The five great novels have a common pattern. Lionel Johnson first suggested it and illuminated by commentary. Hardy presents his conception through the play of life in a tract of the countryside. His protagonists are strong-natured countrymen, disciplined by the necessities of agricultural life. He brings into relation with them men and women from outside the rural world better educated superior in status, yet inferior in human worth. The contact occasions a sense of invasion, of disturbance. The story unfolds slowly and the theme of urban invasion declare itself more clearly as the presence of the country its labour and its past, make themselves felt. Then the story assumes some form of dramatic conflict strong and unsubtle and the invasion wreaks its havoc. Human relations and human persons are represented less for their own sakes than for the clearer focussing of the invasion and the havoc. A period of ominous waiting may follow. What the situation means becomes more evident: it is a clash between agricultural and urban modes of life. From that point the story moves to its conclusion.

This statement is taken from Douglas Brown’s significant study of Hardy first published in 1954. Together with this critic there are those who may be termed thematic critics whose purpose was to relate Hardy’s novels to the great events which were transforming English rural society during his life. Among the critics who placed Hardy’s novels in a historical context we have Raymund Williams, Irving Howe, Arnold Kettle, and Philip Larkin to mention a few.

Such critics saw the central theme of Hardy's novels as "the tension between the old rural world and the new urban one." Brown and Kettle are the two best critics of this period because they relate Hardy to the society he lived in instead of studying him in isolation as most critics do.

The standard image of Hardy which became established now saw him as the novelist of a vanishing way of life, with a nostalgic yearning for old-fashioned rural simplicity and a deep hostility to the disrupting forces of urbanism, industrialism, even education. Rural society up to about 1870 is seen as essentially good in Hardy in this view.

However, a few critics in the fifties and sixties questioned this view, for example John Holloway, Tony Tanner Dorothy Vanghent, J.C. Maxwell to mention a few. They did not see the novels as "just a growing preoccupation with the rural problem nor even a growing sense that an earlier way of life was inevitably vanishing." They offered some brilliant analyses of the pattern of imagery and symbol in the novels as constituting their essential core of meaning, their reality. These critics strongly reacted against the thematic approach, they counter-balanced this approach

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and looked into Hardy's novels as basically conveying meaning through a play of symbol and word. They saw the movement and organism of Hardy's novels as poetical and imaginative expressed in metaphorical terms.

This rivalry between the thematic and metaphorical approaches which was so evident in Hardy criticism in the fiftys and sixtys will form the major theme of my study in this chapter. It is a story of reaction by the Second group of critics to the historicism of the first group.

Richard Jefferies, a remarkable and unjustly neglected writer has often been compared with Hardy as a novelist who was a great observer of country life. The essays Jefferies wrote in the early eighteen seventies gave a clear picture of his growing dissatisfaction with the conditions of village life. He made several suggestions in these early essays for improving things. In 1888 appeared his most solid work to date, "Hodge and his Masters." 'Hodge' was the popular name for the whole body of agricultural labourers in England. It was Hardy who criticised this concept - 'the pitiable dummy known as Hodge' - because he felt that it lumped together many thousands of human beings who were actually very different. In his later essays he became more and more radical and his conception of history revealed by these essays, is quite complex and shows how completely he had changed in the long years of struggle
and suffering since he wrote the Coate letters to 'The Times':

The History of the last hundred years not the mere base chronicle of the movements of kings and queens of armies, but the cause of the heavings and throbings of the nations, has been written in blood by the workman's tool. The future growing as inevitably out of the present as the tree from the acorn, will be shaped by the voices sounding from the bench, the mine and the plough.

It was Douglas Brown's 'Thomas Hardy' published in 1954 which called attention in a major way to the traditionalist basis of Hardy's novels. It appeared to Brown that it was necessary to establish an agricultural rather than intellectual background to Hardy's works.

Brown in his brief biographical sketch speaks of Hardy's formative years as happy ones. "He combined, he would say later, in the twenty-four hours of a day, "the professional life, the scholar's life, and the rustic life."

Brown saw the central theme of Hardy's novels as a clash between the old rural world and the new urban one. This pattern reveals Hardy's dismay at the predicament of the agricultural community in the south of England during the last part of the nineteenth century and at the precarious hold of the agricultural way of life. This situation forms the substance of Hardy's important fiction and illustrates

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4 Douglas Brown: Thomas Hardy, p.3.  
5 Ibid., p.3.
his response to history. The twenty-five years of rural collapse and dismay, says Brown, were the years of the composition of his novels. The details of each work refer directly or by implication to the contemporary environment, and the story of each makes imaginative comment upon the contemporary catastrophe.

Brown insists that Hardy is in no way "a philosophical novelist, he disclaimed the pretension." He argues that Hardy's narrative art "takes both its material and its vitality from the agricultural, rather than from the philosophical context."

In Brown's treatment of the novels he says "Not only 'Tess' and 'Jude' but each of the great Wessex novels treats in imaginative form of the defeat of our peasantry and the collapse of our agriculture." The causes for the collapse concern us little, here. But Brown was deeply concerned with the human consequences and so under two headings emerged Hardy's major themes according to him.

The tragedy of the exodus of the agricultural workers from the villages and the countryside, and what the tragedy represents, forms one of Hardy's continual themes. Secondly, behind the exodus, the desertion of the countryside and the decline of husbandry, we should perceive a more fundamental issue.

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It was Richard Haggard who suggested a modest solution to the problem of the progressive deterioration of the race: "England's greatest safeguard lies in the recreation of a yeomen class rooted in the soil and supported by the soil."\textsuperscript{10}

Brown therefore sees Hardy's narrative impulse as positively nostalgic. One can detect a disturbed and uneasy memory working like a catalyst upon the substance of the past, and therefore the country natures Hardy drew so memorably - Oak's, Herchard's, Marty South's - impinge upon the reader's consciousness from time to time with a certain urgency. They are creations, says Brown, who answered to a deep need in their creator for reassurance for solidarity with a more secure, more limited, more fortifying past. They are personalities mentioned "by the traditional agricultural society. There is a blend of nostalgia and imaginative vision."\textsuperscript{11} Through Oak, Winterbourne, Henchard and Tess, Hardy seeks to express his understanding of the potential value of agricultural life and to celebrate the naturalness of men and women engaged in the skills and necessities of agriculture.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.,
In dealing with Hardy's first important novel *Under the Greenwood Tree*, Brown states that "productive agricultural life provides the essential material." Hardy originally meant to call it ('more appropriately', he said in the 1912 preface) 'The Mellstock Quire' instead of the romantic title he gave it later. It is as much the choir's story as 'the attractive tale of Fancy and her three lovers'. The old, stable order is passing from agricultural life: this is the impression made so vivid by the fate of the choir. The daily labour and the crafts and the music-making of these men and women are bound up with their traditional beliefs and customs. When the urban invader, Maybold, dismisses the choir, they are helpless and inarticulate before him. Says Brown, "for a moment or two the scene stirs the depths. Hardy has contrived a felicitous image for his feeling, and he develops it reticently." The old order passes and against the tale of Fancy and her three lovers. In her choice between Maybold and Dick, Hardy nowhere elaborates what is at stake while the girl delays. The whole narrative folds gently into an incident rich with metaphorical suggestion: the moment of hesitation, during the wedding festivities, between

13 Ibid.,
the old and the new fashion of bridal walk. The old is chosen. A similar suggestion hovers about the tree which presides over the opening and closing scenes. The latter standing for continuity, for countless generations of animals and birds. With all this one thing is suggested says Brown "that although the old, stable order is passing, the sounds for restoration may still be tapped. The loss, the dismay, is not yet tragic, and the deliberate framing of the tale to suggest hope balances the insistence upon dying traditions."\textsuperscript{14}

Once again in \textit{Far From the Madding Crowd}, Brown praises Hardy's "grasp of village psychology", and illuminate the limits within which his narrative art functions most happily. Brown sees Hardy's skill as conventional. The account uses and blends the conventions both of the ballad and the Victorian novel. Bathsheba, he says dominates the novel, not as a human personality created and explored with the searching art of the classical novelist, but as someone "present to a balladist's imagination, confidently taken for granted as what she seems to be, recognized by the gesture of the hand, the inflection of the voice; even the gradual transformation of her nature under the impress of suffering reveals itself

in dramatic strokes."\(^{15}\)

The agricultural context controls the force of the tale. The choral interludes of the fields and the malthouse, of calves and lambs, the seasons of the fair, of the harvest, the sheepwashing, the grinding, the shearing, the hiving all depict. Hardy's sense of the facts of village life. These in turn point out the wider implications of the agricultural skills and traditions in the moment of the precipitate decline of the agricultural society.

Brown sees in the novel one essential factor and that is whatever be the forces of antagonism, the thatching and the binding, the reaping and the stacking, go on. The old values persist, Oak embodies that persistence. Oak becomes the strongest, clearest image for the steadfastness that, in his own person, he continually represents through the novel by his role in agricultural life."\(^{16}\)

Douglas Brown is perhaps wrong in seeing Troy as a destructive urban figure invading a peaceful agricultural community. for one thing he is not the only destructive

\(^{15}\)Douglas Brown: Op.cit., p.49

\(^{16}\)Ibid.,
force in the community. Boldwood is in many ways equally negative. Troy's links are not so much with cities - he has grown up in Casterbridge as with the army and the aristocracy. He is an earl's illegitimate son, in many ways a preliminary sketch for Alec d'Urverville and his treatment of Fanny is much the same as Alec's of Tess. Moreover, he represents none of the qualities of education and modernisation which Brown associates with urban influence. But nevertheless, Troy is one of the destructive forces which shatter the peace of the community. The Return of the Native, Brown sees Egdon Heath performing a constructive function. The Heath it appears nourishes the very vitality and stability it would threaten to destroy; and the vitality and the stability together penetrate the interchange of voices from which the tale emerges.

Venn, Brown says, is a character deeply loved by Hardy and connected with the intimacies and the routines of agricultural life. Hardy represents him with detached accuracy as a particular practicioner of a particular trade. Hardy is emphasising the positive values of a disappearing way of life.
He was one of a class rapidly becoming extinct in Wessex, filling at present in the rural world the place which, during the last century the dodo occupied in the world of animals. He is a curious, interesting, and nearly perished link between obsolete forms of life and those which generally prevail.

Clym according to Brown is a key figure. He is the most direct representative of the novelist's strongest impulse in its simplest form: 'the return from town to country, and the rejection of urban life.' The wholeheartedness of the native's return home is clear. Clym had been so inwoven with the heath in his boyhood. Finally, his readjustment includes a period of working on the heath as a furze-cutter, which Douglas Brown sees as 'the end of Clym's pilgrimate.'

Clym's blindness, which is never completely cured, is an emblem of his spiritual condition and of the images of light and darkness which keep recurring throughout the book. 'you are blinded, Clym,' his mother tells him when he falls in love with Eustacia, the representative of darkness who nearly frustrates his best aims. Although he is the most enlightened character in the novel, he is intellectually blind in some respects right to the

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18 Ibid., p.59.
19 Ibid., p.61.
end. Yet ultimately Clym is seen as the noblest character in the book and as a genuine popular teacher, speaking 'in simple language' about 'the opinions and actions common to all good men.' Brown calls this teaching 'the traditional morality of Egdon.'

There are other instances of the deeply rooted communal life expressed in the bon-fire ritual and the wedding rejoicings, in the mumming, and the fair, and the effigy. And it is this life, says Brown, that will persist, 'through whatever catastrophe, numbed, but strong.'

The mayor of Casterbridge says Brown acknowledges the bitter situation of agriculture in contemporary England. Casterbridge has often been somewhat idealised, which is all the easier to do as it is in many ways only a glorified village — 'the pole, focus, or nerve centre of the surrounding country life.' According to Brown:

Casterbridge is an image of Dorchester, the town of Hardy's youth, and his presentation of it derives from local recollection, a turning from the precarious present back to a stable past.

21 Ibid., p.63.
22 Ibid., p.64.
Hardy's initial theme as depicted in The Mayor and as explained by Brown "is the tale of the struggle between the native countryman and the alien invader, of the defeat of dull courage and traditional attitudes by insight, craft, and the vicissitudes of nature, and of the persistence through that defeat of some deep layer of vitality in the country protagonist."[^23]

Casterbridge and its folk and the feeling for the community's life come first. The market town of the past has its origin in the needs of agriculture. 'Casterbridge was the complement of the rural life around; not its urban opposite.'[^24] The common folk of Casterbridge make another great contribution. Men going about their daily affairs, the flurry, the chatter, the sights and sounds will be remembered. The vigour and colloquial strength of this little community of coices becomes personal in the speech of figures such as Mrs. Cuxsom, Abel Whittle, and the furmity woman, and more personal still in Henchard himself.

In The Woodlanders "the tale tells of the choice between agricultural life and the lure of the town, the lure of 'rising in the world', confronting a country

[^24]: Ibid., p.65.
girl; and the outcome of the story embodies imaginatively the implications of the choice made."^25

Brown describes Hardy's treatment of earlier Novels of Character and Environment as dealing extensively with past times. But The woodlanders and Tess have for their setting "the years of the contemporary agricultural tragedy."^26 The simplicity and force of its conception has given Tess "a legendary quality." The tragedy described is the tragedy of a proud community baffled and defeated by processes beyond its understanding or control. The resonance of the tale, says Brown, "makes itself felt over and over again."^27 The superb opening, the death of Prince the lovely elegiac scene of the harvesting, the sequence in the dairy farm, the scene of the sleep-walking, the episodes of agricultural life at Flintcomb Ash, are powerful and original imaginative inventions.

The opening of Tess which is entirely his own inventions is "at once substantial with social and historical perceptions, and quick with metaphorical life."^28 There is the legendary quality in the May Dance. It evokes country mirth springing from traditional ways and reliance upon cultural processes. The three ominous

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^26 Ibid., 89.
^27 Ibid., p.90.
^28 Ibid., 91.
visitors, the appearance of the spurious country squire, the masquerader, the economic intruder are all images destroying the basis of agricultural security. Alongside this image Brown writes:

There unfolds that of the old father's discovery of his ancient but unavailing ancestry: a disclosure of the community's past which helps to define what Tess represents in the ensuing tale, at the same time as it sharpens the intrusive and invading quality in Alec d'Urberville.\(^{29}\)

Brown sees that the novel centres on the significance of Tess's d'Urbervilles blood. It is assumed that her tragedy consists in her family's loss of its ancestral inheritance: that her being a real d'Urberville and Alec a fake one symbolises the ruin and betrayal of the old aristocracy by a new urban class, bent on exploiting the land. Irving Howe, a critic belonging to this era holds a similar view for he sees a deep significance in Alec's unauthorised use of the d'Urberville name.

Finally, Brown sees the erasure of long local life by the contemporary migrants "as a grave social and spiritual loss."\(^{30}\)

Hardy's last and most abused novel is even today, one of the most undervalued. The contemporary critics

\(^{30}\)Ibid., p.97.
hated it. Douglas Brown speaks of its failure of total imaginative organisation and sums up:

Jude the Obscure has deflected attention away from Hardy's most distinguished and personal contribution to the English novel and towards a small part of his achievement . . . that part, however serious is less distinguished, and it cannot be comparison with the achievements of his greatest contemporaries.

It seems a failure to Brown because it is not, like the earlier novels, based on rural society but begins with the flight from it.

This is the way in which Brown sees the central theme of Hardy's novels as 'the tension between the old rural world and the new urban one.' Merryn Williams in Thomas Hardy and Rural England (1972) challenged this view. But, Douglas Brown convincingly sees Hardy as a novelist of a vanishing way of life, with a nostalgic yearning for old fashioned rural simplicity and a deep hostility to the disruptive forces of urbanism. So the novels are placed in a given historical context. Douglas Brown calls this "the contemporary agricultural tragedy," and there are other critics who betray a romantic view of the old rural England. Irving Howe establishes this most clearly:

The world of Thomas Hardy's youth . . . was another world, an earlier England. It was rural, traditional, fixed in old country ways, rituals and speech. England was then deep into the convulsive transformations of the Industrial Revolution, the reform movement known as Chartism was stirring many people and frightening many more; but in the Dorset countryside .... one might almost have supposed that human nature was changeless, unaffected by history of technology, flowing through the centuries like stately procession of verities and recurrences.

It is true, changes did come of course - the first railroad, new machines, new methods, new men would be reaching into the countryside. The slow incursion of such novelties and threats forms a major theme in Hardy's fiction. It was necessary for a man who was steeped in country tradition to "recall the earlier days as a time of charm, peace and social unity." 33 He remembers and releases his nostalgia of this historical change with pathos and unrivalled knowledge. For:

Growing older into his late adolescence he found himself gradually moving away from that culture: not at all what we might today call "alienated" but aware that he was marked by some personal social differences. 34

It was the world of his youth that Hardy always

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33 Ibid., p.2
34 Ibid., p.3
wanted to be with. Irving Howe explains it thus "Hardy's most gratifying memories, vividly preserved into old age, were of the customs, work and pleasures of this country world." 35

Irving Howe traces the source of that darkness of spirit, that near sense of cosmic desolation that encloses Hardy's work. His two strongest influences - his formative years in Dorset in an atmosphere of traditional rural life as yet untouched by reform and modernism, and the pressures of the philosophical skepticism of the nineteenth century - converge in Hardy's writing, and in Professor Howe's view, it is this strange union that partly explains his appeal to the modern reader.

Wessex as Professor Howe explains:

Represented for him the seemliness of an ordered existence, of all that is natural rooted and tried .... a traditionalist writer whose deepest affinities are with farmlands, animals, rocks, hills and simple people who live among them ..... In the world of Wessex there survives the memory of a life in which nature and society are at peace. A sense of the past, like a heavy aroma lingers over this land — since stretches out as a vast gray corridor into the beyond the historical past ..... The past lives on, a repository of history but also something else, something not always to be grasped through the categories

of history. For here in Wessex long stretches of the past can be seen as embodying the sameness and continuity, the unifying rhythms, of a human existence that extends beneath or beyond the agitation of the historical processes.  

In short, as Professor Howe puts it, Hardy's novels are autonomous (symbolical), not historical, recalling what is gone. so the past lives on as a repository of history, but also something else, something not always to be grasped through the categories of history. "For Hardy, what is essential in life is that which is repeated." 37 So memory is the most important faculty in his fiction, "past never seems pasting." He makes people of the past more immediate than those of the present.

Hardy was a reluctant witness to the gradual dissolution of "dear delightful Wessex" under the assaults of commerce and industrialism. It is no wonder says Howe:

The more Hardy became aware of the thrust of social change, the more he felt a need to turn back to those memories of the past which could yield him a fund of stories, legends, superstitions, folk sayings and fragments of wisdom. 38

It is in Jude the Obscure that Hardy leaves behind

37Ibid., p.18.
38Ibid., p.19.
the rural world, in a desperate realization that he has lost his "homeland" to the machine, commerce and functional reality. The loss is a deep one "for it is a loss that represents radical estrangement, the death of a culture." 39

It is no wonder the Wessex novels take the form not of historical fiction, but of fiction as research into the history of rural culture — not to be seen in a given historical context. What Hardy according to Professor Howe, gained was:

A fictional world sharply contoured and superbly known, so that the very setting of his novels and poems seems a force making for dramatic control and personality ....... the fate of Wessex — as it came welling up in memory ....... Wessex was his fixed principle .... the constant about which he could maneuver the modernist variables of rebellion and doubt — until by *Jude the Obscure*, Wessex too began to crumble in his imagination and the further writing of fiction became, for him, impossible.

Perhaps, it was Irving Howe who gave a fresh impetus to future approaches to Hardy. For later critics were more aware of the fact that nineteenth century rural literature, therefore is not a pastoral survival, but a response to

a real situation. 'It is the product of perceived experience.'

Hardy knew the torments of doubt, the pain of discovering "that no idea can ever satisfy the desires that have given birth, the whole exhausting and draining effort of the intellectual life." Such references, for example "the ache of modernism" (reference to Clym Yeobright's and Jee Fawley's troubles), "the chronic melancholy which is taking hold of the civilised races with the decline of belief in a beneficent power," and in _Jude the Obscure_ that of the hero that a new breed of boys "unknown to the last generation" is springing up: "They seem to see all (of life's) terrors before they are old enough to resist them .... It is the beginning of the universal wish not to live." Such insights led to a development of a philosophic structure which was far more striking than Hardy's formal ideas. This displays, says Professor Howe, "the presence of a writer who brings to bear upon his work an enormous reserve of experience and reflection."

Irving Howe sees Hardy's writing as a convergence of the "traditional and modern." This according to him is the most distinguishing trait of Hardy's fiction.

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41 Irving Howe: _Op.cit._, p.60
42 Ibid., p.30.
43 Ibid., p.61.
Professor Howe states:

The weight of the past looms large in Hardy's experience, and so too does the uncertainty of the modern world as he begins to glimpse it.

As a result Hardy continues to live for he achieves a rare inclusiveness:

The natural together with the historical, the timeless with the time-bound, the inescapable limitations of all existence with the particular troubles of the moment.

Referring to Under the Greenwood Tree Professor Howe states:

Simply as a picture of a fading style of life, Hardy's book is superior to both: a masterpiece in miniature. This is Hardy in his happiest, if not greatest voice, the Hardy who writes with complete assurance about people and places he knows completely; and who writes unburdened by the obligation to be prophetic secrets or depths of character — not very concerned with the secrets or depths of anything — he is content to record the appearances of the natural world and the surfaces of human foible.

Irving Howe declares Far from the Madding Crowd

46 Ibid., p.46.
as being one of the novels which depicts the writers potentiality indicating how lively and various this book is. *Far From the Madding Crowd* displays Hardy's great gift as a writer of fiction — "his gift for those compressed incidents or miniature dramas, sometimes spoken and sometimes mere dumb show, which in a page or two illuminate whole stretches of experience." Later, Hardy would speak of these as "moment of vision."

Virginia Woolf was the only other critic along with Irving Howe who praised the book for what it really is, a spectacle of country life brimming with a special energy and charm. Irving Home states that there is barely visible in the pages (of the novel) "the novelist of lassitude and despair" that one encounters in the later books.

The author here is completely absorbed with a flourishing rural community which is vigorous, rooted and productive. The maturity of the central characters is achieved through learning to live with the learning to modify the accepted social norms.

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The Return of the Native is the first book says Howe, "in which Hardy reaches towards grandiose "literary" effects. Apart from the novelist serving as chronicler of Wessex, Hardy now brings to bear upon his little world an array of intellectual and historical pressures that were not to be seen in his earlier books. All that was stable and consolidated in the country is "shaken by voices of discontent, the bonds of social solidarity begin to loosen, the characters are overcome by feelings of boredom and estrangement and a new kind of sexuality, neurotically wilful but also perversely enticing, makes its appearance." At no time says Howe does Hardy appear as a moralist. He watches over the men and women of Wessex with an almost maternal sympathy watching the endless alternation of effort and collapse, desire and denial, rebellion and defeat. The impulse to moral judgement is of no consequence to Hardy and matters very little. What matters in Hardy's world says Howe is "the large and recurrent rhythms of life, the rhythms of happiness and suffering" and then the fusion with the smaller incidents into which there are dramatically compressed. When Eustacia's hand quivered on tying her bonnet as the result of a quarrel with Clym, no amount of

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effort could tie the strings but Clym came to her rescue and said, "Let me tie them." In that one fragment, as it displays the force of habit in marriage at the very moment of its dissolution, Hardy caught the essence of human pain. Says Howe: "Only a great novelist can fully apprehend such a moment, and only a great novelist can make it seem emblematic of our life." 49

Irving Howe complements Hardy for his masterly portrayal of women. In dealing with them he was seldom inclined to plunge into the analytic depths which mark the treatment of feminine character in George Eliot's later novels. Throughout Hardy's fiction says Professor Howe "there is a curious power of sexual insinuation, almost as if he were not locked into the limits of masculine perception but could shuttle between, or for moments yoke together, the responses of the two sexes." 50 In the deepest level of his imagination, Hardy held to a vision of the feminine that was thoroughly traditional in celebrating "the maternal, the protective, the tender, the life-giving." Professor Howe states that Tess of the d'Urberville comes through with the most striking vitality for the book "stands

50 Ibid., p.109.
at the centre of Hardy's achievement." It is because here the novelist stakes everything of his sensuous apprehension of a young woman's life. She is a girl who is at once a simple milkmaid and an archetype of feminine strength.

According to Professor Howe, Tess is a warm-hearted and unpretentious country girl barely troubled by intellectual ambition. She represents something more deeply rooted in the substance of instinctual life. She is the typical sentative of the Victorian cult of chastity. She is an absolute victim of her circumstances when she falls. But through a dialectic of negation, Tess reaches a purity of spirit even as she fails to satisfy the standards of the world. In conclusion Howe states: "Tess is one of the greatest examples we have in English literature of how a writer can take hold of a cultural stereotype and through the sheer intensity of his affection, pave and purify it into something that is morally ennobling."  

Irving Howe sees in the criticisms of Douglas Brown and Arnold Kettle and to a certain extent in

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52 Ibid., p.110.
that of Dorothy Vanghent a "thematic overload". The first two critics, Brown with more subtly than Kettle, approached Tess in a purely social context in which she acts out her ordeal. She is a victim of social disintegration and the book was looked upon as a social fable - that is a narrative in which attention is steadily being directed to a scheme of social relations behind the foreground events. But Irving Howe believes that central to the book is the figure of Tess herself for he states that she is one of the greatest triumphs of civilization. "A natural girl," Howe expatiates on the centrality of the girl:

Tess is that rare creature in literature; goodness made interesting. She is human life stretched and racked yet forever springing back to renewal, and what must never be forgotten in thinking about her is that she is a pure woman.

From Far from the madding Crowd, or even earlier, to Jude the Obscure, we can see Hardy's interest in complex, tormented, maladjusted being often set alongside comparatively stable and uncomplicated characters. In his book on Hardy, Howe suggests that in The Return of the Native, "a new kind of sexuality neurotically wilful but also perversely exciting makes its appearance. 54

This vividly describes the quality of Eustacia's passions but it is not true to say that such passions appear here for the first time. It is there in Boldwood, and even in Miss Aldclyfee's brief Lesbian encounters in Desperate Remedies. In this respect, The Return of the Native is not a departure, but a continuation in the line of Hardy's development which was to culminate in Jude and Obscure. Howe continues: "a thick cloud - the cloud of modern, inherently problematic consciousness - falls across the horizon of Wessex." It is certainly true that Hardy sees Clym as "a modern problematic consciousness."

In his treatment of Jude the Obscure, Howe explains that even though the account has mostly to do with the difficulty of human beings living elbow to elbow and heart to heart; the difficulty of being unable to bear prolonged isolation or prolonged closeness; and the difficulty for thinking men of getting through the unspoken miseries of daily life, the book must be viewed in the context of a historical background.

Wessex had always been for Hardy a sufficient moral and emotional support. Jude was the representative

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55 Irving Howe: Thomas Hardy, p.58.
56 Ibid., p.136.
of those 'working men' who began to train their minds after the Industrial Revolution. He is as Howe states "a sort of rural cousin of the self-educated workers."\textsuperscript{56}

It pained Hardy that Wessex and all it stood for was slipping out of his fingers for no longer did it seem to provide him something equivalent to a moral absolute. It now kept at a distance those of his character trouble by unrest. The intellectual disturbance of modern life is what roused Jude to excitement. So as Professor Howe states:

Jude is Hardy's equivalent of the self-educated worker: the self-educated worker\textsuperscript{57} transplanted into the Wessex World.

In his depiction of Jude's predicament, Hardy was foreshadowing not merely one man's deprivation but the turmoil of an entire social group. Howe goes on to state that: "Jude's personal drama is woven from the materials of historical change, the transformation and uprooting of traditional English life."\textsuperscript{58}

The same holds true of Sue Bridehead. Professor Irving Howe views Sue as characteristic of a moment

\textsuperscript{57} Irving Howe: Op.cit. p.137.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., p.138.
in history. She is alive and is an intensely individualized figure because Hardy has placed her in a new historical situation. She is a woman who has changed radically from subordinate domesticity and Victorian repression Girl.

Between Jude and Sue, says Howe, there is a special closeness, and this too has been historically conditioned. Irving Howe believes that both are lost souls for they have no place in the world which they can cherish or from which they can retreat. The human character was being regarded as problematic, "open to far-reaching speculative inquiry, and perhaps beyond certain knowledge, that the character of someone like Sue Bridehead must be seen not as a coherent force realizing itself in self-consistent public action, but as an amorphous aid ill-charted arena in which irrational impulses conflict with one another, and that behind the interplay of events occupying the foreground of the novel there is a series of distorted psychic shadows which, with some wrenching, can be taken to provide the true 'action' of the book."\(^{59}\)

Hardy might have been thinking on these lines-his

new characters were persons who felt more estranged from society. Professor Howe explains, "Hardy comes at the end of one tradition . . . . but he also comes at the beginning of another tradition, that of the literary 'modernism' which would dominate the twentieth country." In personal background, novelistic technique choice of locale and characters Hardy remains mostly of the past; but in his distinctive sensibility, he is partly of the future.

Irving Howe sees Hardy as a man who "seemed like the very embodiment of traditional verities and styles." Professor Howe in his critical examination of Hardy sees both his formative years in Dorset in an atmosphere of traditional rural life, and the pressures of the philosophical skepticism of the Nineteenth Century converging in the Wessex Novels. Howe's study of Hardy is a strongly compassionate and knowledgeable reading of the novelist.

The next thematic critic was Arnold Kettle. He saw that Hardy at least did have a philosophy and that there was a basis for his pessimism — the pessimism of the Wessex peasant who sees his world and his values being destroyed.

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61 Ibid., p.190.
Arnold Kettle's assessment of Hardy came in an essay entitled: Thomas Hardy: Tess of the d'Urbervilles (1953). At the very outset of this study Kettle sees the central theme of Tess as "The destruction of the English peasantry."\(^{62}\)

Arnold Kettle reads Tess as a novel with a thesis. The thesis is that:

In the course of the nineteenth century the disintegration of the peasantry — a process which had its roots deep in the past — had reached its final and tragic stage. With the extension of capitalist farming the old yeoman class of small holders or peasants, with their traditions of independence and their own native culture, was bound to disappear. The developing forces of history were too strong for them and their way of life. And because that way of life had been proud and deep-rooted its destruction was necessarily painful and tragic. Tess is the story and they symbol of that destruction.\(^{63}\)

Throughout Tess there is an immediate and insistent emphasis on historical process so that Kettle says, "from the start the characters are not seen merely as individuals."\(^{64}\) Therefore, Arnold Kettle emphasises the fact that the novel is not the story of any personal tragedy but is "the expression of a generalized human situation in history."\(^{65}\) Tess's parents belong


\(^{63}\)Ibid., p.51.

\(^{64}\)Ibid., p.52.
to a class ranking above the farm-labourers, a set of people who owed a certain stability of aim and conduct have fallen on hard times. Their difficulty and hardship is made worse by the accident in which their horse is skilled. This very accident says Kettle "is a striking symbol of the struggles of the peasantry." The discovery by John Durbeyfield of his ancestry is not just an introductory comic scene. It states says Kettle "the basic theme of the novel - what the Durbeyfields have been and what they become." Such instances in Kettle's account like the "club walking" scene contrasted with the May Day dances of the past and early pagan rites are all given significance almost wholly in terms of history.

Great significance is given to the comparison between Tess and her mother. Joan Durbeyfield lives in the peasant folk-lore of the past, Tess has been to a National School, says Hardy "When they were together the Jacobean and the Victorian ages were juxtaposed." Another situation that is symbolic of the historical process at work in the sacrifice of Tess to d'Urberville.

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66 Ibid., p.51.
67 Ibid., p.52.
67 Ibid., p.52.
68 Ibid., p.52.
From the moment of her seduction by d'Urberville, Tess's story becomes a hopeless struggle, against overwhelming odds. Tess's cry when she sees the d'Urberville is "I thought we were all an old family; but this is all new." It carries a world of irony. Her going over to the d'Urberville's is symbolic. Says Arnold Kettle:

Tess prepared to become, since change she must a worker handed over by her mother to the life and the mercies of the ruling class.

Finally, the treatment she succumbs to at the hands of Angel Clare, turns out to be more cruel than that of d'Urberville the aggressor. Says Arnold Kettle, that the function of all these situations in the novel "is to stress the social nature of Tess's destiny and its typicality." Even after Angel has left her the social degradation of Tess continues. The threshing scene, for example, says Kettle, is "a symbol of the dehumanized relationships of the new capitalist forms."

The final blow to Tess's attempt to maintain her self-respect comes with the death of her father

70 Ibid., p.53.
71 Ibid., p.54.
72 Ibid., p.54.
and the consequent expulsion of the Durbeyfield family from their cottage. This is symbolic, for Hardy explains the significance of a life-holder losing his holders:

But as the long holdings fell in they were seldom again let to similar tenants and were mostly pulled down, if not absolutely required by the farmer for his lands... These families, who had formed the backbone of the village life in the past, who were the depositories of the village traditions, had to seek refuge in the large centres; the process humorously designated by statisticians as "the tendency of the rural population towards the large towns," being really the tendency of water to flow uphill where forced by machinery.

Further, the style of this novel catches Kettle's attention. He praises Hardy's "understanding, his deep instinctive comprehension of the fate of the Wessex peasants." But coupled with his profound instinctive "understanding" is the inclusion of his philosophic comment on life in general. This 'loading of the dice' with philosophy affects the book, in general for the worse. As a result says Kettle, Hardy's 'conscious philosophy', accounts for the "unduly long arm of coincidence and the inclusion of half-digested classical allusion's tend towards the psychological weaknesses." But Arnold Kettle concludes:

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74 Ibid., p.63-64.
75 Ibid., p.64.
From the social understanding emerges the strength of the novel, the superb revelation of the relation of men to nature, the haunting evocation of the Wessex landscape not as a blackcloth but as the living challenging material of human existence and the profoundly moving story of the peasant Tess.  

Arnold Kettle sees Tess emerging as a fine novel, a moral fable, the most moving expression in English literature - of the destruction of the peasant world.

Raymond William came forward with his assessment of the novelist in an essay, Thomas Hardy (1964), published in the *Critical Quarterly*. He saw Hardy as being an observer and chronicler of "landowners, tenat farmers, dealers, craftsmen and labourers." He was not writing for them, but about them, to a mainly metropolitan and unconnected literary public. Raymond Williams admits that in the period from George Eliiot to Hardy the English countryside underwent radical changes, but he seems most concerned with the economics of the change. William says:

The profound disturbances that Hardy records cannot then be seen in the sentimental terms of a pastoral: the contrast between country and town.

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The exposed and separated individuals, whom Hardy puts at the centre of his fiction, are only the most developed cases of a general exposure and separation. Yet they are never merely illustrations of this change in a way of life. Each has a dominant personal history, which in psychological terms bears a direct relation to the social character of the change.\(^7\)

William's thesis is rather lop-sided as pointed out by later Hardy critics. He ignores the special quality of Hardy's idiom and the meaning of his dramatic setting which symbolise Hardy's interest in the enduring structures of rural life. The Roman ruins and burrows, the pre-historic monuments in Hardy's landscape are symbolic of his sense of the contemporaneity of the past.

Philip Larkin in his essay: "Wanted: Good Hardy Critic (1966); has declared that though the principal post-Eliot poets (Auden, Betjeman, Dylan Thomas) have acknowledged Hardy's power, the century's principal critics have really shown little interest in him."\(^7\)

He declares Eliot to be hostile, Leavis patronising, Wilson, Empson, Blackmur, Trilling — none has been other than neglectful. Larkin adds:

And the roll-call on the other side - Lord David Cecil, Edmund Blunden, Lascelles Abercrombie, Webster, Guerard, Hawkins - does not on the whole have the penetration of intelligence and sensibility that would command confidence.

Philip Larkin has criticised a good deal of modern Hardy criticism because of its tendency to thrive on the difficult. Most often Larkin points out that the typical role of the modern critic "is to demonstrate that the author has said something other than he intended." 81

Larkin does not agree with Frank Morrell's argument that "the characteristic" trail present in Hardy's works in his "gaiety". But Larkin replies:

In my view it is suffering or sadness, and extended consideration of the centrality of suffering in Hardy's work should be the first duty of the true critic, for which the work is still waiting. 82

Larkin felt that Hardy was peculiarly well equipped to perceive the melancholy, the misfortunate, the frustrating, the failing elements of life. Therefore Larkin makes a suggestion to future critics that in their assessment of the novelist, they must seek first

81 Ibi., p. 174.
82 Ibid., p. 177.
of all the determine what element is perculiarly his. Further, which imaginative note he strikes most effe-
cctively.

It would follow that the presence of pain in Hardy's novel is a positive, not a negative quality - not the mecha-
nical working out of some pre-determined allegiance to permission or any other concept but the continual imaginative celebration of what is both the truest and the most important element in life, most important in the sense of most necessary to spiritual development.

Therefore, Philip Larkin calls for a better and more positive approach to Hardy and so the title "Wanted: Good Hardy Critic."

Quite contrary to the view held by Douglas Brown, Irwing Howe, Arnold Kettle and Philip Larkin we have another approach that helped in the progress of Hardy criticism. To this group belong John Holloway, Dorothy Van Ghent and Tony Tanner.

John Holloway the first of this group of critics came forward with his new approach to Hardy in a book entitled The Victorian Sage (1953). The book was part of the critic's attempt to analyze the philosophy and the rhetoric in the, works of six great Victorians

Carlyle, Disraeli, George Eliot, Newman, Arnold and Thomas Hardy. John Holloway's attempts to combine a study of ideas with a study of rhetorical devices, of the ways in which certain kinds of writers put across their view of life with a wholeness and an immediacy not available to the mere logician and philosopher.

The thematic critics tried to approach Hardy as one "who registered the impact upon rural England of a great historical change, which went to the very roots of life." Their significant emphasis was on the decline of British agriculture, which brought about a radical change in rural life. The majority of Hardy's novels were seen in the context of history. However, this view of the clash between the old rural world and the new urban one of the destruction of peasantry was soon questioned by critics like John Holloway, Dorothy Van Ghent and Tony Tanner who thought this was overplayed. John Holloway best introduces the new approach:

They (the novels) suggest not just a growing pre-occupation with the rural problem, nor even a growing sense that an earlier way of life was inevitably

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vanishing. A gathering realization that the earlier may did not possess the inner resources upon which to make a real right for its existence. The old order was not just a less powerful mode of life than the new, but ultimately helpless before it through inner defect.

John Holloway's discussion of the novels in another account entitled "Hardy's Major Fiction" (1959), virtually ignores Hardy's rich and intimate contact with the rural tradition and his profound dependence upon, and loyalty to, its characteristic virtues. Hardy's 'View of Life' has been expounded, re-interpreted, and attacked many times over, often so fully that a good deal has also been said of how plot, character, dialogue or setting enrich expression. In short, in the past says Holloway:

Hardy is familiar in two quite different roles as chronicling a ghastly world of planless and ironic Fate, and as recording all the interest and variety even charm of rustic life.

Holloway believes that something more important was yet to be said "about the quality of events, the feel of them, than about their course." 85

87 Ibid., p.245.
One of the first things that Holloway states "is that Hardy is both a philosopher and a moralist.\textsuperscript{88} 
"a good number of critics ignored this aspect because they felt that Hardy could never have deep and arnest convictions. They thought him "irreligious or scandalous".\textsuperscript{89}

Holloway agrees with Albert J. Guerand that much of what Hardy has written is lost through excessive interest in Hardy's philosophy. Several times Hardy deviced that he was advancing any general theory of things. Holloway agrees that balance should be struck between Hardy's desire not to be seen as a theorizing philosopher, and his clear conception of himself as somehow giving expression to a "philosophy" all the same. This can be done. Holloway concludes here that:

A Hardy novel is not an argument because it is an impression. Not idle nonsense but the work in all sincerity of purpose of one who though modestly 'a mere tale-teller' is nevertheless a thinker and a realist, and writes down how the things of the world strike him.\textsuperscript{90}

The essence of John Holloway's approach to Hardy rests on the assumption that his novels convey immense meaning through play, symbol and words. An understanding of the real significance of any novel will be understood

\textsuperscript{88}Ibid., p.245. 
\textsuperscript{89}Ibid., p.245. 
\textsuperscript{90}Quoted by John Holloway: The Victorian Sage, p.246.
in terms of its theme. Only within the frame work of this central desire can the real significance of the detail (incident imagery, metaphor, local contrast) be grasped at all.

Critics in the past noted that a major flow in Hardy's Novels was in the numerous unexpected or apparently unlikely incidents Holloway justified the inclusion of such incidents. At first he said "they may seem improbable," but these symbolic incidents not to seem vain and artificial. Hardy must in some way persuade his readers that his wider range of observation is not fanciful but justified seriously. Thus the cock-crow Tess leaves the dairy with her husband after the wedding although it is afternoon and a heron flying above Mrs. Yeobright just when she is exhausted and at the point of death symbolises the happy release from earth to heaven that she has began to long for. Holloway says:

Hardy's success or failure in these incidents can only be judged against his whole view of the quality of human life and the human environment. Our response to the detail must be coloured by our enduring sense of what is meditated all in all.

Further, John Holloway reports that in Hardy's novels nature is not a mere backdrop, a contrivance

\[91\text{Ibid.}, p.251.\]
we are invited to admire for its pictures queness. Nor is nature a mere cluster of inert objects, something "out there", to be apprehended as a pleasing but mute surface. In the best of Hardy's novels, John Holloway observes that nature emerges as:

An organic living whole, and its constituent parts, even the inanimate parts have a life and personality of their own. Secondly, it is unified on a great scale through both time and space. Thirdly, it is exceedingly complex and varied, full of unexpected details of many different kinds - details that are sometimes even quaint on bizarre. Fourthly, for all that, these heterogeneous things are integrated, however obscurely, into a system of rigid and undeviating law.

In short, Holloway stresses the "incessant animation of nature" and this makes Hardy's work quite distinctive. All the details given "accumulate imperceptibly; and little by little creates in the readers mind a sense of the system of Nature which no general description could conceivably evoke."^93

John Holloway describes Hardy's brilliant method of illustrating how nature is more animated. This he does by the use of "figurative language". It is common and varied and very important in Hardy's work. The use of metaphors says Holloway "do something to reinforce

\[92\text{Ibid.}, \ p.252.\]
\[93\text{Ibid.}, \ p.255.\]
the impression that Nature has a quasi-human life".\textsuperscript{94}
Most often Hardy's use of figurative language are all variations on one theme.

Hardy's similes and metaphors not only spread through space, but also vast in time. Egdon Heath and the landscape says Holloway "seems to belong to the world of the carboniferous period".\textsuperscript{95} The Earthwork of Casterbridge, Founways the ancient cross roads in Jude the Obscure, Bathsheba's medieval barn are all examples "of this age long permanence and continuity of things."\textsuperscript{96}

In terms of the individual, he is part of the landscape and is subject to the system and operations of nature. John Holloway did not fail to see "how Hardy suggests the intimacy of the link between man and his environment by apparently quite trivial details which rely for effect on synobolism."\textsuperscript{97} In Hardy's use of symbols and images, figurative language like the 'man-and-tree comparison (Grace and Fitzpiers), the man river comparison (Tess and Clare), and comparison with birds and animals. All have been given to reinforce one impression of Hardy's sense of man set in nature. More often

\textsuperscript{94}Ibid., p.257.  
\textsuperscript{95}Ibid., p.241.  
\textsuperscript{96}Ibid., p.261.  
\textsuperscript{97}Ibid., p.267.
such comparisons confirm that sense of the unexpected and bizarre. For Holloway says: "If Nature's life is half-human life for Hardy is half like that of birds and animals." 98

Holloway believes that the Mayor of Casterbridge is Hardy's best work. It is distinctive says Holloway because "it certainly creates and sustains Hardy's picture of nature, and especially man in nature." 99 Casterbridge further has all the qualities most prominent in Hardy's notion of Nature itself. Holloway says that, "it is easily the most comprehensive portrait of a human society in his work. The whole town is "rooted in a tract of countryside." 100 There is organic interfusion between the town and its surroundings Casterbridge was the complement of the rural life around; not its urban opposite. Ultimately, that is, says Holloway "Hardy shows us South Wessex in this novel as from the standpoint of human society, a single organism." 101

John Holloway sums up Hardy's trend of one novel after another as they portray the same scale of values.

98 Ibid., p.269.
99 Ibid., p.288.
100 Ibid., p.272.
101 Ibid., p.275.
To adapt one's life to one's traditional situation is good, to reroot ('deracine') oneself for material ends is bad, to do so for romantic passion or any abstract ideal is of anything worse.

Dorothy Vanghent was another outstanding critic of Hardy's novels. She treats Hardy's novels as a tissue of symbolic or imagistic constituents forming a pattern "deeper than lines of national cause and effect." But unlike so many other symbol hunting critics, she did not regard symbolism in Tess as mere literary expediency but saw it arising out of the cultural compulsions behind the tale. Dorothy Vanghent states:

It is Hardy's incorruptible feeling for the actual that allows his symbolism its amazingly blunt privileges and that at the same time subdues it to and absorbs it into the concrete circumstance of experience, real as touch.

Dorothy in her brilliant analysis of the pattern of imagery and symbol in the novel shares a certain uneasiness with her predecessors about the philosophical voice in on over the narrative. A voice which William R. Rutland described as "augumentative" theological dogmatic, philosophical or what you will, but which

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102 Ibid., p.286.
104 Ibid., p.8.
is not intrinsic to the picture" has repeatedly come under fire even in the most sympathetic criticism of the novels. Bits of 'Philosophical adhesive tape' have been contrasted with "the deeply animated vision of experience" in the narrative.

However, she devotes a major section of her account to Hardy's use of symbols. For example, Vanghent's account throws light on the metaphorical function of "the heath" in The Return and the Roman ruins round about the town of Casterbridge. In the first case she says:

The heath exists peripherally and gratuitously in relation to the action, on the one hand as the place where the action happens to happen and on the other as a metaphor - a metaphorical reflection of the loneliness of human motive of the inertia of unconscious life, of the mystery of the unfolding darkness; but it is not a dramatically causative agent and its particular quality is not "dramatically" necessary.

Dorothy Vanghent explains the more complicated metaphor of the Roman Ruins as being:

Works of man that have fallen into earth they

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105 Ibid., p.78.
106 Ibid., p.78.
107 Ibid., p.83.
speak mutely of the anonymity of human effort in historical as well as in geological time; their presence suggests also the classic pattern of the Mayor's tragedy the ancient repetitiveness of self-destruction; and they provide thus a kind of guarantee or confirming signature of the heroism of the doomed human enterprise.\textsuperscript{108}

When she comes to the earth in Tess she says that it is "primarily" not a metaphor but a real thing.\textsuperscript{109} It serves its purpose in being real and actual that is, as a factor of causation. Where it has to be trudged in order that a person may get from one place to another. It is always present in person as it were to "encounter, to harass them, detour them, seduce them, defeat them."\textsuperscript{110}

The dramatic motivation provided by natural earth is actual to every aspect of the look. It is all that is on the earth that is the setting and atmosphere is what provided Hardy with symbols. Obvious as other symbolisms are, their deep stress is maintained by Hardy's naturalistic premise. Everything around excited Hardy's eye and so the earth, says Dorothy Vanghent "exists here" as a Final Cause. The symbolic value of setting

\textsuperscript{108}Ibid., p.83.
\textsuperscript{109}Ibid., p.83.
\textsuperscript{110}Ibid., p.83.
are constituted in long part by the responses required of the characters themselves in their relation with the earth. Vanghent explains these symbols for she says:

The green vale of Blackmoor, fertile small, enclosed by hills lying under a blue haze - the vale of birth, the cradle of innocence. The wide misty setting of Talbothay's dairy, "oozing fatness and warm ferments", where the rush of juices could almost be heard below the hiss of fertilization - the sensual dream, the lost Paradise."

In a section of the account of *Tess*, Dorothy Vanghent devotes some time to Hardy's excessive reliance upon accidents and coincidences in the management of his narratives. Critics in the past had condemned Hardy for realising events conform to his "pessimistic" and "fatalistic" ideas. She agrees and does admit that it is not easy to say that there is a certain justification for his large use of the accidental. But then she says the purpose of art is to create order out of disorder by finding causation in it. Says says:-

In the accidentalism of Hardy's universe we can recognise the profound truth of the darkness in which life is a cast darkness both within the soul and without, only in-so-far as his accidentalism is not itself accidental nor yet an ideology - obsessed puppeteer's manipulation of character.

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and event which is to say, only in so far as the universe he creates has aesthetic integrity, the flesh and bones and organic development of a concrete world.

Dorothy Vanghent further explains that this is not always true of even the best of Hardy's novel; but it is generally true of the construction of *Tess* - a novel in which the accidental is perhaps more preponderant than in any other Hardy. Vanghent fully justifies accidents and coincidences in the narrative pattern of *Tess* but has "with very great cunning, reinforced the necessity of this particular kind of narrative pattern by giving to it the background of the folk instinctivism, folk fatalism, and folk magic."\(^{113}\) In turn we see the earth as mysterious, supernatural, "for it is only thus that earth can seem to have intentions."\(^{114}\) Thus though the strong is grounded deeply in a naturalistic premise, Dorothy Vanghent says, "Hardy's use of one of the commonest tools of novelists - symbolism - enforces a magical view of life."\(^{115}\)

In short, Vanghent's inner accounts has made a definite departure of looking at Hardy in the context of history symbolism, metaphor and imagery from the

\(^{115}\) *Ibid.*, p.89
major portion and its application in her treatment of Hardy's novels.

Coupled with Dorothy Vanghent and John Holloway we have Tony Tanner whose approach to Hardy bore affinities and was a stern departure from the thematic approach of Douglas Brown and Irwing Howe Tanner's account appeared as an essay "Colour and Movement in Hardy's Tess of the d'Urbervilles (1968) Tanner states, if we can think of a novelist as creating, among other things, a particular linguistic world by a series of selective intensifications of our shared vocabulary, then we can way that Hardy's world is usually easy to read."\textsuperscript{116} Tanner did not see Hardy's works solely in the context of a largely acquiltheral region steeped in history and slow to emerge from the other rhythm of rural life and labour into the modern industrial world. But he saw Hardy essentially as an artist who made great use of metaphor, imagery and symbolism.

Tanner cites examples from Tess and says "For an Artist as usually sensitive as Hardy, colour is of the first importance and significance, and there is one colour which literally catches the eye, and is meant

to catch it, throughout the book." This colour is red, the colour of the blood, which is associated with Tess from first to last. It dogs her, disturbs her, destroys her. She is full of it, she spills it, she loses it, says Tanner, "watching Tess's life we begin to see that her destiny is nothing more or less than the colour red." The colour red symbolises so many omens. Throughout the book and to the end Hardy continues to bring the colour red in front of our eyes.

Tanner has been one of the many lust critics in interpreting the different occasions when the colour time and again makes its appearance. He pointed highlighted the importance and significance of its presence. For example the time when Tess was splashed with prince's blood from face to skirt. First, he explained Prince's death as being a reminder that the family is destitute. But far more graphic, more disturbing and memorable, is the image of the sleeping girl on the darkened road, brutally awakened and desperately trying to stoulch a fatal puncture, trying to stop the blood which cannot be stopped and only being drenched in its powerful spurts says Tanner.

117 Ibid., p.220.
118 Ibid., p.220
It adumbrates the loss of her virginity for she, too will be brutally pierced on a darkened road far from home and once the blood of her innocence has been released she too, like the stoical prince will stay upright as long as she can until all blood being out, she will sink down suddenly in a heap. Comprised in that one imponderable scene we can see her whole life.

Throughout the novel and in the light of Tanner's interpretation of the text, he has suggested that the destiny of Tess comes to us as a cumulation of visible omens. Tanner sees the part played by the sun, altars and tombs, and finally walking and travelling in the life of Tess.

Hardy, even conscious of effects of light on various occasions displays his skill in the interplay of such phenomena. The dancing girls being warmed without by the sun symbolises says Tanner that "each of them had a private little sun, for her soul to bask in". The sun is their source of heat and life. Tess starts "sun-blessed". Tess further blooms into full female ripeness and Tanner through his symbol of the sun describes this growth. In another place as so after when Tess is getting involved with the superior power of man,

119 Ibid., pp.221-222.
120 Ibid., p.227.
the atmosphere is misty but this time it is cold mist, the sunless fogs which precede the dawn says Tanner:

In this particular light of a cool watery whiteness, Tess appears to Angel as a visionary essence of woman. Something ghostly, merely a soul at large. He calls her among other things, Artemis (who lived of course in perpetual celibacy). In this sunless light Tess appears to angel as unsexed, sexless, the sort of non-physical spiritualised essence he in his impotent spirituality wants. But Tess is inescapably flesh and blood. And when the sun does come up she reverts from divine essence to physical milkmaid her teeth, lips and eyes scientillate in the sunbeams, and she was again the dazzlingly fair dairymaid only ......

The account here is carried on by the dairyman who tells of his story of the seduction of a young girl; none of them but herself seemed to see the sorrow of it. Immediately we read, "the evening sun was now ugly to her, like a great inflamed wound in the sky" says Tanner counting on this: "Sir is a natural instinct which however can lead to lives of utter misery. The same sun that blesses can curse." ¹²²

To the convergence of redness and the sun is added the great final fact of the altar syas Tanner, it is an altar which Tess approaches almost gratefully, and on which she takes up her sacrificial position with

¹²¹Ibid., p.227.
¹²²Ibid., p.227.
exhausted relief." She is very much 'at home' on the altar of sacrifice Tanner adds, "fully to be human is partly to be heathen, as the figure of Tess on the altar makes clear." The term "heathen" is fully appropriate for it as for it originally meant someone who lived on the heath and as for a Pagan someone who lived in a remote village.

In another place angel takes Tess and lays her in an 'empty coffin' in the ruined choir', says Tanner in interpreting the action:

In Angel's life of suppressed spontaneity and the Negation of passioned feeling, this is the most significant thing that he does. He encoffins the sexual instinct then lies down beside Tess. The deepest inclinations of his psyche, his very being, have been revealed.

Later on when things are utterly desperate for Tess's family and they literally have no roofover their heads, they take refuge by the church in which the family vaults are kept. In their exhaustion they erect an old 'four-post bedstead' over the vaults Tanner at once sees again the intimate proximity of the bed and the grave. This sombre contiguity also adumbrates the ambiguous

123 Ibid., p.229.
125 Ibid., p.229.
relief which Tess later finds in here crinison four-post-bed which is also very close to death. On this occasion Tess enters the church and pauses by the tombs of the family and the door of her ancestral sepulchre. 'It is here when Alex worries and pensesures her at the very door of her ancestors' vault, she bends down and whispers that line of terrible simplicity - "Why am I on the wrong side of this door? adds Tanner, that Tess in her increasingly vulnerable, weary and helpless state, her only solution is:

To break through that "all delivering door" the door from life to death which opens on the only home left to her. This she does, by stabbing Alex and then taking her place on the ritual altar she has finally spilled all the blood that tormented her. She can then abandon the torments of animateness and seek out the lasting repose she has earned.\footnote{Ibid., p.231.}

Another, most searching of all Hardy's preoccupations - walking, travelling, movement of all kinds. Says Tanner, about Hardy, "somewhere at heart of his vision is a profound sense of what we may call the mystery of motion."\footnote{Ibid., p.231.} Such visualised passages of walking "says Tanner, carry the meaning of the novel. Tanner adds
through the novel, "we see Tess as a moving spot on a white vacinity. And this extreme pictorical reduction seems to me to be night at the heart of Hardy's vision." 128

Tanner goes on to explain what he means about Hardy's mystery of motion* and preoccupation with it. He says:

To be human is to be animated, is to move Hardy's novels are about 'the discontinuance of immobility'. All the confusions that make up his plots are the result of people who perceptibly give up their fixity. To say that this is the very condition of life itself is only to point to the elemental nature of Hardy's art. 129

And further in terms of the inert heath in The Return of the Native he says:

The tragic tension between human and earth, between motion and repose, between the organic drive away from the inorganic and, what turns out to be the same thing, the drive to return to the inorganic, provides Hardy with the radical structure of his finest work. The human struggle against - and temporary departure from - the level stillness of the heath, is part of that struggle between the vertical and horizontal, which is a crucial part of Hardy's vision. 130

Tess, as Tanner describes it is a tale of suffering.

128 Ibid., p.232.
129 Ibid., p.233.
130 Ibid., p.234.
Tanner adds, "We see Tess suffering, apparently doomed to suffer; destroyed by two men, by Society, by the sun outside her and the blood inside her." Hardy is a master at depicting this tragic vision. The vision is tragic because Hardy shows an ordering of existence in which nature turns against itself, in which the sun blasts what it blesses, in which all the hopeful explorations of life turn out to have been a circuitious peregrination towards death. "All things are born to be diminished" said Pericles at the time of Sophocles; and Hardy's comparable feeling that all things are tended to be obliterated, revels a Sophoclean grasp of the bed-rock ironics of existence.

Says Tanner, "Tess is the living demonstration of these tragic ironics. That is why she who is raped lives to be hanged; why she who is so physically beautiful feels guilt at inhabiting the fleshly tabernacle with which Nature had endowed her; why she who is a fertile source of life comes to feel that 'birth itself was an ordeal of degrading personal compulsion, whose gratuitous nothing in the result seemed to justify.' One could in the circumstances of Tess's life and ask why should it all happen to her? Some people in the book

\[^{131}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p.236.}\]
\[^{132}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p.237.}\]
say fatalistically, "It was to be". But Tanner adds, "Hardy does not work in this way, more than make us judge. Hardy makes us see, and in looking for some explanation of why all this should happen to Tess, our eyes finally settle on that red ribbon marking out the little girl in the white dress, which already foreshadows the red blood stain on the white ceiling. In her beginning is her end. It is the oldest of truths, but it takes a great writer to make us experience it again in all its awesome mystery."\textsuperscript{133}

Criticism that came during this phase is distinctly marked by two schools of thought. One school the thematic critics have given Hardy's novels a precise definition by relating it to the great events which were transforming English rural society during his life. Douglas Brown calls this 'the contemporary agricultural tragedy' and a critic like Irwing Howe betrays a romantic view of the old rural England which is equally distorting.

Such an approach where Hardy's great 'subjects' is essentially thought of as the sad passing of the stable rural life the decay of old customs and of local traditions, the death of ghost stories and the death of village choirs appears in most accounts. It is no

\textsuperscript{133}\textsuperscript{Ibid.}, p.232.
wonder that Meiryn William comes later and challenges such views of Brown and Arnold Kettle. For one, the central theme of Hardy's novels is seen as 'the tension between the old rural world and the new urban one,' and for Kettle as he sees it in *Tess* it is the destruction of peasantry. The novels of Thomas Hardy do relate to the condition of rural England in the latter half of the nineteenth century as acknowledged by some of Hardy's famous critics and by Hardy himself. The version of Hardy which has become established sees him as the novelist of a vanishing way of life. But history, truth, fiction are problematical concepts and much of the wonder of Hardy's enduring fictions depends on the way in which they extend, complicate and wrestle with the meaning of these concepts. Therefore, the thematic critics of this phase should have taken the Wessex novels as research into the history of rural culture and not looked upon such fiction solely in the context of history. Critical accounts which proceed from such an historical context miss out on the obliquity of Hardy's historical imagination. In making local history their primary focus Hardy's historical critics for this phase have misjudged the creative centre of his fiction. They have paid insufficient attention to Hardy's metaphor-making powers and his
astute understanding of the inheritance of metaphors in the workings of folk consciousness. It is no wonder came Philip Larken with his plea: "wanted good Hardy critic."

Critics like Dorothy Vanghent, John Holloway and Tony Tanner to mention a few belong to the other school of thought. They failed to see Hardy's novels solely in the context of history and its effect on society. So the critical confusion about Hardy's intentions still persists and needs to be examined and refuted in further detail.

In general such critics tried to probe into the realm of Hardy's aesthetic nature. They noted that the essential pleasure derived from Hardy's novels was in his ability to create images of life and was a counterbalance to the thematic approach of Raymund Williams, Douglas Brown, Irwing Howe and Arnold Kettle.

Vanghent, Holloway and Tony Tanner were more liberal in their outlook and though the dynamism of Hardy's novels they were able to explain his greatness through play, symbol and words. Every great writer has his own kind of legibility, his own way of turning life into a language of particular significances, and, in Hardy this legibility is of a singularly stark order. No other
novelist in Hardy's day had created among other things, a linguistic world by a series of selective intensifications of our shared vocabulary. It is this that makes Hardy's world easy to read. The key words in his dialect continue the image, "stand out like braille. It is as though some impersonal process of erosion had worn away much of the dense circumstantial texture of his tales, revealing the basic resistant contours of a sequence of events which Hardy only has to point to make us all — like ancient marks a barren landscape. And through his use of metaphor and symbol, Hardy above all does make us see just as he himself could not bear to be touched, so he does not 'touch' the people and things in his tales, does not interfere with them or absorb them into his own sensibility. Hardy's famous or notorious, philosophic broodings and asides are part of his reactions as a watcher, but they never give the impression of violating the people and objects of which has late is composed reflection and perception are kept separate (in Lawrence they often tend to merge) and those who complain about the turgidity of his thoughts may be overlooking the incomparable clarity of his eyes.

In the light of what has been said, through Hardy's use of language, imagery and metaphor art aims
to become a "total experience", soliciting total attention. This is what Hardy's novels do to his readers.

In terms of history, Hardy's interest in local history cannot be denied. One has to see his *Commonplace Books* to believe how assiduous a student of local history and culture Hardy was. His fiction was a quest for the inherent but undiscovered forms of this history and culture. Wessex was a fictional world, no doubt, but a fictional world informed by Hardy's awareness of the fictional form of apprehended social reality. A true historian; Hardy is not only concerned with social data, with gross historical references, but with the elusive shape and rhythm of historical and social reality. Wessex is an emotive model for the discover and communication of forms of social reality which are seldom acknowledged or felt by factful historians.

Both Schools of criticism for this phase in spite of shortcomings have helped in the further development of Hardy criticism. Their thoughts and ideas have helped towards a more modern approach. Today there are almost and even more critical works on his novels as on his poetry. His reputation stands higher than it has ever done; it is even possible for a modern critic,
Donald Davie, to argue in a recent work that Hardy has been the greatest single influence on English Novels in this century (although I do not think this has been proved.) The editor of the 1960 Penguin Poet Edition writes:

There have been relatively few poet-novelists in English Literature..... the only authentic double - firsts in this field are, I believe, Hardy and D.H. Lawrence.