knows exactly how exceptional and how non-exceptional
his events should be made, possesses the key to the
art. 49

Hardy's argument, thus proceeds from the value of 'the excep-
tional' to the necessity of maintaining verisimilitude and
consistency in his characters. Here he is not on different
grounds than those trodden by Horace Walpole, Walter Scott and
Hawthorne. 50 Hardy's problem, on the one hand, is to satisfy

47. LH I, p. 194
48. Ibid., p. 222
49. LH.II, pp. 15-16
50. For a detailed account of "The Novel and the Marvellous" see
Mirrian Allott, Novelists on the Novel, pp. 3-20
the curiosity of the reader and on the other, to keep his material well under control lest it becomes just "fantasy".

Hardy's handling of his tales is acknowledged even by such critics as T.S. Eliot who feels that Hardy seductively lures his readers. What is lost sight of is that Hardy, apart from the "tonic value" of the novel, also emphasizes its intellectual, moral and aesthetic value. Admitting that "side-interests" and "digressions" cannot be ruled out from a lengthy tale, he suggests:

Our true object is a lesson in life, mental enlargement from elements essential to the narratives themselves and from the reflections they engender. 51

Again:

Closely connected with the humanizing education found in fictitious narrative which reaches to the level of an illuminant of life, is the aesthetic training insensibly given by familiarity with story which, presenting nothing exceptional in other respects, has the merit of being well and artistically constructed... to a masterpiece in a story there appertains a beauty of shape, no less than to a masterpiece in pictorial or plastic art, capable of giving to the trained mind an equal pleasure. 52

51. LA ("The Profitable Reading of Fiction"), p. 60
52. Ibid., p. 68
Requisites of Style:

No discussion on theory and craftsmanship in fiction is complete without a consideration of the problems of style. In the case of a really good writer style is the expression of himself. But it expresses him by being adequate to what he has to say and also subordinate to what he works in. The individuality of a style is seen through its content. That is true of imaginative prose as of other kinds and applies to the best writing in contemporary fiction, so far as the direction of this is to find the precise equivalents, in language, of the writer's perceptions and impressions.

Hardy considered style to be not an isolated ingredient of the novel but something organic. In his essay "The Profitable Reading of Fiction", he says:

The indefinite word style may be made to express almost any characteristic of story-telling other than subject and plot, and it is too commonly viewed as being some independent, extraneous virtue or varnish with which the substance of a narrative is artificially overlaid. Style, as far as the word is meant to express something more than literary finish, can only be treatment, and treatment depends upon the mental attitude of the novelist; thus entering into the very substance of a narrative, as into that of any other kind of literature. A writer who is not a mere imitator looks upon the world with his personal eyes, and in his peculiar moods thence grows up his style, in the full sense of the term. 55
Hardy, obviously, is emphasizing the personal bias or the individual trait in the style of a writer. Given his temperament, he would never subscribe to the neo-classical doctrine of methodizing nature in the image of past masters, nor would he ever submit to T.S. Eliot's 'de-personalization' theory in style. In the same essay he suggests the readers to study the 'interior' rather than the 'surface' if they want to profit by the study of style. They should "formulate an opinion of what it consists in by the aid of their own educated understanding, their perception of natural fitness, true and high feeling, sincerity, unhindered by considerations of nice collocation and balance of sentences, still less by conventionally accepted examples".

That Hardy detested "nice collocation" and "conventionally accepted examples" in style is obvious throughout his notes in his journals and also in his prefaces. As early as January, 1881, he defined his creed:

Style — consider the Wordsworthian dictum (the more perfectly the natural object is reproduced, the more truly poetic the picture). This reproduction is achieved by seeing into the heart of a thing (as rain, wind, for instance), and is realism, in fact, though through being pursued by means of the imagination it is confounded with invention, which is pursued by the same means. It is, in short, reached by what M. Arnold calls 'the imaginative reason'.

54. JH I, p. 190
But, though Hardy agreed with Arnold in the use of 'imaginative reason' he did not approve of his plea for standardization of style (for example, the French 'preciseness'):

Arnold is wrong about provincialism, if he means anything more than a provincialism of style and manner in exposition. A certain provincialism of feeling is invaluable. It is of the essence of individuality, and is largely made up of that crude enthusiasm without which no great thoughts are thought, no great deeds done. 55

It is this romantic attitude towards 'spontaneity' in style that has brought forth the criticism of more sophisticated writers and critics like T.S. Eliot and Henry James. In spite of a conventional "form" in which he works, Hardy's style remains distinguished with a personal touch. His prose makes no disguise and seems to register not merely his strength or defect, but all the fluctuations that may appear in a long piece of writing.

From our study of Hardy's criticism we conclude that he accepts a 'personal' formula for style but he never sets down to work out its details. One thing, however, is clear. Hardy would never stand by the exponents of "too much style". As early as March 1875 he had expressed his views on style in a valuable document. The occasion was a letter from Coventry

55. LVI 1, p. 189
Patmore expressing the view that *A Pair of Blue Eyes* was in its nature not a conception for prose, and that he "regretted at almost every page that such unequalled beauty and power should not have assured themselves the immortality which would have been impressed upon them by the form of verse". Hardy was much struck by this opinion from Patmore. However, finding himself committed to prose, he renewed his consideration of prose style:

Read again Addison, Macaulay, Newman, Sterne, Lamb, Gibbon, Burke, Times leaders etc., in a study of style. I am more and more confirmed in an idea I have long held, as a matter of common sense, long before I thought of any old aphorism bearing on the subject "Ars est clara artém". The whole secret of a living style and the difference between it and a dead style, lies in not having too much style — being in fact a little careless, or rather seeming to be, here and there. It brings wonderful life into the writing:

A sweet disorder in the dress...  
A careless shoe-string, in whose tie  
I see a wild civility,  
No more bewitch me than when art  
Is too precise in every part.

Otherwise your style is like worn half-pence — all the fresh images rounded off by rubbing, and no crispness at all.

It is, of course, simply a carrying into prose the knowledge I have acquired in poetry — that inexact rhymes and rhythms now and then are far more pleasing than correct ones. 56

Hardy, it should be admitted, preaches no 'lawlessness' in

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56. LH I, p. 138
matters of style or treatment. He never for a moment forgets the propriety of style within limits. What he detests is too much of correctness and preciseness in presentation of life. Here he is with Conrad who despite his reverence for Henry James, maintained that James's preoccupation with style and his constant endeavour for "too much perfection of method" was solely responsible for his unpopularity. 57

Hardy was much too unsophisticated to be influenced by the theory of "well-made novel" or the nuances of style à la James. All that he remembered or cared to remember was the personal note in his writings. Even in the use of language he finds himself at home only when he is following his own instincts. He can be successful with the dialogue of rusties but as soon as he tries to imitate urban conversation, he flounders. But even in the use of the 'dialect' he avoids 'precise accents' and makes use of the language of the rusties 'creatively' because his "aim is to depict the men and their natures rather than their dialect forms". 58 His defence in his letter to the Editor of the Spectator (Oct. 15, 1881) is based on the same theory:

58. LA "Dialect in Novels", p. 113
I have been reproved for too freely translating dialect English into readable English, by those of your contemporaries who attach more importance to the publication of local niceties of speech than I do. The rule of scrupulously preserving the local idiom, together with the words which have no synonyms among those in general use, while pointing in the ordinary way most of the local expressions which are but a modified articulation of words in use elsewhere, is the rule I usually follow; and it is, I believe, generally recognised as the best, where every such rule must of necessity be a compromise, more or less unsatisfactory to lovers of form. 59

Once again, in matters of style, Hardy was being self-conscious in using the language 'creatively' rather than 'precisely'. And hence his distinction over writers like Jefferies,

Towards Modernism !

Hardy's theory of fiction becomes all the more clear when we try to find a pattern in his remarks on certain novelists. It is a pity that he left no full-fledged essay on his contemporaries or predecessors to allow us any coherent study but whatever exists would give us a clue to his general attitudes. He had appreciated Thackeray at the early age of twenty-three while still an apprentice in London. To him Thackeray's greatness lay in his "perfect and truthful

59. LA, "On the use of Dialect", p. 114
representation of life". He was sceptical of Scott's powers as a novelist but he read and enjoyed him with George Eliot and Wilkie Collins. Hardy, I may venture to suggest, carved a way between Thackeray and Scott when he had studied and assimilated early in life. He applied Thackeray's 'realism' in his depiction of Wessex life and borrowed some of his ideas and images from the regional novels of Scott. Together with Thackeray and George Eliot, Scott remained, perhaps, the greatest influence on Hardy. Not only their imaginative preoccupations seem to be identical but they also share a legend common to both. As Douglas Brown points out, it was a phase of history that concerned Scott's imagination and processes of change, resistance and absorption that moved through his anxieties into tragic fables. He wanted to preserve what was passing away. Hardy's novels and his Notes and Prefaces (as external evidence) also suggest the same concern. But Hardy is a much more complex artist than Scott. In him we find many strains of diverse pattern which belie any attempt to work his imitation of Scott any further.

Hardy detested 'lack of sympathy' in creative artists. In his essay "The Science of Fiction" he had emphasized that all genuine writers should have "a power of observation"

60. Douglas Brown, *Thomas Hardy : The Mayor of Casterbridge*, pp. 44-47
informed by a living heart". He refused to write an
Introduction to Fielding's novels in 1898 because "his
aristocratic, even feudal attitude towards the peasantry
should be exhibited strongly..." He could enjoy Meredith
as belonging to "the succession of Congreve and the artificial
comedians of the Restoration", but was disappointed to find him
incapable of discovering "the tragedy that always underlines
comedy". He could even endure Henry James who had nothing
but a "ponderously warm manner of saying nothing in infinite
sentences" than find Meredith interesting. In one of his
remarks of March 4, 1915, he wrote: "Have been reading a
review of Henry James. It is remarkable that a writer who has
no grain of poetry, or humour, or spontaneity in his
productions, can yet be a good novelist. Meredith has some
poetry and yet I can read James when I cannot look at Meredith".

These remarks show not only Hardy's likes and dislikes
but they also suggest implicitly his own views about the art
of the novel. He liked Anatole France as a writer "who is
faithful to the principles that make for permanence, who never
forgets the value of organic form and symmetry" but seems to
have no patience with his late contemporaries who violate all

61. IH II, p. 74
62. IH II, p. 257
63. IH I, p. 237
64. IH II, p. 169
65. IA, p. 121
principles of good fiction that he cherished both in theory and in practice:

Thought on the recent school of novel-writers. They forget in their insistence on life, and nothing but life, in a plain slice, that a story must be worth the telling, that a good deal of life is not worth any such thing, and that they must not occupy a reader’s time with what he can get at first hand anywhere around him. 66

The attack is obviously on the Realistic school of novelists in England — Arnold Bennett, H.G. Wells and John Galsworthy — who, in their enthusiasm for “reality”, tended to forget or sacrifice the basic canons of art. Hardy as has been observed earlier, was not against “realism”. It was photographic realism which he disapproved and instead upheld the use of “imaginative reason” for creative works.

Dr. M.C. Bradbrook in her monograph on Conrad has suggested some salient features of Conrad’s theory of fiction:

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I may submit the following as Hardy’s theory of the novel:

66. B. II

Impressions not Convictions
Romanticism not Naturalism
Imagination not Formula
Selection not Comprehensiveness
Gaudour not Compromise

Let it be admitted, in all fairness to Hardy, that he was not a theorist of the stature of Flaubert, James or even Conrad. He never systematized his ideas into a coherent theory. But, in practice, his basic tenets remain his guiding thread throughout his career as a novelist. True, he went a long way from the earlier juvenalia to the creation of Tess and Jude but ever since he came to his own in Far From the Madding Crowd, he adhered to his principles fervently. He was so much convinced of the genuineness of his theories that he refused to benefit from the experiments of Flaubert, Zola and Henry James. He would not normally accept any theory from 'above'. We know the story of his experiment in The Return of the Native to write a novel with an 'Aeschylean intention and a Sophoclean unity and grandeur'. He had even tried to preserve the unities of Time and Place by limiting the action to the narrow space of Egdon Heath and the time to a year and a day. Beyond this he also tried many expedients in speech, movement and atmosphere to make the novel something like a 'Greek tragedy'. But the direct, formal and structural correspondence seems to

68. Modern Fiction Studies (Autumn, 1960)
John Paterson: "The 'Poetics' of The Return of the Native"
pp. 214-222
have become diffused in the process of creation. Consequently, the novel, more or less, falls in line with *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *The Woodlanders* than with Greek plays. Nobody has benefitted more than Hardy from the study of classical Greek drama but he succeeds only when he has assimilated the spirit of Greek art into his own. This evocation of the classical heroic atmosphere succeeds only in a personal frame of reference that gives dignity and meaning to his art. He follows his basic principles through *The Return of the Native*, *The Woodlanders*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and also *Jude the Obscure*. The emphasis on social realities in the last novel seems to have betrayed critics like Arthur Münzer and Walter Allen to the extent that they feel Hardy's naturalistic technique sets it off from his earlier and more characteristic fiction. *Jude the Obscure* illustrates Hardy's view that a writer should be free to select his materials, to give shape and form to them, to explore their poetical and metaphysical implications and to declare his 'belief, however tentative or qualified, in values which he deems to have some "permanent validity in experience".

In view of our study of Hardy's theory of fiction and his own practice as a novelist, it is difficult to accept,
Zabel’s theory of ‘inegruity’ and ‘central discordance’ in Hardy’s aesthetics. It goes to Hardy’s credit that without being a follower of any of the contemporary schools of fiction, he stands distinguished among creative writers of his age. There seems no apparent schism between his artistic principles and achievement in creative fiction. He is not one of those “who abound in precept, apology and formula” but remains first and last an energetic practitioner of his craft. Nonetheless his theories do help us with a standard with which to measure his achievements. His conventionalism in fiction and its theories are enlightened by his vigorous mind and exuberant imagination to such an extent that we can regard him among the pioneers of modern English novel.

I) A novel is in its broadest definition a personal, a direct impression of life: that, to begin with constitutes its value, which is greater or less according to the intensity of the impression.

(“The Art of Fiction”, 1884)

II) Any point of view is interesting that is a direct impression of life.

(“The Great Form” : A letter to the Deerfield Summer School, 1889)