CONCLUSION

There is no doubt, that behind Hardy's sadistic imaginings, and pessimistic declarations lie, of course, a deep concern for the fortunes of his characters, an incorrigible sympathy for all who are lovely and all who long for happiness. My point is, that in spite of the numerous attacks meted out to his works both during his life and after, a large number of critics have paid glowing tributes to a man where heart, imagination and intellect combined to produce the very best in English novel writing.

Hardy excelled in coming to grips with the 'Wessex' of his imagination and his novels derived much of their strength from Hardy's intimate knowledge of the speech, customs, and ways of life of people of his native county of Dorset. They are also a conscious attempt to translate some of the themes of Greek tragedy into terms of the English novel. Although Hardy attached more importance to his poetry than to his novels, I am of the opinion that his novels are responsible for his popularity and acclaim him as a great literary figure in English literature.
This is well illustrated in the variety of studies and approaches that have been published by some of the finest critics of this century.

Contemporary criticism on the whole had been unkind to Hardy throughout the serial publication of his novels. Critics were unfair to use George Elliot as a standard for comparison as Hardy developed his rural themes. However, the article by Havelock Ellis, one of the most enlightened critics of the time marks a change in the approach to Hardy. It is the most searching and sensitive essay ever written on Hardy, the more so because it neither praises the novels in the conventional way, nor makes what had come to be the equally conventional attack on their vices. As one might expect, Ellis is interested in the more intimate places of the Hardyan psychology, though he pushes them with delicacy and tact. He points out that all women in his novels must be weak, even when weakness is an aspect of their strength, as with Bathsheba. They are incapable of moral firmness or ascendancy - the natural birthright of George Eliot's women: if they possessed it they could not attract Hardy or be seen by him and identified with as they are. Naturally Ellis does not speculate on the reasons for this, though as a doctor and psychologist
in training he is clearly thinking about it. How true was Ellis's remark that Hardy though without training as a literary artist, it was genius that carried him through.

Unfortunately, the critics that reviewed *Tess* and *Jude* in the nineties did not think in the manner of Havelock Ellis. Their accounts tended to be seriously distorted by outraged conventionality and the concentration upon moral and philosophical issues. By the time the storm died down the tendency was to work out parallels with the classical tragedians. W.L. Courtney contributed a significant two-part essay on *Mr. Hardy and Aeschylus*. Interesting enough less attention was given to the qualities of style and narrative technique which had so preoccupied earlier critics. References to these matters were less often remarked on and tended to be played down.

The best single studies on Hardy were contributed by Lionel Johnson, Samuel Chew and H.C. Duffin. All agreed on Hardy's masterly portrayal of character, the dominant role of nature, the symmetry of his plots and one who was steeped in the traditions of his country-side. Those "post-Victorian" critics, seem to me vitiated by hardened pre-occupations - pre-occupation about fatalism and passimism, for
instance. But we should on Mr. Chew's generation with envy rather than disrespect, because there is no doubt that their accounts contributed immensely to Hardy's ever-growing popularity and to the development of criticism on his novels.

A recent British survey showed that Hardy is now extremely popular with young people. F.R. Leavis's refusal to include Hardy in his great tradition is not acceptable to most contemporary readers. Together with Leavis, T.S. Eliot and Henry James share a dislike of the novels which owes something to fastidiousness at the conventions of their plotting and melodrama; but more as John Bayley says, "it would appear, to a sense of the 'parochial' confusions in them, the radical disunity." In short, these critics, inhibited by the critical habits of their generation and unable to place Hardy in perspective, dismissed him rashly as an Unrewarding and sentimental writer.

One on whom Hardy certainly exerted a deep influence was D.H. Lawrence, by exploring Hardy's people he had found a language in which to articulate his vision. But above all, his experience of Hardy must have been the greatest possible authentication

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and encouragement of his own vision. Here, of all English novelists, was one who saw human life against a vast impersonal landscape, and whose characters already existed in terms of being and consciousness rather than the conduct and sensibility of 'the old stable ego.' As he pondered more deeply he had come to see how, as Hardy's fiction develop, the great background had become internalised in the conflict of universal forces within the characters themselves, at such a depth that they already clarified in credibly human complexity, the interplay of contraries which he had been trying to understand in his own life and Art. Yet he must have felt - the most liberating perception of affinity - that Hardy had neither seen clearly where he was going nor gone far enough, that there was no room to move beyond him and above all, to move beyond his pessimism. What Tess and Jude began, The Rainbow could complete. In short, Hardy helped Lawrence to find himself, and to carry to completion what he saw in the Wessex novels.

Both Virginia Woolf and E.M. Forster had joined Lawrence in paying tribute to Hardy. Virginia Woolf, who had chosen to read The Mayor of Casterbridge on her journey to Max Gate in the summer of

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1926 to visit Hardy, found herself strangely affected by the felt condition of the novel. It required Virginia Woolf's alertness of feeling to intuit and affirm that Hardy was an irresistibly great novelist despite his rather uncertain reputation at that time. For E.M. Forster the works of Thomas Hardy was his "home". For Forster, one of Hardy's greatest strengths as a novelist in his creation of "a sense felt life", so that his readers can experience what it is like to be Tess or Sue, Clym or Jude. This derives in part from ability to "let a bucket down into the subconscious" as Forster describes the process, so that Hardy is imaginatively exploring his characters in the process creating them. Further, Forster with his theory of "the undeveloped heart" and Lawrence with his stress on the need for a harmonious balance between mind and body are clearly developing themes that were central in Hardy's work. The change is the concept of characterisation, with the emphasis on the existence of unknowable areas of the personality, is not quite so striking as the change in subject matter, but it is a natural consequence of it. Lawrence wrote:

"The novel has a future. It's got to have the courage to tackle new propositions without using abstractions; it got to present us with
new, really new feelings, a whole
new line of emotions, which will
get us out of the emotional rut."

A little hesitantly and cautiously, Hardy is doing
this. These developments are embodied in a character
that has so much vitality and is depicted with sympathy
that it is indeed "a point of major innovation in
prose fiction."

Before 1940 criticism tended to look upon
Hardy more in the light of a traditional Victorian
novelist. We call Hardy a Victorian because he spent
the first sixty years of his life in the nineteenth
century and it was that century which formed many
of his beliefs and ideas. But he was not a typical
Victorian; he now seems to exemplify the more modern,
adventurous, questioning spirit which came into litera-
ture about the turn of the century and led on directly
to the work of F.H. Lawrence. Many of the most cherished
Victorian beliefs, in Providence, for example were
just those which Hardy found that he could not accept.
Another way in which he seems untypical is in his
preoccupation with the life of the countryside. The
consciousness of most educated Victorians, writers
or not, was decidedly "urban"; Hardy was very different
from them in this way.

3Quoted by Rosemary Sumner: Thomas Hardy:
Psychological Novelist, London, Macmillan Press Ltd.,
But in other ways he could not help being influenced by the contemporary intellectual climate. Hardy fitted into the Victorian literary tradition. Other novelists did not influence him, except in a negative way. Hardy admired Fielding, who had lived in the same part of England, and thought he was not appreciated enough 'as a local novelist'. Dickens was still alive when he first went to London, and the young man often went to hear him reading from his own novels, but in general they wrote about very different subjects and in still more different ways. At that time, Thackeray was generally thought to be the best living novelist. Hence because his novels stand as high as works of Art or Truth, they often have anything but an elevating tendency, and on that account are particularly unfitted for young people - from their very truthfulness. As for George Eliot, Hardy had, as I have illustrated, the strange experience of being mistaken for her. Hardy thought that she was a 'great thinker' - one of the greatest living, but not a born storyteller by any means,' and that her novels were not representative of real country life. The other great novelist of the late nineteenth century was Henry James, but although he and Hardy met several times they were really incompatible.
But during his growing period in London he was reading hardly any novels, and a great deal of poetry. He was influenced by poets much more than by novelists. He had a thorough knowledge of Milton and Shakespeare, yet his real roots were in the English Romantic tradition, the tradition which, in one way or another, helped to form almost all English poets until it was killed by the First World War. Hardy had more in common with Wordsworth than with any other Romantic writer. Wordsworth had insisted in his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* that poetry must be written in 'real language of men.' Hardy must have felt the same, as he incorporated a good deal of ordinary language, including dialect, in his poems and novels. Further, like Wordsworth, he is deeply interested in man's relationship to his natural environment - in his case Dorset, in Wordsworth's the Cumberland hills. Like Wordsworth, he writes about men and women who live in constant communion with nature, shepherds, for example, or tramps, or rural workers and he feels that nature provides these people with a permanent source of strength.

Further, the ability to put up with 'solitude, pain of heart, distress and poverty' and still carry on is what makes up the heroic aspect of man. This
is an essential part of Hardy's philosophy, which the Victorians called pessimism, and which he himself thought was the only realistic and possible creed. That was why Wordsworth's poetry seemed to him so good as a 'cure for despair.'

Surprisingly, it seems that Hardy's favourite Romantic poets were Keats and, above all, Shelley. He felt a strong sympathy for both of them as people: Shelley because he had been persecuted for unorthodox ideas, and Keats because he had been abused by the critics (like Hardy himself) and died in obscurity. Hardy's own attitude to religion was very much the same as Shelley's. He believed in what he called 'the spirit of the sermon on the Mount', but, except as a very young man, he didn't believe in a personal God.

Finally Swinburne's work had an electric effect on Hardy. The latter described this effect, many years later, in his elegy for Swinburne, 'A Singer Asleep'. Why did Hardy admire Swinburne so greatly? Hardy's enthusiasm was always appealing because he was a bond and independent thinker. Like him, Swinburne was what we would now call a humanist, one who believed that man, not God, was the most important being in
the universe. He asserted this, deliberately provocatively, in his 'Hymn of Man', which announced that God was dead and that "Man is the master of things."\

With his atheism went the belief that there was no such thing as Providence, and that man is necessarily alone and must work out his own destiny. Such lines: "Save his own soul he hath no star", (which is the motto for Book II of Jude the Obscure) were some of Hardy's favourite lines. Both writers tended to see man as a lonely and heroic figure, 'slighted and enduring'. They were both 'pessimists' in the sense of believing that man must solve his own problems, without any help from a superhuman force. Therefore, it is most surprising that both Swinburne and Hardy should find themselves unpopular among critics and more sin an age which hated and feared originality and tried to reduce its artists to mere entertainers. For this reason, Hardy had a fellow-feeling for Swinburne more than for any other living writer, and he records rather touchingly in the Life that after he had written 'A Singer Asleep' he 'gathered a spray of ivy and laid it on the grave of that brother-poet of whom he never spoke save

Critics up to the 40's failed to see that one of the great forces which shaped his art was his compelling need to seek out the truth, however uncomfortable or painful; the other was his passionate hatred suffering. 'What are my books' he said, 'but one long plea against "man's inhumanity to man" - to woman - and to the lower animals? Whatever may be the inherent good or evil of life, it is certain that man make it much worse than it need be.' The cruelty of man and society, the immeasurable value of each human being and the tragic waste of human potentiality; these are the great themes of Hardy's writings, and in this sense it is true to say that he is a novelist of protest.

The finest criticism came in 1940 in the Hardy centennial issue of the Southern Review. The accounts survey the multiple facets of Thomas Hardy's talent by a host of the greatest critics of the time. They include Donald Davidson, Dorothy Van Ghent, Morton Dauwen Zabel, W.H. Auden, and Katherine Anne Porter. I call this phase a 'revival' in the development


of Hardy criticism because for the first time we have essays in criticism which throw new light on his novels. Hardy criticism had gone through a revival in the same way as Dickens criticism had done. Further, it is surprising that there are some stimulating and constructive essays in Hardy criticism in the Hardy centenary issue of an American periodical, nearly all by Americans. Here I refer to Mr. Zabel's "Hardy in defence of his Art: The Aesthetic of Incongruity", one of the finest essays of the time written on the novels. The valuable analysis of 'Jude the Obscure as a Tragedy' by Arthur Mizner - such a really fundamental analysis of one novel done with intelligence and critical method, and by someone in possession of a great deal of parallel information about Hardy's mentality and outlook, is more illuminating than a library of "Aesthetic" flounderings; and the final essay on "The Novels of Hardy To-day" by Herbert J Muller. These really are essays in criticism which enlightening and gave to the world a brand new approach to Hardy. Says Q.D. Leavis in his review of the essays that appeared in the centennial issue of the Southern Review:

What really warms one's heart is the complete absence of the belletristic approach or of any aesthetic posturing, in this collective enterprise.

A wonderful tribute paid by Leavis to this remarkable collection of essays and beyond doubt, the most helpful critical work on Hardy I know of since 1928.

The really useful critical biography of Hardy had not yet been written up to 1940. With the publication in 1942 with Edmund Blunder's book: *Thomas Hardy*, he had gone some way towards producing one. Following this account we have the brilliant critical study of Hardy where Albert of Guerard breaks sharply with the traditional view of the novelist and writers of Hardy, not as a ponderous old-school philosopher, but as a great storyteller who dramatized the destructiveness, the drift, and the absurdity of life. The *New York Herald Tribune* reviewing Guarard's book states: "Crisp, challenging, informative, highly intelligent ......... He has crammed into this little book more vital comment on his author than can be found in a whole shelf of ordinary criticism."

With the thematic critics of the 50's and 60's, I feel placing Hardy's novels solely in the context of history had been over done. From all accounts there is no doubt Hardy did paint a picture of 'English rural life' and his novels do relate to the condition of rural England in the latter half of the nineteenth
century. It was in 1982 where Nooral Hasan in his book *Thomas Hardy: The Sociological Imagination* stated:

The Wessex novels take the form not of historical fiction, but of fiction as research into the history of rural culture. It would not do therefore, to place them in a given historical context.

Reviewers commenting on the works of the thematic critics concluded that Hardy beyond doubt was concerned with social data, with gross historical references but this was not the essence for his writing. Nooral Hasan's analysis is that Hardy's fiction is essentially an evocative cultural statement about the quality of life in a rural community. This author shaved the central assumption of the sociological school in Hardy criticism but he takes a different view of both rural history and Hardy's treatment of it in his Wessex novels. Dr. Hasan argues that Hardy booked upon local history as an interpretive and metaphoric structure rather than as regional predicament. C.B. Cox in his foreward to Dr. Hasan's book states that this book is undoubtely an important addition to our understanding of the drama of warring values in Hardy's fiction.

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My own view is that fiction for Hardy is a human necessity for making sense of the world. Therefore, Hardy used the novel as a means for expressing the truth and various things he wrote, show that he understood this state of mind only too well. It saddened him that critics approached his work with ignorant prejudice against his "pessimism." He preferred to describe himself as a 'meliorist' where he showed in the novels that the world can be better, if people try. It was no good pretending that pain did not exist or did not matter. Pain has been and always will be. In terms of religion, however much he might want to believe in Christianity he refused to let himself be persuaded against his judgment. He went on being an agnostic all his life. But there is no novelist who made so much use of Biblical references as Hardy did. Hardy's familiarity with the Bible probably did more to enlarge his historical sense than any other literature.

Therefore, almost everything Hardy wrote about arose out of personal feeling that the world was frightening, planless, and dangerous. Matthew Arnold wrote in a similar fashion in his poem 'Dover Beach'. Hardy found himself on a 'Darkling Plain' as it were. Man must create his own values, for,
living in a universe of cruelty and chaos, he will find no guidance from anything outside himself. This is what Hardy set out to declare in his novels.

Coming to the critics of the 70's we have some of the most original and vigorous approaches to Hardy. It is not possible to place these critics and what they have to say about Hardy under any definite subject. By looking at him in a variety of fresh ways the contributors provide a range of new ideas and interpretations that help to identify what is important in Hardy to-day. Criticism since 1928 has gone a long way. From being the writer of pastoral tales, a lover of nature he is accredited with being a great psychological novelist. Hence, Rosmary Summer's publication in 1981, *Thomas Hardy: Psychological Novelist*. Hardy considered it important for a writer to be 'fifty years ahead of his time'. His desire to change peoples attitudes, to make them more understanding, more tolerant and less prejudiced arose largely from his profound insight into psychological complexities.

With Hardy's work still a potent force in modern writing it is too early to assess his influence. But the numerous critical studies come out after
the 70's speak for itself - Hardy remains as popular a writer in the modern world. No writer in the past has taken pains in exploring man's relation to the natural world, writing at length the significance of his fictional world 'Wessex', and to modern society. Hardy has been one of the first English novelists to treat the relationship between the sexes with the seriousness it deserved. It is no wonder in the light of this Hardy's novels have proved so very attractive to modern critics and his influence is still present in several ways.

Hardy's influence is seen in one of the most remarkable of modern English novels, The French Lieutenant's Woman by John Fowles which is set in Victorian times in Lyme Regis. The influence has been felt in U.S.A. and in Japan. In Australia, finally, there is the distinguished output of Patrick White. Because of his concern with the country in such a book as The Tree of Man one is barely aware that the village life is other than an English one. It is of a universal nature but has affinities with the Wessex novels that it may be read as part of the progeny of Hardy.
Finally, because of the increased output of Hardy's works from the press and the demand for still more precise editions of what he wrote he may be forming the consciousness of writers who are still in the process of self-discovery. There has at the same time been a renaissance in Hardy's studies and scholarship, for although the public has long known that he was a great writer it has taken longer for critics to find this out and explain precisely why. Although the world in which Hardy grew up has gone for ever it is impossible to picture him as a Victorian. He has indeed transcended these limits and comes over to most people as a curiously modern and readily accessible writer of the highest order and of to-day.