CHAPTER I
CONTEMPORARY VIEWS ON HARDY'S FICTION

If you mean to make the world listen, you must say now what they all will be thinking and saying five and twenty years hence.

Hardy wrote this to Mrs. Hennicker in 1893. It was not till more than seventy years later that Hardy critics began to recognise how much he had to say to the modern world.

Thomas Hardy died over half a century ago in 1928. Over the last fifty years, studies of his fiction by some of the most outstanding critics have given us an entirely new, modern Hardy. By looking at him in a variety of fresh ways Hardy's great critics have come to identify the more valuable aspects of his novels.

The circumstances which led Hardy to write fiction are interesting. After spending four years in trying to pursue an architectural career he began to see the futility of a materialistic civilization and its meanness. Hardy could no longer cope with the strain of London life and having no stakes in staying in the city and remarkably devoid of ambition in his chosen career, returned to his native Dorchester. Back in the country Hardy was himself again and went into a reading spree. He now considered writing

as a possible career more seriously. He considered that he knew fairly well both West country life in its less explored recesses and the life of an isolated student cast upon the billows of London with no protection but his brains. Hardy's inclination at this stage lay in rediscovering an ancient way of life and this is why he chose Wessex as his province and left London and town society. The two contrasting experiences seemed to afford him abundant materials out of which to evolve a striking 'Socialistic novel' - not that he consciously defined it as such, for the word had, probably never or scarcely ever, been heard of at that date.

So he started working at the novel The Poor Man and the Lady, which was never published but of which Alexander Macmillan said, 'If this is your first book, I think you ought to go on',² Chapman and Hall hereby published the novel but their reader George Meredith wanted an interview with the author before he could give clearance. Meredith referred to the book as injudiciously provocative and full of indiscriminative satire. The publishers were ultimately advised against publishing the book. Hardy took the humiliation and went back to architecture.

The forty odd years from the appearance of Hardy's first novel in 1871 saw a steady flow of reviews in the

principal periodicals, increasing both in number and length until the nineties, when the special problems of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude* roused controversy on a much larger scale. Hardy always remained sensitive to the numerous attacks.

The belligerent attacks on his great novels considerably embittered him and proved the futility of criticism which he described as a kind of intellectual boxing.

Literary criticism was slow in throwing light on Hardy's genius, on the tenuous and contradictions in his art. It discovered late that in spite of his pessimism he was a man of courage and vitality. Critical accounts which appeared during Hardy's life-time generally contained negative cliches or unsubstantial, effusive and self-defeating plaudits by Hardy enthusiasts. These misinterpretations and malicious carping criticisms resulted in many false myths about the kind of novelist Hardy was.

The first attack on *Desperate Remedies* came in 1870 when the *Spectator* came down heavily on the prematurely happy volumes, the reason for this being the author's daring to suppose it possible that an unmarried lady owning an estate could have an illegitimate child. The review began:
This is an absolutely anonymous story. No assumption of a 'non-de-plume' which might at some future time disgrace the family name and still more the Christian name of a repentant and remorseful novelist - and very right too. By all means let him bury the secret in the profoundest depths of his own heart, out of reach, if possible, of his own consciousness.

He remembered, for long years after, how he had read this review. The bitterness of that moment was never forgotten. All the reviews agreed in selecting for praise those parts of the novel which point forward to Hardy's most characteristic later work; their censure is directed against sensationalism and an over-complicated plot.

With the publication of the next novel: Under the Greenwood Tree (1872), he clearly emerged as a great novelist. It was entirely a story of rural life. Hardy in a letter to Macmillan and Co. stated:

In that story the rustic characters and scenery had very little part yet to my surprise they were made very much of by the reviews.

The Athenaeum said:

The characters are often exceedingly good ... The parish clerk 'a sort of Bowdlerized rake who refers to the time' before he took orders is really almost worthy of George Eliot ... We see no reason why the author should not write novels but little, if at all inferior to the best of the present generation.

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3 Florence Emily Hardy, *Op.cit.*, p.84
The Spectator said:

The is an unusual and very happy facility in catching and fixing phrases of peasant life - in producing for us, not the manners and language only but the tone of thought ... and simple humour of consequential village worthies and gaping village rustics ... The scenes allotted to these humble actors are few and slight but they indicate powers that might and ought, to be extended largely in this direction.

The Pall Mall Gazette referred to it as "a story of much freshness and originality". Further, Horace Moule, Hardy's distinguished countrymen and friend, called attention to the superbly achieved realist basis of Hardy's fiction in his review of *Under the Greenwood Tree*:

Anyone who knows tolerably well the remoter parts of the South-Western counties of England, will be able to judge for himself of the power and truthfulness shown in these studies of the better class of rustics who isolated lives have not impaired a shrewed common sense and insight together with complete independence set off by native humour which is excellently represented in those two volumes.

Moule's review won Hardy the attention of prominent editors and intellectuals. Encouraged by the success of *Greenwood Tree* he now felt more confident about his literary talent.

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The reception of the next novel, *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, published in May, 1873 surpassed his expectations. The influential *Saturday Review* pronounced it to be:

The most artistically constructed of the novel of his time - a quality which by the bye would carry little recommendation in these days of loose construction and indifference to organic homogeneity.

*The Athenaeum* (28 June 1873) saw Elfride's adventure as rather forcible, but the *Graphic* (12 July 1873) said "Mr. Hardy seems to us to excel everyone but George Eliot", and the *Pall Mall Gazette* (25 October 1873) hailed him as "distinctly a man of genius," adding "there are chapters in *Under the Greenwood Tree* which rival the most admirable rustic pieces of George Eliot herself." At a later date Tennyson was to tell him that he liked *A Pair of Blue Eyes* the best of his novels. It continued to be surprisingly popular up to about the end of the century.

*Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), Hardy's next novel, aroused interesting reactions. Many critics found its rural characters and situations unhistorical. Andrew Lang, for instance wrote in his *Academy* review:

The country folk in the story have not heard of strikes, or of Mr. Arch; they have to all appearance plenty to eat and warm clothes to weather and when the sheep are sown in the ancient barn of Weatherbury, the scene is one that Shakespeare or that Chaucer might have watched. This immobile rural existence is what the novelist has to paint.

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9 Florence Emily Hardy: *The Life of Thomas Hardy*, 1840-1928, p.95.
11 Ibid., p.35.
Others made the claim that the novel was historically true. If that truth appeared exaggerated to some, argued The Examiner, it was because they were simply ignorant.

Mr. Thomas Hardy's novels have been favourably received and many of their merits recognized. Yet their most characteristic feature have either been passed over in silence or pronounced exaggerated simply because very few of the readers are able to judge in those matters of his workmanship.12

Horace Moule, in his review of the novel, particularly drew attention to its masterly depiction of 'the inner life of a rural parish.' He called it 'a prose idyll' but one that was remarkable for its fidelity to truth. He wrote:

Anyone who knows tolerably well the remoter parts of the South-Western counties of England will be able to judge for himself all the power and truthfulness shown in these studies of the better class of rustics.13

The majority of the contemporary reviewers tried to solve the problem by taking the novel as simply an idyll, although some did not fail to notice that idyllism could not account for the novel in its entirety.

The Guardian while accepting the novel as 'purely pastoral', argued that it was pastoral with a difference:

It is in truth a purely pastoral idyll, in which however the shepherds and shepherdesses and of a very different strain from the Cyprian and Phyllis of conventional poetry.14

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13 Ibid., p.36.
The Saturday Review praised the graphic description of farming life, but the reviewer found his confidence in their truthfulness somewhat shaken by what he felt to be an idealized rendering of rustic wit and conversation. He also had some strong criticisms of the general style. R.H. Hutton in The Spectator echoed the general praise of the novel's freshness and imaginative power but he found the farm labourers incredible in their biblical wit and 'intellectual banter'.

Hardy himself described the novel as 'a pastoral tale'. Further, the preface to Madding Crowd offers many clues to Hardy's real intentions as a novelist. He called his imagined world 'WESSEX' which was the ancient name of the region described in his novels. He did so not because here he had seen the persistence of the past into the present. He states:

I first ventured to adopt the word "WESSEX" from the pages of early English history and give it a fictitious significance as the existing name of the district once included in that extinct kingdom. The series of novels I projected being mainly of the kind called local, they seemed to require a territorial definition of some sort to lend unity to their scene.  

Far From the Madding Crowd is the first of Hardy's novels to attract the attention of readers outside England. In France readers of the Revue des deux Mondes (1875) 

15 Thomas Hardy: Far From the Madding Crowd, From Author's Preface, p.v.
were introduced to Hardy in a substantial article by Leon Boucher called "Le Roman Pastoral en Anglet erre". Boucher in his account praises the presentation of rural life, the rustic chorus, and the reality of the descriptions of nature, and predicts that Hardy will continue to command the respect of serious readers.

With Hardy's next novel *The Hand Of Ethelberta* (1876) reviews tended to be rather lukewarm and lacking in enthusiasm. George Saintabury thought there was less laboured eccentricity in this novel than in the earlier works, but found it scrappy. The *Saturday Review* saw original force in the book, but misapplied to an unworthy theme. The editor of *Harper's Magazine* was less polite in his 'Literary Record': he said the book could be read, 'with no intellectual effort and very little emotional excitement' and the heroine was 'not intriguing enough to disgust nor unselfish enough to attract'. Hardy's son's own view, as expressed in his contribution to the *Life of Leslie Stephen* was a claim to be in advance of his readers: he thought that the novel was published thirty years too soon.

The *Return of the Native* (1878) was published by Messrs Smith and Elder in November. The *Times* remark upon the book was that the reader found himself taken further from the madding crowd than ever. The *Times* found the world of R.G. Cox: *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul 1970. Introduction, p.XX.
of Egdon remote and alien, and "not able to get up a satisfactory interest in a people whose history and habits are so entirely foreign to our own”. Yet the story is a striking one and well worth reading, were it only for those graphic scenes and descriptions with which the clever author has enriched his pages.

The Saturday Review thought the book less entertaining than its predecessors and found even the vivid descriptions weakened by eccentric expressions and strained metaphors. Hardy's invention of characters was said to be unjudicious and their treatment unrealistic. On the other hand there was praise for the atmosphere of the setting, the vividness of individual scenes like the gambling by the light of glow-worms, and the humour of the rustics.

The Illustrated London News thought the description good, the movement slow, the personages uninteresting, the action poor and the conclusion flat. This reviewer, too, dwelt on the gambling scene, but warned Hardy against relying 'more upon the mere fringe of his story than upon his story itself for the exhibition of his powers.'

Further, the accusation of putting improbable language into the month of peasants was repeated by Britten, but his general tone was more favourable. Mr. Hardy seems to be in the way to do for rural life what Dickens did for that of the town.

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18 Ibid., p. XXIII.
With his next novel *A Laodicean* (1881), the *Saturday Review* and the *Athenæum* both referred back *Desperate Remedies*. The former found the characters not sufficiently explained: the latter was mildly favourable with one or two objections, for example it noted that:

> Without being in the least degree a "fleshy" writer Mr. Hardy has a way of insisting on the physical attractions of a woman which, if imitated by weak writers, may prove offensive.

*Two on a Tower* (1882) was hardly more popular with critics than *A Laodicean*. In *The Spectator*, Harry Quilter found the story "as unpleasant as it is practically impossible ...... melodramatic without strength, extravagant with object, and objectionable with truth."20

Around 1881 an adventurous young medical man called Havelock Ellis, had become an avid reader of Hardy and in order to write a critique on the novels he had toured Dorset. His essay appeared in the *Westminster Review* of April 1883, and was not lost upon Hardy. He enjoyed it both for its generous tribute and as a practical help.

> With his particular blend of talents, as psychologist and man of letters, Ellis was able to discuss Hardy's woman with more subtlety and insight than any of the

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20 *Ibid.*., p. XXIV.
critics of the 1920's and 1930's. Hardy had the pleasure of reading two warm critical appreciations of his work. With these essays there began a line of criticism which, despite the rantings of priggish reviewers, took Hardy with the utmost seriousness. Hardy's fame as a great novelist was established when in 1895 Lionel Johnson brought out his important study of Hardy's fiction.

Upto the mid-eighties the reviewers' chief points against Hardy had been on grounds of style, and of melodramatic improbabilities in plot and character, with occasional minor uneasiness about his handling of sexual relations. With the next two novels there was added to these the issue of 'pessimism'. Hardy's sensitivity to adverse criticism did not generally imply deference to the critics' advice. For the most part he pursued his own way with a certain dogged obstinacy.

The Mayor of Casterbridge was issued complete about the end of May 1886. It was a story which Hardy fancied he had damaged more recklessly as an artistic whole, in the interest of the newspaper in which it appeared serially than perhaps any other of his novels. However, at this time he called his novel writing 'mere journey work'.\(^{21}\) He cared little about it as art, though it must be said

\(^{21}\) Florence Emily Hardy: The Life of Thomas Hardy, p.179.
in favour of the plot, as he admitted later, that it was quite coherent and organic, in spite of its complication. Others thought better of it than he did himself, as is shown by the letter R.L. Stevenson wrote to the novelist.

"I have read The Mayor of Casterbridge with sincere admiration. Henchard is a great fellow and Dorchester is touched in with the hand of a master."

Hardy was pleasantly surprised by the way The Mayor was received by important critics and to Robert Louis he wrote: "I feel several inches taller at the idea of your thinking of dramatizing the Mayor."

Both The Spectator and The Westminster declared the character of Henchard as "a great study which has not, so far as we recollect, its prototype in fiction." In The Boston Literary World a short paragraph in a chronicle of Minor Fiction spoke of the hand of a master in contrast to "the place average fiction of every day."

Private comments by individuals were often more enthusiastic. The incident of the wife-sale was singled

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25 Ibid., p.XXV.
out for praise by Gerard Manly Hopkins in a brief reference to Hardy which appears in a letter of October 1886. He wrote:

In my judgement the amount of gift and genius which goes into novels in the English Literature of this generation is perhaps not much inferior to what made the Elizabethan drama and unhappily it is in great part wasted. How admirable are Blackmore and Hardy ... ...

We find George Gissing sending Hardy a respectful letter with the gift of one of his novels: "I have not been the least careful of your readers and in your books I have constantly found refreshment and onward help."

Coming to *The Woodlanders* (1887), Hardy liked it the most as a story. Britten in the Athenaeum praised the novel as an example of Hardy's 'second manner' -- less sensational, less broadly comic. "The Novel", he concluded, is distinctly not one for the "young person" of whom we have lately heard, but should be read by all who can tell masterly work in fiction when they see it."²⁷ The Saturday Review admired the atmosphere and description but found some stiffness and artificiality in the incidents especially in the earlier part. It also noted some inconsistency in the standard


of conversation given to the villagers. Concluding with praise for the portrait of Giles Winterborne, the reviewer warned Hardy not to be led astray by the desire to idealize. The Westminster's brief notice spoke of 'a treat for all lovers of imaginative literature of a high order.' Over in Boston the Literary World spoke of the touch of a master's hand, but deplored the pessimism of the novel which leaves the reader "baffled, stupefied, cast down".

It was around this time that Hardy in the middle of his novel-writing put together his thoughts on fiction. They constitute a record of Hardy's opinions, extending over a full half-century, that surely interested his readers throughout the world. He defined good fiction as:

That kind of imaginative writing which lies nearest to the epic, dramatic, or narrative masterpieces of the past. The higher passions must ever rank above the inferior -- intellectual tendencies above animal and moral above whatever the treatment, realistic or ideal.

At another time Hardy referred to himself as an "Ancient Mariner." Many a 'great' has testified to his Mariner-like powers of inducing a willing suspension

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29 Ibid., p. XXVII.
of disbelief. The adverse contemporary reactions to a number of his books stung Hardy into contemplating the end of his fictional career. He thought that "a man must be a fool to deliberately stand up to be shot at."

The publication of Tess of the d'Urbervilles (1891) certainly did not improve matters as far as his reputation went for from the very start it was the subject of much critical controversy and confusion. An unknown critic stated:

Hardy postulates an all powerful being endowed with baser human passions, who turns everything to evil and rejoices in the mischief he has wrought.  

The reception accorded by the various Journals and reviews was, of course, one of the literary scandals of the late Victorian age. In the National Review Tess was ridiculed as "A Prig in the Elysian Fields". This was no significantly counterbalanced by the praise of H.W. Massingham, Richard le Gallienne, William Watson and in 1913 Lionel Johnson, Matters were not helped by the addition of a subtitle, 'A Pure Woman' which intensified the storm. Some local libraries in English-speaking countries 'suppressed' the novel -- with what effect

31 Florence Emily Hardy: The Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840-1928, p.243.
32 Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings, Prefaces, Literary Opions, ed. by Harold Orel, p.261.
33 Ibid., p.261.
was not ascertained. Hardy's good-natured friends Henry James and R.L. Stevenson (whom he afterwards called the Polonius and the Osric of novelists) corresponded about it in this vein:

Oh yes, dear Louis: Tess of the d'Urberville is vile. The pretence of sexuality is only equalled by the absence of sexuality is only equalled by the absence of it and the abomination of the language by the author's reputation for style.

The most scathing attack appeared in the New Review from Andrew Lang. Hardy referred tartly to this review in his preface to the novel's second edition, and Lang answered at length in Longman's Magazine explaining that while he found Tess like Clarissa, or Le Pere Goriot or Madame Bovary, "forbidding in conception," his objection was that it was not like them credible and real, and that to this unreality the defects of style contributed. In the Westminster D.F. Hannigan supported Hardy against Lang's criticisms and went on to hail Tess as marking a distinct epoch in English fiction and as the greatest novel since George Eliot died. The Times reviewer began forthrightly "Mr. Hardy's latest novel is his greatest." It praised the book's tragic power, and asserted "It is well that an idealist like Mr. Hardy should every now and then remind us how terribly defective are our means of judging others." In the Star Richard le Gallienne

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34 Florence Emily Hardy: The Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840-1928, p.246.
described **Tess** as "perhaps the very best of Hardy's novels, though he criticized the style for its occasional self-consciousness and 'imperfect digestion' of scientific and philosophical ideas.

**Tess** perhaps his most powerful novel ironically proved to be the beginning of the end of his career as a novelist. In the 1892 preface to the novel Hardy offers a summary of the creative principle in **Tess**:

Nevertheless 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 oftener charged with impressions than with conviction, there have been objections both to the matter and to the rendering.

He quotes from Schiller's letters to Goethe to explain his own aesthetic of the novel:

As soon as I observe that anyone, when judging of poetical representations considers anything more important than the inner necessity and truth, I have done with him.\(^37\)

As far as he was concerned **Tess** was simply a story as it occurred to him "An impression, not an argument."

There is no doubt that, both from its intrinsic qualities and from the stir roused by its subject, Tess did more than any other novel to Hardy's reputation. W.R. Routland records that between 1900 and 1930 it was


\(^{37}\)Ibid., p.131.
reprinted some forty times in England alone.

To many attacks from contemporary critics was added one more by Mrs. Hardy herself. She started a virulent attack on Hardy's novels and went to the extent of campaigning for the rejection of *Jude the Obscure* (1895), his last novel, though she did not succeed.

Further, the onslaught upon *Jude* started by the vituperative section of the press -- unequalled in violence since the publication of Swinburne's *Poem and Ballads* thirty years before was taken up by the anonymous writers of "libelous letters and post cards, and other such gentry."

To mention some of the attacks, in the *Athenaeum* the reviewer called *Jude the Obscure* a "titanically bad book", and its author a man who had run "mad in right royal fashion."

Hardy was in his mid-fifties, and an established writer when Jude came out. He had written two great novels and several others of some distinction. But he was more than a famous or honoured writer. For the English-speaking world he had become a moral presence genuinely affecting the lives of those who read him.

When Hardy first printed *Jude the Obscure* as a monthly serial in *Harper's Magazine* between December 1894 and November 1895, he agreed to cut some of its most vital
parts: those which showed Jude to be harried by sexual desire, others reporting that Jude and Sue Bridehead did finally go to bed together, and still others displaying Hardy's gift for a muted but humorous earthiness. Today such mutilations by a serious writer would provoke an uproar of protest; but Hardy, not being the kind of man who cared to languish in a garret, did what he had to do in order to sell the serial rights.

The book within months of publication stirred up a storm of righteousness. Many of the reviewers adopted a high moral tone, denouncing Hardy's apparent hostility to the institution of marriage while choosing to neglect the sympathy he showed toward people caught up in troublesome relationships, whether in or out of marriage. One true blooded Englishman, the Bishop of Wakefield, publicly announced that he "was so disgusted with (the book's) insolence and indecency that I threw it into the fire."[^38]

To which Hardy added that probably the bishop had chosen to burn the book because he could not burn the author.

Mrs. Oliphant a novelist herself in an article entitled "the Anti-Marriage League" referred to Jude as "The strongest illustration of what Art can come to when given over to the exposition of the unclean." The character of the new novel, to her, was easily summarisable:

[^38]: Quoted by Irving Howe: Thomas Hardy, Masters of World Literature, Louis Kronenberger, editor 1973, p.133.
Nothing so coarsely indecent as the whole history of Jude ....... has ever been put in English print; that is to say, from the hands of a master. There may be books more disgusting, more impious as regards human nature more foul in detail, in those dark corners where the amateurs of filth and garbage .... .... and so forth.\footnote{39}{Edmund Blunden: Thomas Hardy. London, Macmillan, 1942, reprint 1951, 1967, p.86.}

Another woman, Miss Jeannette Gilder, wrote a scathing review, protesting that she had to open the window and "let in the fresh air"\footnote{40}{Ibid., p.91.} after finishing the story. This reviewer so distressed Hardy and he himself thought that "it was somewhat overburdened with the interests of morality."\footnote{41}{Ibid., p.91.}

The tone of the reviewers varied as much as their opinions. A.J. Butler, wrote in a fairly temperate and judicious way in the \textit{National Review} on 'Mr. Hardy as a decadent.' He began with a general survey of his powers and with particular praise for The Woodlanders. Jude, he objected, ignored the existence of genuine reformers and people of any elevated or generous feeling. He did not want the artist to ignore sex or to limit his subject matter unduly, but he thought that Hardy at times showed signs of simply wanting to defy Mrs. Grundy. R.Y. Tyrrell adopted a rather harsher tone. The Pall Mall Gazette referred...
to the novel as 'Jude the Obscene' and gave a facetious summary of the story and demanded of the author: "Give us quickly another and cleaner book to take the bad taste out of our mouths." 42

The Saturday Review, however, had more favourable accounts. It spoke of Jude as the "last and most splendid" of Hardy's works, and likened its "foolish reception to the new D.P. Hannigan's review which hits out emotionally at the representations of 'Smug journalistic critics while classing Hardy with Fielding, Balzac, Flaubert, Turgenev, George Eliot and Dostoievsky. The most substantial discussion of all was Havelock Ellis's article 'Concerning Jude the Obscure.' Ellis is chiefly interested in Hardy's understanding of feminine psychology, and considers Jude the greatest novel written in England for many years. Though intellectually Hardy is a mere child compared to Meredith, he finds him the truer artist. As for the accusation of immorality, Ellis sees this as resulting from the artist's faithful portrayal of the conflict between natural instincts and secondary social expedients. The article shows evidence of wide literary experience and sophistication.

Returning to the marriage question Hardy once wrote to his friend Edmund Gosse that all he had done was:

... ... to deal unaffectedly with the fret and fever derision and disaster, that may press in the wake of the strongest passion known to humanity; to tell without a mincing of words, of a deadly war waged between flesh and spirit; and to point the tragedy of unfulfilled aims.

What Hardy was getting at in his letter to Gosse is an idea now commonly accepted by serious writers: that while a work of fiction may frequently raise social and moral problems, the artist's main intention is to explore them freely rather than take hard and fast public positions.

Hardy believed he had suffered enough from the attacks on Jude. But attack was precisely what he had to expect. Frederic Harrison's attack on his 'monotony of gloom' in 1920 proved particularly nettling, and Hardy wrote a bitter paragraph on both Harrison and Joseph Hore that he attached to Late Lyrics and Earlier 1922. Hardy was well aware of the mean-spirited attacks that were being made on him by George Moore and G.K. Chesterton.

Finally, to the impression produced by the general and uncritical public he replied:

However I must put up with it, and say as Parrhasius of Ephesus said about his pictures. There is nothing that men will not find fault with.

It is interesting to note that the American reception

43 Irving Howe: Thomas Hardy., p.133.
44 Ibid., p.139.
of *Tessa* and *Jude the Obscure* was as mixed as the British
The *Atlantic Monthly* carried a ten-column praise of *Tessa*
as Hardy's masterpiece and noted particularly its effect on human sympathy:

> It has left at least one reader believing that many of the crimes served up morning and evening in the newspapers would seem less barbarous, less unintelligible, if there were at hand to explain the motives them some seen of human nature, some Thomas of Hardy.

The *Boston Literary World* dismissed it in a short paragraph lamenting its 'unpleasantness'. *Tess's* career ignores "the plain unwritten instincts of morbidity."\(^{46}\)

Of American reviews of *Jude* the most notable is probably W.D. Howell's. He sees the book as a tragedy of the Greek kind. It carries conviction although we know that in ordinary life compromises would prevent the various catastrophes from happening. The unpleasant incidents are not untrue and the questionings of convention and morality are such as to make us ask the reasons of things. The *New York 'Critic*', after outlining the story concluded:

> There is an undercurrent of morbid animality running through the book which is sickening to an ordinarily decent mind and of these men and women and their companions in kindred fiction are to be taken as true to modern life, we may as well accept a cage full of monkeys as a microcosm of humanity.

\(^{46}\)Ibid., p.XXIX.
\(^{47}\)Ibid., p.XXXVI.
Hardy's last full-length novel, *The Well-Beloved* (1897) appeared in serial form simultaneously in the *Illustrated London News* and *Harper's bazaar* during 1892 and was considerably revised for book publication in 1897. It is therefore not really a later work than *Jude* and it had apparently been sketched much earlier. In the heated atmosphere left by the *Jude* scandal some reviewers managed to find it immoral. Hardy refused to answer such attacks, commenting to an editor who had raised the question:

There is more fleshliness in *The Lovers of the Triangles* than in this story - at least to me. To be sure, there is one explanation which should not be overlooked: a reviewer 'himself' afflicted with 'sex mania' might review so a thing terrible to think of.

Britten reviewed it faintly favourably, and hoped that its publication indicated "a desire to renew those pleasant relations with his readers that should never have been interrupted." In fact it marks the end of Hardy's career as a novelist.

In the next phase of the early years of the twentieth century there came several articles surveying Hardy's work as a whole. In the *Quarterly* for April 1904 Edmund Wright used the occasion of Macmillan's uniform edition for a twenty-four page essay. The account was chiefly

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48 Edmund Blunden: *Thomas Hardy*, p. 100.
concerned with Hardy's insight into country life and his peasant character. It concluded with a comparison of Hardy to Euripides, and with the judgement that in certain of his later works he is, as a sentimental materialist, a 'misdirected force'.

Other interesting accounts appeared in the Edinburgh Review provoked by F. Hedgerock's study of Hardy in French (1911). The 1912 collected edition was the occasion of an interesting article in the Spectator 'Novels of Character and Environment' by F. Manning. Hardy's didacticism was seen as a flow in his work: considered purely as works of art, Tess and Jude are not on the height of his achievement, for all their peculiar merits. In some ways The Return of the Native is more complete as a representation of life. Blackwoods also noticed this edition in a general essay by Charles Whibley which gives a fair idea of Hardy's critical reputation at this time. It touches on his 'intense feeling of locality', both in its human associations and its natural atmosphere and his profound awareness of rural life. It says:

"Never since the Georgics have the industries of the country side been turned to literary account with so fine a sense of their enduring importance" against the background he sets dramas 'tense and simple, like dramas of Sophocles'. His blemishes of style are superficial, and he will certainly survive more as a novelist than as a poet.\(^5\)

\(^{50}\) R.G. Cox: Op.cit., p.XLIII.
From about 1900 onward, American periodicals show a similar spate of general surveys of Hardy's work. In 1901 W.D. Howell's *Heroines of Fiction* included two chapters on Hardy. P.H. Fryes wrote an essay on 'Nature and Thomas Hardy' which is largely a discussion of his tragic pessimism and 'comic irony'. Mary Moss wrote a commentary on all the major novels. She up Hardy's achievement as similar to Tennyson's in that "he bridges the gulf between poetry and science." His intellectual irony would finally grow unbearable if it were not that "the discouragement wrought by his pitiless logic is forever cancelled by his indestructible human sympathy." W.H. Phelps in his *Essays on Modern Novelists* gives a brief life and summary chronological survey. He distinguishes between the pessimism of the earlier novels, which had been 'a noble ground quality', and 'the merely hysterical and wholly unconvincing didactic pessimism of *Jude the Obscure*. He praises especially Hardy's uncanny intimacy with nature. The article by Harold Williams puts the stress on the greater Wessex novels, not simply as pictures of village manners, but as tragic realizations of the unity of the individual and universal life. The typical achievement of the five tragedies culminates in *Tess*. These are the same five that Douglas Brown was to select as central in his study some forty years later.

52 Ibid., p.XLIII.
So from first to last, that is from the publication of his first novel to the last, Hardy has been subjected to several critical assessments, at times to blunt dismissal. A good part of Hardy criticism during his life was, in the unhappy sense academic. Majority were treatises on his alleged Philosophy. But some of it is distinguished illuminating insights like those of Lionel Johnson, H.O. Duffin, Samuel Chew and those contained in the fierce essay by D.H. Lawrence.

Lionel Johnson's: The Art of Thomas Hardy (1894) is a major landmark in Hardy studies. It contains chapters on the country folk, Hardy's principal characters, and his idea of tragedy, especially as embodied in Tess. Though by modern standards excessively verbose and obtrusive of the critics' own personality, it raises a number of basic critical points and was for many years the best work on its subject. Two-thirds of the book is taken up with a study of the traditional qualities of Hardy's novels. Johnson praises Hardy for bringing into his sentences the cadence of such earlier prose masters as Burton and Sir Thomas Browne. He comments favourably on Hardy's rustic characters, who he says, possess affinities with Shakespeare's. Indeed, he says, Hardy drawn them so well because he is in sympathy with their slow-moving, unchanging and traditional way of life. Reading Hardy's novels is like taking a journey back in time, for the novelist has a
sense of the links that bind the present with the past. Hardy's plots are based upon the conflict that ensues when newer ways of life come in conflict with the established ones. The conflict produces tragedy, but the novels end with the heroic failure of the protagonists to change the world, and life goes on as before even after they are no more. Indeed, the impression that Johnson gives is that though Hardy may be a modern novelist who brings into his works psychology and heredity, his greatness lies in the fact that he evokes, as few have done, the beauty of a traditional way of life:

He (Hardy) dwells, in a dramatic meditation upon the earth's antiquity, the thought of 'the world's gray fathers, and in particular upon certain tracts of land with which he has an intimacy, upon the human traditions of old time, upon the pageant of the past, upon the relics of long gone powers and forces, genealogies, rolls tenures, heraldory, old names and old houses lingering in decay, unconscious of their age, pageant impulse, the spirit of material and natural religion, the wisdom and the simplicity, the blind and the grouping thoughts of a living peasantry still primitive; the antique works and ways of labour in woods and fields, the sense of sacred dignity inherent in such things, in that immemorial need of man to till the soil for his daily bread; meditation upon ...... the fair forms of vanished life the heroism and the ambition, the beauty and the splendour, long past away......

As a humanist Johnson admires Hardy's characterisation, his sympathy with suffering mankind, and his analysis

53 Lionel Johnson: The Art of Thomas Hardy, London 1894, p.52.
of human problems, but as a christian and a traditionalist he cannot see the point of Hardy's questioning social coventions and religious beliefs which is precisely where Hardy's 'Modernity' lies. He is appreciative of the novelists' art, but he refuses to grant him the philosophical tenets which constitute the 'raison d'être' of his art. It is a pity that Johnson's book was published in 1894, just a year before Hardy's last novel, Jude the Obscure. Jude is perhaps Hardy's best novel in terms of the artistry involved. It is also his most pessimistic and anti-Christian work. If Jude had preceeded Johnson's book, it would have been interesting to see what Johnson made of it.

Lascelles Abercrombie's 'Thomas Hardy: A Critical Study' (1912) typifies the critical attitude of the end of this period. Hardy at the beginning of the century was proclaimed as an established man of letters and a great tragic artist comparable with Sophocles and Aesychylus.

The development of critical writing on Hardy since 1914 has been, first, a reaction against solemn academic adulation, with some tendency to turn to the poems rather than the novels and then the beginning of an attempt to make a new approach with a frank admission of faults awkwardness of style and dated elements generally. Modern criticism is marked by a strong sense that Hardy's work is very mixed in quality and that its positive merits
require careful disentangling: as yet the process can hardly be said to be complete. After the upheaval of the 1914-18 war, Hardy's work was bound to seem less subversive and startling than in the nineties. His essential Victorianism became more obvious.

One of the better-known critics that came after the war was H.C. Duffin. His book entitled Thomas Hardy was first published in 1916 and revised in 1937.

Duffin like Lionel Johnson contends that Hardy excels in characterisation. Hardy's characters though 'unnoticed, very simple, are interesting personalities in their context and quality of being.

Duffin commends Hardy for his understanding and portrayal of humanity and his evocation of nature. A critic commenting on Duffin states "Duffin writes like a teenager, but shorn of the effusions the book might offer a morsel or two worth testing." However, Duffin's criticism has more than historical interest for a student of the early period of Hardy criticism.

In his eighties Hardy returned to poetry. A visitor in 1920 was much puzzled by his asking in response to a remark about his having pulled out 'all the stops' in Jude. "Do you think so? My views on life are so extreme that I do not usually state them." What he perhaps meant
was that he had learnt since Jude, not to change his mind about the state of the world and of the universe, but to save some to the wear and tear consequent upon speaking that mind in public. At his age, and with so much work behind him, it no longer seemed necessary, profitable, or congenial to continue to testify in season and out: he had for some time taken the position that it was possible to be too vocal in a good cause. His sometimes discomforting facility for seeing all sides of a question had in any case obliged him to acknowledge that those who held radically different views might be perfectly sincere and honourable and, within their own terms of reference, perfectly justified.

Samuel C. Chew's *Thomas Hardy: Poet and Novelist* (New York 1928) is another work to be taken note of. He too like previous critics saw Hardy's art and craft as essentially "Victorian". He described Hardy as a master in his depiction of Wessex, one who was "usually sensitive of Nature."54 In terms of style, proportion, design, finish, selection and exactitude Samuel Chew states that Hardy's study and practice of architecture stood the author of the Wessex novels in good stead. A notable feature of Hardy's writing says Samuel Chew, was his "intimate familiarity with the Bible especially with the Old Testament."55

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Chew found the dissimilarities between Hardy and George Eliot as far more marked than the resemblances. This difference was to be seen in their approach to life. With Eliot it was "desire and conscience" that was responsible for the tragic conflict and was internal. "Conscience" on the other hand, plays a small part in Hardy's books. The tragic conflict, for Hardy, was the duality of will and destiny. Man is a master of his fate in George Eliot. Fate according to Hardy is beyond human control.

A creditable feature of many of Hardy's novels is his great care in "harmonizing the setting with the event" that takes place therein. Bathsheba meeting, for the first time, with each of her lovers is proof of this. Further, Chew is of the opinion, that though the rural setting of the novels greatly restricts Hardy's range of subject and character, it also possesses corresponding advantages. It is the appropriate ground for men and women yielding to the dictates of instinct, warm, elemental vigorous human beings who are close to earth. From the setting too comes the sense of detachment and separation from the outside world that makes each novel seem complete in itself....

Finally, Chew feels that Hardy's steady view of life does not embrace the whole of life. In the chapter

57 Ibid., p.98.
entitled 'A tentative metaphysic' he states: "Man, in Hardy's novels and poems, becomes only one of the many phenomena of interest to the imaginative interpreter of life."^58

By this time Hardy had become a legend. He had won the admiration of contemporaries like Ezra Pound, W.B. Yeats, John Galsworthy, Bernard Shaw. A good number of novelists and poets found his doors at Max Gate always open to them. Hardy was a constant source of encouragement and inspiration to them. Other ardent disciples included E.M. Forster, Virginia Woolf, W.H. Auden, Siegfried Sassoon, T.E. Lawrence. Unfortunately, many of them shrank from publicly claiming for Hardy the greatness of which they had all had a personal experience.

There were others who dismissed Hardy rashly as an unrewarding and sentimental writer. Some of these included Henry James and even Robert Louis Stevenson. George Moore spent his harshest invective on Tess and its author. T.S. Eliot in After Strange Gods, had set Hardy down as a "symptom of decadence" a victim of emotion run morbid, "a minor poet" whose matter of communication is not "Particularly wholesome or edifying." F.R. Leavis excluded Hardy from his great tradition. Both Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson had exchanged views on what they considered

the abominable style and the pretence of sexuality in
Tess of the d'Urbervilles. Henry James wrote to Stevenson:

The good title Thomas Hardy has scored a great success with Tess which is chock-full of faults and falsity and yet has a singular beauty and charm.

And a year later he wrote to Stevenson:

I am meek and shamed where the public clatter is deafening - so I bowed my head and let Tess of the d'Urberville's pass. But oh yes, dear Louis, she is vile. The pretence of 'sexuality' is only equalled by the absence of it, and the abomination of the language by the author's reputation for style. There are indeed some pretty smells and sights and sounds. But you have better ones in Polynesia.

Hardy, on hearing of these views, called them the Polonius and Osric of novelists. He exclaimed:

How indecent of those two virtuous females to expose their mental nakedness in such a manner.

T.S. Eliot made a notorious attack upon Hardy.

The work of the late Thomas Hardy wrote Eliot:

Represents an interesting example of a powerful personality uncurbed by any institutional attachment or even by submission to any objective beliefs unhampered by ideas even by what sometimes acts as a partial restraint upon inferior writers, the desire to please a large public. He seems to me to have written as nearly

59 Edmund Blunden: Thomas Hardy, p.75.
60 Ibid., p.75.
61 Florence E. Hardy: The Life of Thomas Hardy, p.246.
for the sake of "self-expression" as a man well can, and the self which he had to express does not strike me as particularly wholesome or edifying matter of communication. 62

This is wrong, through and through, and small-spirited as well. Hardy's "powerful personality" was precisely curbed by an institutional attachment. He called himself a churchy man and lived by the imperatives of Christian morality. Irwing Howe rightly argues that some rehearse the letter of dogma but are unable to bend to the spirit of charity. Hardy was admirably free from hauteur and snobbism and he had an enormous sympathy for human beings.

F.R. Leavis denigrated Hardy in much the same manner as Henry James and T.S. Eliot. He excluded Hardy from his great tradition and refused to consider him a good novelist. Like some of the earlier critics he did not see the pessimism of Hardy as being absolutely thorough and absolutely candid, a splendid contribution to modern fiction. He spoke about and compared Hardy to dark philosophers like Nietzsche and Schopenhauer. When we hear a condescending remark about Hardy: "the good little Thomas Hardy" it shows how reputations are maimed and marred - a phrase which Leavis described as "appropriately sympathetic". Leavis failed to understand what Hardy was writing about.

62Quoted by Irving Howe: Thomas Hardy, pp.26-27.
However, inspite of the adverse criticism Hardy had admirers who thought him their greatest writer since Shakespeare. Others, who lacked the courage for so large an estimate, admitted that he stands alone working out a philosophy (although he never called it that) which seemed revolutionary to the man of his time. But if we survey his life-work he shows himself perennially vital, inventive, and responsive to new experience.

A fine tribute by J.E. Barton appeared in The Bristol Times and Mirror, January 14, 1928:

Thomas Hardy is in a category by himself. He is not the obvious representative of his period nor the conscious critic of it. He is the deeply imaginative artist of his own time who catches and suggests the large underflowing current, which men of science and men of affairs only perceive dimly, by fragments of floating matter.

This leads us to a group of critics who termed Hardy "a good novelist". They are D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf and E.M. Foster who were all drawn to Hardy's work. Lawrence saw in Hardy's novels, a kinship with his own. Each of these novelists agreed that Hardy was an irresistibly great novelist.

D.H. Lawrence's highly personal and idiosyncratic study was actually began in 1914, though not published until after his death (in PHOENIX, 1936). In July of

63 Quoted by Irving Howe: Thomas Hardy, pp. 43-44
the same year Lawrence asked Edward Marsh to lend him some Hardy novels for a book he was about to write on Hardy. In September he wrote to J.B. Pinker that 'out of sheer rage about the 'idiocy' of the war he had begun the book on Hardy. By December the Study of Thomas Hardy, 1936 was finished and Lawrence had begun to write the final version of The Rainbow.

Hardy's novels were known to Lawrence in his youth, and their presence can be felt in his work even as late as Sons and Lovers. But then, during the writing of The Rainbow, Lawrence turned aside from his work to re-read Hardy's work and to produce a long critical study of the Wessex novels. The different phases of Lawrence's engagement with Hardy have to be understood as a sequence, because then it becomes apparent how far Lawrence's creative needs preceded his formation of critical attitudes. He could not have become a penetrating critic of Hardy without having first grappled as a novelist with the full significance of the Wessex novels. He recognized Hardy as one of the first great English novelists to treat the relationship between the sexes with the seriousness it deserved. The extent to which Lawrence's critical discoveries issue from his awareness of the substance and grain of Hardy's work has never been sufficiently recognized.

In his Study of Thomas Hardy he dealt with most of the Wessex novels, but save his main attention to
three - The Return of the Nature Tess of the d'Urbeville's and Jude the Obscure. Much in the Study leads one away from Hardy in order to be able to return to him with enlarged understanding. But even when Lawrence is not discussing Hardy explicitly, Hardy is there as a constant, implicit presence, providing points of suggestivity which prompted D.H. Lawrence to say about Hardy that:

His feeling, his instinct, his understanding is ....... apart from his metaphysic, very great and deep, deeper than that, perhaps of any other English novelist. Putting aside his metaphysic, which must always obtrude when he thinks of people, and turning to the earth to landscape, then he is true to himself.

Lawrence, like his predecessor, had come from a quite ordinary family and begun his career by writing about a class and a region (in his case, Nottinghamshire and its miners) which had scarcely been mentioned in literature before. Lawrence's public was only a few degrees more emancipated than that which had abused Hardy; his work too was widely misunderstood and his novels went as far as being banned entirely. He must therefore have had personal reasons for sympathising with what Hardy wrote in 'Candour in English Fiction'. It is fascinating, further, to see how he virtually rewrote the plot of Jude in Lawrention terms and how it ended up as something

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completely different.

Lawrence points out that the most crucial crisis in the Wessex Novels is "the struggle into love and the struggle with love . . . . meaning the love of a man for a woman and of a woman for a man." The people of Wessex writes D.H. LAWRENCE:

are always bursting suddenly out of bud and taking a wild flight into flower always shoot-ing suddenly out of a tight convention a tight hide-bound cabbage start into some-thing quite madly personal . . . . it is all explosive . . . . . This is the tragedy of Hardy. This is the theme of novel after novel : remain quite with the convention and you are good, safe and happy, in the long run, though you never have the vivid pang of sympathy on your side; or on the other hand be passionate, individual, wilful, you will find the security of the convention a walled prison, you will escape and you will die, either of your own lack of strength to bear the isolation and the exposure, or by direct revenge from the community or both. 65

The central matter in these novels therefore is a conflict between figures of convention and figures of rebellion. So the tragedy in The Return is the waste of Eustacia, through the 'subtle cowardice' and ultimate conventionality of Clym, who has original force of life but chooses "to improve mankind rather than to struggle at the quick of himself into being" and is consequently reduced to half-blindness and half-life, while Thomasin

66 Ibid., p.410.
and Venn get the prize within the walls. But the second contention, which Lawrence urges more cogently than any other critic, is that Egdon Heath is the great power in the book:

This is a constant revelation in Hardy's novels: that there exists a great background, vital and vivid, which matters more than the people who move upon it ... The vast, unexplored morality of life itself what we call the immorality of nature, surrounds us in its eternal incomprehensibility and in its midst goes on the little human morality play.

Hardy shares this quality with the great writers, Shakespeare, Sophocles, Tolstoy. But, finally, Hardy and Tolstoy are smaller because their tragedy lies not in the transgression of nature, but merely that of society, which for Lawrence is not necessarily tragic.

Lawrence's dialogue with Hardy finally brought about the revolutionary change, which in his own fiction, he had struggled so hard to achieve. By exploring Hardy's people he had found a language in which to articulate his own vision. The Study showed him how to begin, how to divide The Rainbow into its three 'testaments', and where to end in near-tragedy, but with a vision of reconciliation to be achieved in the second novel. It also awakened images which his novelist's imagination could explore in terms of human relationship, with marvellous sensitivity.

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and insight. But above all, his experience of Hardy must have been the greatest possible authentication and encouragement of his own vision. As he pondered more deeply he had come to see how, as Hardy's fiction developed, the great background had become internalized in the conflict of universal forces within the characters themselves. 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 room to move beyond him and, above all, to move beyond his passimism. What Tess and Jude, began, The Rainbow could complete.

In an account entitled "The Novels of Thomas Hardy" which appeared in The Common Reader, Second Series (1932) Virginia Woolf paid glowing tributes to Hardy. In Far From the Madding Crowd, he finds a fusion of subject and method, form and content, which is a main point in her criticism. Hardy's poetry and tragic vision, which are the main qualities of his novels, relate him to the modern sensibility. With the earnestness of a true admirer Woolf writes:

In short, nobody can deny Hardy's power - the true novelist's power - to make us believe that his characters are fellow-beings driven by their passions and idiosyncracies while they have - and this is the poet's gift - some thing symbolical about them which is common to us all.

Her applause of Hardy reaches its climax when she calls him "the greatest tragic writer among the English novelists." She was always impressed with the novelist who proved himself a minute and skilled observer of nature. Nature for Hardy was more than a backdrop. He seems to be saying how people can develop a deeply intuitive relationship with their surroundings which can give meaning and purpose to their lives. E.M. Forster, the artist turned critic was another writer who contributed very positively to the development of Hardy criticism. In *Aspects of the Novel* (1927), Forster found a dichotomy between the poet and novelist in Hardy. Forster admired Hardy because he is "essentially a poet, who conceives of his novels from an enormous height." Hardy arranges events with emphasis on causality and the characters are required to acquiesce in the requirements of the plot. There is ceaseless emphasis on fate. "The fate above us, not the fate working through us - that is what is eminent and memorable in Wessex novels." But what makes Hardy admirable is that the machine that works in his novels "never catches humanity in its teeth." It is true that the characters are drained of their vitality; they are required to contribute much to the plot. Hardy's flaw lies in the fact that "he has emphasized casualty more strongly than his medium permits." But he is great

71 Ibid., p.93.
72 Ibid., p.93.
because there is an element of mystery in his novels. Inspite of the cause and effect chain which connects the characters to the plot "there is some vital problem that has not been answered or even posed ...". Here Forster makes a comparison between Meredith and Hardy in their construction of plots. Meredith was a great plot maker and he knew where it could stand, but Forster prefers Hardy to Meredith, nevertheless because the work of Thomas Hardy is my home and that of Meredith cannot be.  

Despite their awareness of Hardy's greatness and all let the scathing attacks of Henry James, T.S. Eliot, and F.R. Leavis go unchallenged. Forster stood up on behalf of Lawrence, but about Hardy he remained relatively unprovoked Virginia Woolf, to whom an acknowledgement of Hardy's greatness "was true but sounded wrong", was cryptically eloquent. The propaganda against Hardy's novels was the result of an unexplainable treachery of Hardy's famous friends and admirers.  

However, whatever might have been the early approach to the Wessex Novels the final outcome was that each of the early studies kept up the critical concern with Hardy. They led to the awareness to establish another background to Hardy's work, agricultural rather than intellectual the need to see the convergence of traditional and modern

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74 Ibid., p.94.
as equally strong impulses in a fruitful entanglement. The weight of the past looms large in Hardy's experience, and so too does the weariness of the modern world as he begins to glimpse it.

It is no wonder that later Hardy critics began to recognise how much he had to say to the modern world. He was and is beginning to be seen less and less as a traditional Victorian novelist and more as a pioneer of a new fictional sensibility. His affinities with twentieth century novelists are beginning to be examined.

With the 1940 Hardy centennial number of The Southern Review came fresh and serious explorations of the making and meaning of Hardy's fiction by several highly intelligent and honest critics. These critics were no longer limited by preconceptions about fatalism and pessimism, for instance - they no longer condemned books that were once opposed by nearly all reviewers and critics at first. They realised that the meaning and interest of a novel lay in what the novel says, not in what it was intended to say. There were concerned with what the novelist did, not with deciding whether he did what he set out to do. The critical consensus was that whatever he is never trivial or debasing. Differences of opinion must naturally be held of Hardy as a critic of life; but as an artist - as a painter of certain concrete aspects of that life, he is among the greatest in English Literature. It was left to later critics to acknowledge
and reevaluate Hardy's greatness - of "a man who knows, who has seen and felt."

A fitting conclusion to a close of this phase of critical development in Hardy's fiction is what Havelock Ellis said about the novelist:

Hardy was without training as a literary artist: it is genius that carries him through. 75

75 Quoted by Albert J. Guerand: Thomas Hardy: A New Directions Paperbook, p.192.