Thomas Hardy has been a much discussed author. From time to time his power of observation, description and delineation of characters; his life style, life view and philosophy have been discussed by his many critics and reviewers. But none so far, it seems to me, has clearly pointed out the modern elements present in Hardy's Wessex Novels in general and his major novels in particular; nor has anyone ever called him a modern novelist. Perhaps, because of his birth and upbringing in the Victorian age and the publication of all his novels in the late nineteenth century, Hardy is looked upon merely as a Victorian novelist, as a novelist of old and traditional school. This, it seems to me, is not the only valid way of looking at his works. It is curious that Hardy's poetry is considered to be modern but his novels are not. But a deeper reading will show that all his writings are of a piece.

Different critics have given different opinions about modernism and modern movement in literature. I have accepted for the purpose of this thesis, Cyril Connolly's idea of modernism as a pattern of thought and an attitude of mind in the changing flux of time which are not only contemporaneous, but which have also resulted from eventful and exceptional changes occurring in earlier centuries.
The new nineteenth century concept of history, as modified or developed through evolution, is the recurring themes of the modernism of our age. In this view the spirit of modern movement is the combination of certain intellectual qualities, such as, lucidity, irony, scepticism, intellectual curiosity, combined with the passionate intensity and enhanced sensibility of the Romantics, their rebellion and sense of technical experiment and their awareness of living in a tragic age. These are the qualities inherited from Enlightenment and they shaped and moulded the modern literature to a great extent. And accordingly, the modern literature has become a combination of such features as those of scepticism and criticism, of secular humanism, the mood of anxiety and the sense of futility in human endeavour, a sense of isolation, an awareness of contemporary social realities - the vanishing rural virtues and the uprooting of the settled habits of life and thought, an attitude of revolt against the conventional values of the society and an awareness of living in a tragic world.

In point of time and technique Hardy may not be called a modern novelist, but certain attitudes to life and things which are undoubtedly modern are present in Hardy's novels, especially in his major novels: Far From the Madding Crowd, Return of the Native, The Mayor of Casterbridge, The Woodlanders, Tess of the D'Urbervilles and
Jude the Obscure. Though Hardy was born and bred in the Victorian age, yet he was more modern than Victorian in the sense that he never submitted to the Victorian conventions of compromise, complacency and comedy of life and always revolted against the dry, hard-hearted moral principles of his age. As an advance thinker of his age he shared, more than any other of his contemporaries, the great body of thoughts developed in the twentieth century. For a correct assessment of Hardy as a man, rather as a modern man and of his ideas about men and things, one must have to refer, in addition to his creative works, to his innumerable letters and his Note Books. His Note Books and his letters clearly indicate that Hardy was more modern than Victorian.

All his major novels contain almost all the characteristics of modern English literature in general and modern English fiction in particular. Realism, romance, regionalism, autobiographical elements, historical perspectiveness and middle class pre-dominance are some of the important features of modern English fiction, and Hardy's Wessex Novels, not merely the major novels, have been written in a historical perspective. For, they are the faithful record of disintegration and uprooting of old families, old villages, their culture, tradition, agriculture and their old system of economies resulting from the advent of modern civilisation along with its attendant evils.
A growing awareness of living in a tragic world is an important mark of modern literature. The principal characters of Hardy's major novels, such as Henchard, Clym, Eustacia, Elizabeth Jane, Giles Winterborne, Martyn South, Tess, Jude and Sue are constantly aware that they have been living in a tragic world and they have been always smarting under a sense of helplessness. They know that they are in the hands of a malevolent destiny, and in its hand they cannot expect any fair-play. The tragic note has been sounded most poignantly by Elizabeth Jane. Human life for the most part is essentially a drama of pain, in which happiness is only a momentary recurrence.

The secular humanism, which is an important feature of modern literature, is also present in Hardy's novels. Hardy has chosen his heroes and heroines from among the ordinary and the commonplace. For almost all the prominent characters of Hardy, such as, Bathsheba, Gabriel Oak, Clym, Henchard, Elizabeth, Giles, Grace, Tess, Jude and Sue hail from the lower strata of the society. Angel Clare and Eustacia are the exceptions: Angel Clare is the son of a clergyman, while Eustacia is the grand daughter of a captain. Nevertheless, Hardy has treated them equally without any distinction of blood and race.

Modern literature also conveys a sense of personal isolation. Hardy's characters are sceptical and critical, and when they become aware of the tragic plight of humanity,
they are apt to suffer from a sense of isolation. The
veritable tragedies of life, a sense of futility in
human endeavour and the painful ironical human situations
make most of Hardy's men and women feel often isolated.

The attitude of revolt against the conventional
values of the society, which is an obvious modern attitude,
is also characteristic of Hardy's novels. Hardy's whole-
hearted sympathy for Tess, the unmarried mother, and
for Sue, the married lover, typifies an indirect revolt
against the institution of marriage and some such moral
and social conventions. This attitude of revolt exists
in his early novels only in hints and suggestions, but
it gradually deepens in his later novels.

Realism, which is another marked feature of modern
literature, particularly of modern fiction is also present
in Hardy's novels. Hardy has been a tireless observer of
the working of nature. He has thorough knowledge of
Wessex shepherds, farm labourers and furze cutters. The
various sounds of wind and rain have been described by
Hardy almost as a scientist. Again, he is never orthodox
in his view about nature. He has not glorified or idealised
She makes human destinies atoms significant and futile.
Above all, his presentation of human life is always
faithful and realistic.
The touch of autobiography, another marked feature of modern literature, is also found in some of the Wessex Novels. *Jude the Obscure* is partly autobiographical. Early Sue is reported to have been modelled upon Hardy's cousin Tryphena Spark with whom Hardy was in love. Wessex Novels also do not lack in romance, which is another important mark of modern fiction, but romance exists in his novels only in so far as it depends on love interest; and love is the central theme of all the novels of Hardy right from *Desperate Remedies*, his first published novel, to his last fictional masterpiece *Jude the Obscure*. Regional novel is another marked feature of modern fiction, and Hardy's Wessex Novels are a case in point. Symbolism, another prominent characteristic of modern literature, is also in evidence in Hardy's Wessex Novels in which bird symbolism has its predominance. In the world of Hardy, bird in symbolic both of human joy and sorrow.

Even though Hardy's reflections on life are tragic and his novels grim, the Wessex Novels bear evidence to a search for a workable faith in this bewildering world which is another important mark of modern fiction. At the hands of an Unconscious will, humanity has been constantly suffering. If it were possible for man to subordinate his impulses and instincts to wisdom, to adjust himself to environment completely, man could have perhaps escaped the ravage of the will. A dim hope is also
held out by Hardy that in some remote future men might
be able to lend a portion of his own consciousness to the
hitherto unconscious will and force it to fashion all
things fair. Thus, some of the Wessex Novels, offer an
ultimate hope and faith to the tortured humanity, thereby
making Hardy an evolutionary meliorist, rather than a
pessimist.

Date does not make a writer modern. And Hardy's
modernism does not essentially lie with chronology. He is
separated from his Victorian contemporaries by his modern
mind and modern outlook, by his modern subtleties of
emotion and thought. He is, indeed, more occupied with
the concerns of modern thought and modern ideas. His ideas
about marriage, love, sex, religion and faith are undoub-
tedly in advance of his time and they indicate unmistakably
his modern mind and modern outlook. Such ideas could not
be expected of the Victorians who were invariably
influenced by the dogma produced in an age of "Doctrine
of Authority". Uninfluenced by any dogma or doctrine and
even pulling aside the veils and shutters of his age,
Hardy marched forward and stood for ideas with which we
have our immediate concern today. The attitude of life
expressed by him, the problems dealt with by him and his
disillusioned view of every human situation are quite in
keeping with the peculiar spirit of the modern age -
the spirit of anxiety and interrogation, of frustration
and futility, sorrows and sickness and of doubt and scepticism. I have discussed in detail these modern elements in Hardy's major novels in the thesis.

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