Chapter - Two

Hardy’s Belief in Existentialism

The type of life and character to which people are brought up is the only type which they understand instinctively. Their mature view of human nature in general is always founded on this instinct. Most people are intensely receptive to experience only when they are young. It is then that impressions pierce down to that deepest layer of the mind where the seeds of creative life lie hid. First impressions are the most fundamental and the most durable. Hardy is no exception to this rule. He was the son of humble parents, only just above the rank of labourer, and the first twenty years of his life were spent between the
village of Bockhampton, which was his home, and the neighbouring town of Dorchester. Rural Dorset is a remote place, and it was more remote in the early years of the nineteenth century than it is now. Feudal and sequestered, centering round church and village inn and squire’s manor house, its life-little touched by the changes of the great world-revolted in the same slow rhythm as for hundreds of years past. It was an agricultural life. Every-one, except the clergyman and the school master, lived by the land. And they lived hard, In clay-built cramped cottages men struggled year after year against wind and weather to support a wife and family. But it had stability and dignity. Every Sunday in the grey old churches the community met together, to hear their joys and sorrows. It has its light relief too, home-made traditional pleasures-harvest celebrations, Christmas gaieties, parties to celebrate birth and marriage. Hardy’ father was a musician, famous in the neighbourhood. His soon took after him. At eleven years old he would go off to fiddle at a wedding party or a Christmas party. Until two in the morning he would play sometimes, bowing away while the couples wove their way through the figures of the country dances. And then, so he tells us in his recollections, would came a pause when the girls, clustered together in their light gowns against the wall in the barn, would warble a traditional ballad:

“Lie there, lie there, thou false-hearted man,

Lie there instead o’ me:

For six pretty maidens thou hast a’ drowned here,
But the seventh hath drown-end thee!”

Tragedy was not confined to ballads. Real life had its drama too at Bockhampton: strange simple dramas young man, in need of a livelihood, would leave the place to seek his fortune; years later he would return, to find his sweetheart married to another. In such a world, confined and elemental, passions grew to obsessions. Men, brooding on their wrongs until they seemed intolerable, found vent for their emotion in crime. Then, by the stern laws of those days, the offenders would be hanged at Dorchester. Hardy saw two hangings before he was eighteen. He stood under the scaffold to see a woman die on one occasion. On another, from a neighbouring hill, he watched through a telescope the white figure of a man, silhouetted against the façade of the prison, Overcome with horror, he turned home-ward.

He was a very sensitive boy, and the life in which he grew up stamped itself so deeply on his imagination that, when his faculties had reached the creative stage of development, he conceived his picture of life in its terms. The most living part of his work is always concerned with it, and it is responsible for some of its most characteristic features. Nature, first of all, played a larger part in his books than in those of any other English novelist. It is not just the background in his drama, but a leading character in it. Sometimes it exercises an active influences on the course of events: more often it is a spiritual agent, colouring the mood and shaping the disposition of human beings. The huge bleak darkness of Egdon Heath dominates the lives of the characters in
“The Return of the Native,” infusing into them its grandeur and its melancholy; woods is the keynote of sentiments “The Woodlanders” who lived among them. As its title suggests, the distinctive mark of the characters in Hardy’s second novel comes from the fact that they dwell “under the greenwood tree.” His most living characters, moreover, are always natives of the countryside. Farmers and shepherds, thatches and hedgers, they, most of them, never stray beyond its borders. A few, indeed, go off as soldiers or sailors, like the Loveday brothers in “The Trumpet Major”; very rarely one with exceptional intellectual aspirations, like Clym Yeobright or Jude Fawley, will depart to seek fulfillment in a higher sphere. But soldiers and intellectuals like countrymen still. However much they travel or educate themselves, they bear the stamp of field and village on every facet of their personalities. Out of their original environment they are aliens. Indeed, so far as the motives actuating Hardy’s stories are not motives of rural life. Jude longs to satisfy his desire for learning; Eustacia Vye yearns for the colour and luxury of life in Paris; Grace and Fancy hesitate to marry their rustic sweethearts because a glimpse of the great world has made their taste.

For the plots of Hardy’s books are as much conditioned by his upbringing as are his setting and characters. His comedy turns on the genial, farcical humours of village life. His tragedy is village tragedy, composed of the drama of broken love and wronged girls. There is always something of the folk-song about Hardy’s plots. They are full of true lovers and forlorn maidens and dashing Don Juan's. “Far From the Madding Crowd,” is the old typical figure
of the dashing, inconstant soldier with a love in every town, who kisses and rides away. Even “Tess”, considered so modern and advanced in its day, has a story which reveals itself as a regular folk-tale tragedy. Tess, the beautiful innocent, maiden, is betrayed by a wicked seducer and ends her life on the gallows tree. “The Return of the Native,” the midsummer rites by which girls sought to divine the name of their future husband in “Tess” and “The Woodlanders”; while country customs and ceremonies are scattered broadcast over his pages.

Another effect of Hardy’s environment was to turn his imagination towards the past. He was stirred primarily by the life he had known as a child, and of the most famous books only Tess and Jude deal with the contemporary world of his mature years; the rest are set in the world of his childhood. This world in its turn was closely linked with a more ancient history. Wessex life was too unchanging, too uneventful, for people to forget the past. Every cottage, every landmark was thick with survivals and memories of history. And Wessex has played a large part in history. The primitive inhabitants of this island had dimpled the Downs with their barrows. The men of the Middle Ages had built churches there; the Elizabethans had erected sculptured manor houses; hidden in the woods. And, in more recent times, the armies of England had gathered there to resist the invasion of Napoleon. Hardy was acutely sensitive to the picturesque appeal of the past. As a matter of fact, he himself came of an ancient local family. A Thomas Hardy of the sixteenth century founded the
Dorchester Grammar School; the Burgesses of Dorchester had put up a tablet to him “to commend to Posterity an example so worthy of imitation.” His mother’s ancestors, so the legend ran, had sheltered Monmouth after the battle of Sedgemoor. He made a short story out of this, “The Duke’s Reappearance.” He wrote several historical short stories and one novel, “The Trumpet Major”. But his more modern books, too, are resonant with echoes of an earlier age. The Casterbridge of which Henchard is Mayor is ancient Casterbridge, with its Georgian houses and Gothic churches and, outside the limit of the old rampart, a huge prehistoric earthwork. Tess—we are not likely to forget it!—is a descendant of the ancient family of d’Urbervilles. When Jude goes to Christminster, he walks the streets hardly able to see the modern scene for the crowding specters of the ancient worthies of the University. The great houses of Wessex, standing aloof from the villages, are also landmarks in Hardy’s landscape. He was fascinated by the idea of heredity. He loved to trace the family type continuous through generations. It is an important element in that of “Tess” like that of the reddleman in “The Return of the Native”.

Hardy’s subject is human life. But human life can be looked at from many aspects and in many relations. Hardy regards it in its most fundamental aspects. He sees human beings less as individuals than as representatives of a species, and in relation to the ultimate conditioning forces of their existence. His subject is not men, but man. His theme is mankind’s predicament in the universe.
As seen by him, it is a tragic theme. The world he lived in bad something to do with this. There was plenty of tragedy in the life of the Wessex labourer, with its poverty and its passion. Life to them was life in the raw. Dependent and ignorant, exposed alike to the oppressions of the social system and the caprice of the weather, at every moment of their existence the people among whom Hardy was brought up were made conscious of man’s helplessness in the face of circumstances. Hardy, too, was the man to realize the tragedy implicit in such a life. He had a tender heart, unusually responsive to the spectacle of suffering. By the time he was fifteen a shadow had already fallen across his vision of life. He tells us he remembers lying back in the sun and wishing that he need not grow up. He wanted to stay just as he was, in the same place, with the same few friends. The infinite possibilities mature life seemed to hold for failure and for suffering appalled him. This shrinking from life embodied itself in the form of spectral fear. It was the enemy of mankind in general. For Hardy’s was a speculative mind. Since the world he looked at seemed so full of pain and disappointment, the, he argued, pain and disappointment were outstanding characteristics of human existence.

This disposition to a melancholy view was confirmed and increased by the age in which he lived. It was a disturbing age for a sensitive mind; for it was an age of transition. Along with the disintegration of the old social and economic structure went a disintegration of ideas. Eighteenth-century rationalism had united with the new romantic spirit of rebellion against
convention, to shake the fundamental basis of belief-religious, social political-
which the people of the old England had accepted. The mental atmosphere of
reflective minds tended to be overcast by clouds of doubt. Toward the middle of
the century it was further disturbed by the higher criticism of the Bible and the
Darwinian theory of evolution. People were feeling already uncertain about the
philosophic basis of Christianity. Now they began to doubt the historical facts
on which that philosophy rested. And not only Christianity-the new ideas struck
a blow at all religious and ideal interpretations of the universe. If Christianity
was not true, what became of the consolation of Christianity, the conception of
Divine justice. New thinkers-some rationalist, some romantic-disputed with one
another as to what creed should take the place of the old religious certainty.
None of their alternative proved convincing to establish itself unquestioned in
men’s minds. The thoughtful person saw himself swept upwards from darkness
to darkness, like a straw on a torrent. Artists, always peculiarly sensitive to the
atmosphere of their environment, were affected by this atmosphere of doubt and
apprehension. Other took refuge in worlds of beauty conjured up by their
imaginations. But there were those who could find no such consolation for
themselves; and, for the first time, pessimism-conscious considered pessimism-
found expression in English letters in Hardy. Hardy was especially open to the
melancholy implications of the new outlook. As a countryman, he belonged to
the world that was passing. No doubt the standard of living was improving, but
against any satisfaction this might bring to his moral sense was balanced his
regret at the passing of what had seemed so secure. The most established institutions seemed precarious; life too.

By the age of twenty-seven he had already lost his faith. He did not feel it a dead loss. Such elements in Christian morality as were, in Hardy’s view, the cause of suffering marriage, for instance—he thought, a good riddance. And he was angry, with the clergy and other orthodox persons who felt it their duty to defend them. Like many village people, Hardy was always ready to grumble about the vicar. But, taken as a whole, he felt that the loss to human happiness involved by the new scientific interpretation of life. He felt a wistful yearning for the comfort and the beauty of the old belief:

“That with this bright believing band

I have no claim to be,

That faiths by which my comrades stand

Seem phantasies to me,

And mirage-mists their Shining Land,

Is a strange destiny.

I am like a gazer who should mark

An inland company

Standing up fingered, with ‘Hark! Hark!’

The glorious distant sea!’

And feel, ‘Alas, ‘tis but yon dark

And wind-swept pine to me?”
Moreover, hardy did not feel that any of those new philosophies of
life which people were constructing to harmonise with the new scientific
knowledge. It would have been no use preaching to him of the delights of a
world organized to make use of every resource that science had put at man’s
command. To Hardy, molded by a religious mode of thought, mere material
improvement would not satisfy the demands of man’s soul. Hardy thought it
both silly and disgusting. No sane mash could accept an ideal that went against
what instinct told him were the finest feelings of his nature. At one time, Hardy
tried to comfort himself with the idea that the universe might, in the course of
time, evolve a moral sense. Man had grown more humane through the centuries.
This whimsical fancy cast a feeble flickering gleam of hope round the close of
his great historical drama, “The Dynasts”. His philosophy, from the time he
began to write, was confirmedly gloomy. The universe was a huge impersonal
mechanism, pursuing its mysterious end.

Poor, harassed mankind is not likely to be cheered up by such a
view of his existence. But he did not think it possible for man to maintain
himself in a state to blessed forgetfulness. If what science said were true,
gradually everyone would find it out. Man had reached a stage in his history at
which, realizing that the old comforting myths were false, he must, for the first
time, learn to face the prospect of a life without ultimate hope. This was, to
Hardy, a fact of supreme importance. He thought it would modify human nature
Men would grow to care less for physical beauty.
“Material fact has ceased to be of importance in art,” he says somewhere. “It is the style of a period when the mind is serene and unawakened to the tragical mysteries of life.” The new outlook will leave its mark on man’s very appearance. Hardy is curiously fascinated by the idea of a new face; a face, he felt, that was appearing in the world as an expression of man’s realization of his sorry predicament. He describes it most fully in his portrait of Clym in “The Return of the Native.”

“In Clym Yeobright’s face could be dimly seen the typical countenance of the future. Should there be a classic period to art hereafter, its Phidias may produce such faces. The view of life as a thing to be put up with, replacing that zest for existence which was so intense in early civilizations, must ultimately enter so thoroughly into the constitutions of the advanced races that its facial expression will become accepted as a new artistic departure.”

The law of nature, cruel and indifferent, forms the background of every one of Hardy’s books, incarnating itself now as savage Egdon Heath, now as the woods of Hintock, whose apparent peace masks an unending struggle for survival. Even a love scene, in the pastoral idyll of “Under the Greenwood Tree,” is a jarred by the anguished scream of a bird caught by an owl. Incidentally, it may be noted that Hardy’s melancholy philosophy increased the disposition, to place his scene in the peasant world of his youth. There, he remembered, people were still untouched by the disturbing influences of modern thought. There they were still unaware of the true human predicament.
The most characteristic note in all Hardy’s emotional scale—the strain which, as it were, forms an accompanying undercurrent alike to his scenes of fun and his scenes of tragedy if happiness were not really attainable, men were still under the illusion that it could be attained.

To Hardy perhaps a novel is an interpretation of life through a picture of human psychology which the author aims at. The real life of the people, their hopes and fears, struggling and sufferings, aspiration and desires, the adjustment with the religious belief and social dogmas— one who wants to know about these deep and vital issues, should not go to Fielding, Thackeray, Beaconsfield or Macaulay but straight to Hardy. And, his vision of life was not primarily of man’s relation to man, but of man’s relation to the forces of ultimate reality. His characters live most fully not in the social encounters of Jane Austen’s Bath or George Eliot’s Middlemarch, but in the great emotional crisis that express their heroic resistance to Fate, the conflict of reason and instinct, or their harmonies and disharmonies with the natural world.

Equally astonishing is Mr. Miller’s clam that Hardy held himself aloof from life in general (it is amplified in his first chapter, ‘The Refusal of Involvement’). The truth is that Hardy was always actively ‘involved in mankind’..

His environment, to place his scene in the peasant world of his youth, implants Hardy’s melancholy philosophy. There he knew that people were still untouched by the disturbing influences of modern thought.
The most characteristic note in all Hardy’s emotional scale - the strain, which, as it were, form, and an accompanying undercurrent alike to his scenes of fun and his scenes of tragedy - its nostalgia. In reference to ‘Ode on the Intimations of Immortality’, and Hardy’s poem ‘Before life and after’, to quote Jean Brooks:

....... Wordsworth’s nostalgia is for the loss of a child’s heightened awareness, hardy’s for a time ‘before the birth of consciousness; since heightened awareness is so often awareness of suffering.......3

The longing for a world where, if happiness were not really attainable, men were still under the illusion that it could be attained. In Hardy’s nostalgia is a major source of discovery and creation. The Wessex novels owe some of their most haunting moments to the action of memory. It is an answer to the inexorable mutability of life.

Nostalgia, gentle in Under the Greenwood Tree, lyrical in Woodlanders, romantic in The Trumpet Major, bitter in Jude, echoes hauntingly through Hardy’s work in general.

There is neither denying nor any need to deny that Hardy’s conception of life was essentially tragic. It is also equally true that Hardy’s tragic view of life was the consequence of his sharp insight and the great sensitiveness of his temperament which pressurized him to react upon the spectacle of human suffering. One is amazed to learn that, as a little boy, Hardy
even abominated to see the boughs being lopped off the trees and the very sight of a dead bird appalled him with an unforgettable horror. By the time Thomas Hardy was fifteen, a shadow of grief captured his vision of life. Consequently, the glum novelist of the future even wished not to grow up. Module's suicide was an appalling shock to Hardy. To quote George Wing:

> ..... *Maule had a deeper but darker influence which persisted long after his death in 1875..... Meant much to Hardy. But so too did his fits of acute melancholia: he was in the van of an age of neuroses and Hardy was exceptionally affected by his sporadic descents to lonely despair..... Cause the darkening of some of the novels.*

The vibrating young boy was frightened with the endless suffering of life which, to him, always struck as something full of insecurity and apprehensions. He fancied that a figure stood in his van with arms uplifted to knock him back from any pleasant prospect. Since Hardy possessed a speculative soul, he counted this figure not only his enemy but also considered it at war with the mankind in general. Such a defeatist view was further fed by the disturbing and transitional conditions of the age in which he lived.

The constitutional bent of Hardy's mind, the misery and suffering witnessed by him and the apprehensiveness of his nature led him to believe that misery and the ensuing disappointment are the inescapable characteristics of human existences.” ..... Hardy’s irony is not directed at human egotism or at the disparity between real and assumed worth, but at the real conditions of human
existence.....”\(^5\) this is why the men and women of Hardy come before us as grieving souls. They constantly exhibit before us the agony of their souls and appear struggling for existence in this world inhabited by ruthless people. They ultimately come to grief. To quote Brooks:

\[\text{........} \text{The dissonance of the multiple visions dramatically enacts} \]
\[\text{hardy’s metaphysics of man’s predicament as a striving, sensitive, imperfect individual in a rigid, non-sentient, absurd cosmos, which rewards him only” it eternal death.}\(^6\)

It shall not be out of place to take notice of the conclusive observation of Baker who asserted:

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\text{Hardy’s conception of life was essentially tragic; the conflict is one in which there is but the remotest chance of escape, so heavily are the scales weighted by man’s impercipience, his inability to coerce his own subordinate nature and the checks and snares plentifully sown in his path by some occult malice.}\(^7\)

As a realist, Hardy saw this humanity at war with Universe. His books reveal to us that he is full of indictment against the cruel destiny planning to rule the lives of human beings in general. To make these clandestine feelings more glaring, he comes before us with his indignant outbursts and denunciations through Tess, Sue, Eustacia and Elefried. These figures are the emotive embodiment of Hardy’s philosophy. To quote Jean Books:
The irresponsible sending of a valentine, the concealment of a seduction until the day of the wedding to another man, the careless sealing of love letters and choice of an untrustworthy messenger, release forces of death and destruction which inspire tragic terror at the contemplation of the painful mystery of the working of inexorable law. Tragic pity is aroused, as Dobree points out ‘not because someone suffers, but because something fine is bruised and broken.....

Hardy believes in Supreme Power that is indifferent to human affairs. Hardy calls it the Immanent Will. To quote Jean Brooks:

...... Hardy’s most poetically incongruous and original adoption of the Homeric domestic simile is his conception of the Immanent Will, unconsciously weaving a fabric of war and suffering ‘like a knitter drowsed/whose fingers play in skilled unmindfulness’ (Fore scene).....

This Will is Immanent, unconscious, listless, mindless, and blind. It has no purpose in creating. This Will is called differently at different times by Hardy-Prime cause, First cause, Force, Fate, Destiny, Supreme Power, Absolute, Unconsciousness, and even God. Duffin says:”..... In the microcosm of Hardy’s novel there is unquestionably a power- conscious or unconscious,
personal or impersonal - that ocntrols, influences, at least hampers and hinders the doings of man......“10

In all his novels except *The Mayor of Casterbride* Hardy’s chief interest is in his women. They are the common instrument by which the universal Will, the blind onward drive of life, thwarts or destroys the hopes and purposes of individual men. At the same time they are themselves, in the singleness of their service, conscious or unconscious, to the same thrust of creation, peculiarly representative of the helplessness of humanity before the commands of Fate.

Eustacia, the ill-Fated woman, like Flaubert’s Emma Bo’Zary, is a born romantic, unable to cope with the conditions of environment. She always strives uselessly for happiness but Fate, her enemy as it is that of her contenders, works against her. There is a kind an eccentricity about her nature forcing her to be against the general modes of life. Her nature is tragic, always thinking of the blind and malicious conspiracies arranged against her by malignant Fate. She must be the centre of everything in life, thus consciously devising ruin for the never satiable thirst of her pride. There is always a conflict between the impulse to develop a personality and the impulse to create a character in the portrait of Eustacia Vye. We see this goddess of beauty and youth standing against a wild bank ‘like a helpless despairing creature’ having suffered the agonies and mortification of an unsatisfied life”.... Isolation fosters Eustacia’s attraction to Clym and a man of inferior caliber.....” to. She suffers
separation from her husband and is blamed for the death of her mother-in-law. In a final analysis, Hardy sees her as a ‘Crying animal’, ‘a painful object isolated and out of place’.

It is her doom which is meaningful and not the cause of the doom or her own weakness of character or even Fate working through her character. The really moving thing for us is the pathos of her situation-’it was to be’ and her lies the pity, the terror and the waste, Eustacia herself complains that her great qualities, her splendidness and her capabilities have been wasted.

The reason one may suggest behind Eustacia’s tragic isolation is her longing for romantic dreams and social brilliance. She marries Clym Yeobright, a young man who has returned from Paris, under the impression that he would fulfill her dreams and help her to escape from her remote and secluded life of Egdon Heath.

As a matter of fact Eustacia comes down to earth with her disillusionment after having conflicts with Clym, thus desperately makes an attempt to fly away with a former lover, Demon Wild eve. On her way, she is drowned and Wild eve is also drowned in an attempt to rescue her. Hardy does not make it clear whether Eustacia’s drowning is an accident or a suicide but logically it is proved that it is an intentional death. She is entrapped between two insufferable choices-either to stay on Egdon Heath which is unbearable for her or to fly away with her former lover which is immoral as Eustacia is halfway traditional. She is conscious of her doom as she confesses to Yeobright
that she is not destined to be successful wife. She stands near the moldered remains inside the barrow isolated from all humanity.

Eustacia suffers not only externally but also internally yet there are some who consider her inconstant in love and responsible for the death of her mother-in-law. She has to leave her husband and dies in an attempt to fly away with her former lover. We really feel pity for her misplacement and cannot look down upon her predicament.

His persona however irritating and awkwardly embarrassing at times come frighteningly, pathetically, sadly to life, and endear themselves. In their personal isolated struggles, they have a lonely poignancy. The world be the poorer without Michael Henchard, for all his perverse cussedness. Henchard is the most virile of Hardy’s men. Henchard marries at an early age but he has no interest in women. He has almost at pathological dislike of them. He sells his wife for a variety of psychological and circumstantial reasons but it is only an instance of his apathy towards the other sex. He is almost devoid of sexual aggressiveness which is the common male quality. He confesses to Farfrae that ‘by nature I am something of a woman-hater’. The general impression of his character also confirms his passive sexuality-native the self-effacement and the bitter passivity with which he endures his sufferings, ‘shuts lips, like a vice,’ and desires at the end to die unwept unsung and unknown.

Hardy was himself psychologically, almost pathologically, suffering from sexual passivity. Like Hardy too, Henchard we are told felt his
childlessness deeply and found little solace in the thought of a wifely companionship. He suffers from an ‘emotional void’, he is ever craving for somebody’s love. We almost seem to hear Hardy himself in the bitterly pessimistic words of Henchard when he sank into one of those gloomy fits: “I sometimes suffer from, on account of the loneliness of my domestic life, when the world seems to have to blackness of hill and like job; I could curse the day that gave me birth”. His locked, reluctant character lies in the fact that he was starved of affection.

His ‘kind-like’ outweighs his roughness, and the devotion of this “poor fond fool” is a measure of the intense loneliness of Henchard. There remains only the publication of his modern pathetic will, which, with the exception of a clause showing affectionate consideration for Elizabeth-Jane, under-scores his terrible isolation, his removal from grievous human contact, and a morbid wish to remain so removed even after death.

The speech is not simply an expression of individual sentiment. It evokes a whole cultural context, a standard of feeling and rectitude and ways of confronting life and death, which give to Henchard’s career and character a kind of objective correlative. He is understandable only in relation to such a community. In the alien Caster Bridge with its Gesellschaft men, he is clearly out of place. To Quote Jean Brooks:

*The sublime tragic simplicity of Whittles elegy on Henchard, with its physical details of his last hours offset by the bond of*
compassionate love ...... Which has become Henchard’s ultimate value, defines the meaning of his life with a fierce affirmation of love and pain that makes the negations of his Will positive ..... 

Images of the human condition; of a lonely heroic man.........12

It is not Farfrae who incites the rebellion against Henchard. It is simply the fact that in the given milieu Henchard is a total misfit. He confronts the mightily opposites. He is no longer wanted. The world of Casterbridge belongs to Farfrae. When people want an opinion on any small matter of agriculture of business, it is Farfrae they seek. Even Casterbridge children know by heart the language in which Henchard is condemned and Farfrae listened:

‘But please will Mr. Farfrae come?’ said the child. ‘I am going that way ....... Why Mr. Farfrae?’ Said Henchard, ‘with the fixed look of though. ‘Why do people always want Mr. Farfrae?’ I suppose because they like him so that’s what they say’. ‘Oh-I see-that’s what they say-hey? They like him because he’s cleverer than Mr. Henchard, and because he knows more; and in short, Mr. Henchard’s can’t hold a candle to him-hey?’ ‘Yes-that’s just it, Sir-some of it.’

This is the voice of the people of Caster bridge speaking through the impartial medium of Child’s memory.

Henchard returns to the community before his death. He is weaker physically and best, but he pursues his way with stoical determination. “I-Can-
go alone as I deserve— an outcast and a vagabond. But my punishment is not
greater than I can bear!” Henchard goes his penitential way to Weyden-priors,
but such is his love for his stepdaughter that he cannot move too far from
Caster-Bridge. He returns to his former occupation. The wheel has come full
circle, but now he has no ambition for himself. He lives on ‘against his will’.
Then he hears that Elizabeth and Farfrae are to be married, he allows himself
three days to reach Casterbridge. On the way he buys a caged goldfinch as a
wedding present. Not wishing to be seen, he enters Casterbridge in the evening.
He reaches Farfrae’s when the entertainment is at its highest. He is met by
Elizabeth, who rejects his overtures of forgiveness. Tired of life, he makes no
excuses, and departs, leaving, the caged bird under a bush. When the caged bird
is found too late by Elizabeth— it had starved to death— she at last perceives the
truth, and relents. Henchard’s final statement that most comprehensively reveals
his rejection of the world and life. And this comes with and effect which is all
the more powerfully tragic in that it is the final testament of a man who has
stirred himself so vigorously in the world to achieve his position as Mayor.
Hence his rejection of the world is not vulnerable to the charge which is
sometimes made against the Schopenhauerean tragic view, that it is the product
of low vitality. Rather, it is the final act of man who has demonstrated a more
than usually splendid, if wayward, animal energy and has embraced life with a
violent gusto.
Henchard has disappeared in the remote recesses of Egdon Heath. It is as if this man of primeval ruggedness and passions had returned to the rude world of the past. But this impression belies the Henchard of the present. In many ways, like Lear, he has been redeemed through folly and suffering. Finally despised and rejected by the one person he could turn to, he turns his back on society. As we are told about ‘Michael Henchard’s Will’:

“That Elizabeth- Jane Farfrae be not told of my death, or made to grieve on account of me.

“that I be not bury’d in consecrated ground

“that no sexton be asked to toll the bell.

“that no mourners walk behind me at my farcical.

“that no flours be planted on my grave.

“that no man remember me.

“To this I put my name.

Michael Henchard

This was wish for annihilation. It is a superlative irony that only Able Whittle be friends him at the last, who had suffered shamefully at Henchard’s hands but could never forget his kindness to his mother, to show awareness of Henchard’s suffering and need. The Mayor of caster-bridge is the story of one man, as admitted by Hardy in the Preface: ‘the story is more particularly a study of one man’s deeds and character than, perhaps, any other of those included in my Examination of Wessex life’.
With ‘Tess’ we come to one of the most contentious character in the novel. Once again the theme is preposterous human suffering, an ill-starred individual, fighting the good but he fight against invincible odds. But this time the sufferer is an attractive peasant girl, “a pure woman”.

Tess stands in isolated weakness, the condition in which the stuff on the body ceases to be personally expressive is most thoroughly developed in *Tess of the D’urbervilles*. Tess’s society has little use for her personality: it takes her body for sexual or economic profit, so that her consciousness is forced either to detach itself dreamily from material circumstances, or shrink itself within the harsh limits of mindlessly mechanical activity: “A field-man is a personality a field; a field-woman is a portion of the field; she has some-how lost her own margin, imbibed the essence of her surroundings, and assimilated herself with it”.

Tess struggles against her reduction to a thing. But the only successful tactic is to reduce her to impassively objectivity, making her ‘dead’ when Alec kisses her.

Her final act, like Jude’s, is to withdraw from her own body in a crisis of desperate self-abandonment. Angel sees that ‘his original Tess had spiritually ceased to recognize the body before him as hers- allowing it to drift, like a corpse upon the current, in a direction dissociated from its living will’. She thought:”...... He might drown her if he would; it would be better than parting to-morrow to lead severed lives”. The woman whom Angel has treated
as a corpse in his sleepwalking comes to embrace this definition of her body, in the moment before it is formally destroyed by society.

When Tess comes in contact with Angel Clare, she finds herself in dilemma. Earlier she is sad over the unhappy episode with Alec and is determined to ignore him however in her relationship with Angel she is drawn towards him and simultaneously held back by the haunting feeling of guilt. She loves Angel deeply and nobody could love him moiré. After her desertion, Angel’s conversation with Izz is meaningful:

He drove past the cross-roads, one mile, two miles, without showing any signs of affection.

‘You love me very much, Izz?’ he suddenly asked.

‘I do - I have said I do! I loved you’ll the time we was At the dairy together?’

‘More than Tess?’

She shook her head.

‘No’, she murmured, ‘not more than she’.

‘How’s that?’

‘Because nobody could love’ee more than Tess did!...

She would have laid down her life for’ee.

I could do no more’.
Such was the love of a deserted wife for her unkind husband. Further as Jean Brooks observes:

After her marriage with Angel, she is engaged in a deep-rooted love-affair. Tess ‘Clings’ to her husband - as she writes to him in this strain and moment of her separation:

...... I must cry to you in my trouble- I have no one else! I am so exposed to temptation, Angel. I fear to say who it is, and I do not like to write about it at all. But I cling to you in a way you cannot think! Can you not come to me how ..... Angel, I live entirely for you ....

Whenever Alec comes before her, the image of Angel in Tess’s mind asserts itself. Tess, being deeply in love with her husband, is ready to do anything for him and accepts everything as her separation:

...... I think I must die if you do not come soon, or tell me to come to you. The punishment you have measured out to me is deserved- I do know that - well deserved....... Not to be just- only a little kind to me, even if I do not deserve it, and come to me!.... I am desolate without you, my darling, O, so desolate! ......

Tess entreats her husband to be merciful to far’ a little kind to her. She is all humility, like a spirit urging for a union with her husband.

Tess is pitted against heavy odds. Her father dies, her family becomes extremely poor and dependent Alec again tempts Tess, and Angel does
not remember her despite her pathetic appeals. She reviews her past life and
feels that her husband has been downright unjust and cruel to her. She rebels
against him. In this mood she blames Angel for her misfortunes, isolation and
suffering. She writes to Angel:

\[
O \text{ why have you treated me so monstrously, Angel! I do not deserve it. I have through it all over carefully; and I can never-never forgive you! you know that I did not intend to love you - why have you so wronged me? You are cruel, indeed! I will try to forget you.}
\]

\[
\text{It is all injustice I have received at your hands!}
\]

Tess, abandoned and destitute, when sleeping in the woods, becomes aware of the peasants dying around her. This image of the hunted peasants makes us realize, what Kettle subtly points out, that:

\[
\ldots.. \text{The pure woman is in fact a victim not just of predatory male hunters but of situations and attitudes which the society in which she lives thinks of and justifies as “natural”}.^{13}
\]

Inspire of her condition, Tess is able to transcend her feeling of self-pity and is full of sympathy for the beautiful mangled birds.

Tess lives her life in isolation and separation. There is a rejection of Tess by Angel Clare as they were about to go to bed on their wedding night. The iniquitous human meanness was only the inevitable culmination of the march of events. She has a conscience and a will that may possibly be called her own, but against her or her father and mother, Alec, Angel, a conventional
society, Nature, hereditary tendencies, and a malicious course of events. With what happens to her she has nothing to do. In forced obedience to her parents she goes to Trantridge, the home of the spurious D'Urbervilles. The smutting of her innocence there is an act of treachery, for which she is in no way responsible. Her love for Angel Clare which result in the ill-starred marriage, is the working in her of a cruel law of nature, against which she struggles in vain and becomes the ultimate cause of the separation from her husband. Towards the end she returns to Alec to save her mother, brothers, and sisters from starvation.

The homelessness of Tess’s family ties the metaphysical sense of exile from meaning to concrete economic pressures which drive man untrusting over the earth with no place to go. At all time Tess is linked intimately to the natural world from which her consciousness is isolates her. Hardy’s double vision presents her both as extensions of nature moved by force beyond her control. She perishes in the end but not without having passed the image on. Her stabbing of Alec is dangerously close to the melodramatic. Tess kills him, and takes responsibility: paradoxically restores to her life an order she has chosen. To live and love with an intensity sharpened by knowledge of the imminent death sentence she had pronounced on herself. And, the murder of the seducer is an emblematic of her rejection of the society, which is brutish and full of such people who are self-seekers and lusty.
Truly she wanted little from life, and wished for nothing more than quite happiness, but the cruel world would not allow her even that. At her arrest on the Salisbury plain she surrendered herself willingly:

‘It is as it should be’, she murmured... ‘Angel, I am almost glad—yes, glad! This happiness could not have lasted. It was too mush. I have enough; and not I shall not live for you to despise me!’ ....... ‘I am ready’, she said quietly.

In *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy initiates the modern novel with an ambitions working-class hero and a neurotic. The novel fore-shadows the modern thematic emphases of failure, frustration, and futility, disharmony, isolation, rootlessness, and absurdity is, *Jude the Obscure* seems to be Hardy’s someone quest for the self, self-definition, self-knowledge, self-sufficiency, and purpose without significance, gods, homeland, religious myths, or absolute values. It stresses the importance and self destructive exclusiveness of personal relationships. There is also the ascendancy of the death: wish. The absurd and tragic predicament of human beings developed to a high degree of sensitivity in an insentient. Universe bears all things away. Hardy has developed a primacy of suffering in the novel. Jude Fawley differs from most anti-heroes, to his credit, in holding fast to his ideal Christminster, and in effusing to demean his integrity to survive, in the real defective world.

In fact the novel is the University’s rejection of Jude. According to Paterson with “....... the conflict between a sensitive, passionate temperament,
with a cruel, conventional world ..... Jude a poor country boy, longs for satisfaction, both of mind and heart ....”14 Hardy had for long contemplated the story of a youth miserably unsuccessful in his efforts to enter University. But in the novel what we learn about is only half the story. In tension with the initial conception of the University’s rejection of Jude is Jude’s and Hardy’s rejection of the University as a moral and cultural symbol. The ‘struggle and ultimate failure of a young man to make a place for him in the academic world’ were the point from which Hardy started. It sees this theme as:

......... Forced by the dynamics of the author’s imagination to give way to another and more dangerous theme: an attack on the stringency of the marriage laws and on the narrow Christianity responsible for their stringency.15

Jude the central character is one who would sacrifice everything for the journey and yet would take the wrong road. For a Poor and lonely young man like Jude, pleasure is not to be taken without cost. Arabella’s offering of sex is seen as a menace to learning and ambition and that does not prove to be wrong. There is a heavy consequence, a large bill to be paid for the most perfunctory surrender. And when Jude thinks of ending his affair with Arabella, she deceives him about pregnancy and they marry, in hopelessness, without any joy or understanding of each other. The misery of this marriage is so great that Hardy has dipped the courtship and early days in the slow, filthy waters to the
pigsty. Arabella and Jude undertake to kill a pig they have raised. Jude hears the animal scram and wises to get it over quickly, but Arabella says:

‘You must not!’ she cried. ‘The meat must be well bled, and to do that he must die slow...... I was brought up to it, and I know. Every god butcher keeps unbending long. He ought to be eight or ten minutes dying, at least’.

The connection with Jude hastily comes to mind. His life is to be a long-drawn-out suffering and pain. He is as miserable with Arabella as she with him. Her tricking him into marriage, her lies, her abandonment of him on his deathbed are the deepest betrayals that follow on the first betrayal, their lack of real meaning with each other. “.... his passionate temperament has already betrayed him into a short-lived marriage with the coarse Arabella ......”

The Self-enforced isolation of Hardy suggests the dying Jude is contrasted with a view of Oxford life in the summer, similar to that described in the note.

In it Hardy expressed his view that “a girl should certainly not to be allowed to enter into matrimony without a full knowledge of her probable future in that holy estate......” this seems reminiscent of Sue Bride head’s remarks to Philltson about not understanding the implications of marriage. Later on in the novel Sue in a discussion with Jude, Comments on the breakages of marriage:
I thought, of course, that she had never been really your wife since she lift you of her own accord years and years ago! My sense of it was, that a parting such as yours from her, and mine from him, ended the marriage.

Sex and marriage - of the two, marriage is the easiest surrender and Sue rather thoughtlessly submits to it with the unsuitable Mr. Phillotson, the schoolmaster He is confused to learn that the other submission is not forth coming. Sue’s marriage to Mr. Phillotson is the boldest inconsistency. She has a sort of unwieldiness and caprice that allows her to undertake this Union. She, as it turns out, feels a profound aversion to her husband. She hides in a dismal closet rather than enter the bedroom. Once, dreaming that he was approaching her, she jumped out of the window. Is this neurasthenia and hysteria? To look at it in that way is to impose a later abstraction of definition upon a soul; one might almost say a new kind of human being, probably struggling for alienation. To which she confesses to Jude:

...... ‘I like Mr. Phillotson as a friend, I don’t like him- it is a torture to me to - live with him as a husband!’...... What tortures me so much is the necessity of being responsible to this man whenever he wishes,

This marriage is all in vain; desperately in love, they defy convention and elope. The bitter stages of fear, sorrow and waster through which passes the beautiful but nervous Sue Bridgehead is not less heart-rending.
The world Jude lives in is a world without joy. Jude starts life as a normal man, with normal instincts, but not for one instant does he enjoy himself. He does not even come across any likeable people, except Sue and Phillotson, and they are neurotics. The general gloom in which Hardy was allowing when he wrote *Jude* did betray him into philosophic inconsistency. In this he does not only attack the universal plan, he also goes for human institutions and human beings. In *Jude the Obscure* Hardy makes an onslaught on the marriage laws and on snobbish dons.

Jude and Sue though they obtain a divorce, they neither marry nor leave the district they live in. In consequence, they are ostracized. If we confine out attention to the question of marriage, Jude’s aunt again utters warnings against marriage for the Hopeson-stancombe-Fawley family. Arabella has said tauntingly that they make ‘a queer lot’ as husbands and wives. Jude on questioning his aunt learns that his own parents separated, causing his mother to drown herself.

It is the tragic flaw in Sue’s character, her inconstant nature and nervour constitution which inflicts torment and tragedy upon her. It is her enemy but it does not work against her as much as it works against her rivals. She confesses, “I am not really Mrs. Richard Phillotson but a woman tossed about, all alone, with aberrant passions and unaccountable antipathies”.

In the end what is so poignant is that Sue’s brightness and will to freedom cannot save her. She goes down into despair with Jude and, finally,
under the strain of life, sinks into a punishing denial of her own principles about marriage, religion and alienation. She has not, through ideas and strong personal leanings, been able to break out of poverty and defeat and the undermining force of an accumulation of disasters. Life simply will not open itself to her frail unsupported brightness. In despair she tries to name the mystery of implacable barriers:

They are talking about us, no doubt!’ moaned Sue “we are made a spectacle unto the world, ‘There is something exterior to us which says, “you shanty!” First it said, “You shan’t love!”

Sue is very unsettling in the prodigal openness with which she greets these dark holes of withdrawal. She tells Jude of the most important experience of her youth, her meeting with a young undergraduate:

...... We used to go about together - on walking tours, reading tours, and things of that sort - like two men almost. He asked me to love with him, and I agreed to by letter. But when I joined him in London I found he meant a different thing from what I meant. He wanted me to be his mistress, in fact, but I wasn’t in love with him - and on my saying I should go away if he didn’t agree to plan, he did so. We shared a sitting - room of fifteen months; and he became a leader - writer for one of the great London dailies; till he was taken ill, and had to go abroad. He said I was breaking his heart by holding out against him so long at such close quarters; he
could never have believed it of woman. I might play that game once too often, he said. He came home merely to die. His death caused a terrible remorse to me for my cruelty - though I hope he died of consumption and not of me entirely. I went down to Sandbourne to his funeral, and was his only mourner. He left me a little money because I broke his heart, I suppose. That’s how men are - so much better than women!.

The passage reveals of an [intellectual] alienation that gives an assurance to one’s character and even a measure of tranquility and resignation to balance the shattering and shaking of psychological intensity.

Jude is a village boy of humble origin, an orphan. Hardy, as is his wont, expresses a situation in tones of doom and without the reductive effect of humour. In the words of Jude’s aunt:”...... It would be ‘been a blessing if Gaddy - might had took the too, we’ they mother and father, poor useless boy!”. No wonders that “… the predestinate Jude” keeps wishing as a child, that he “had never been born’, that he were ‘out of the world’, nor that, later, he contemplates committing suicide;”.... What was he reserved for? He supposed he was not a sufficiently dignified person for suicide”. Jude comes to see himself as “perhaps, after all a paltry victim to the spirit of mental and social restlessness, that makes so many unhappy in these days!”.

The Aldrickham pub where Jude takes Sue to begin their life together and where she refuses to ‘live with’ him in the usual sense, is
shadowed by the temporary physical union he had there with Arabella, which strikes him as the worse offence. Arabella’s coarseness is a mirror of Jude’s weakness, which he confesses to Sue: “..... My two Arch Enemies you know- my weakness for womankind and my impulse to strong liquor......”. He is scared of yet another betrayal which is expressed in his pitiable words: “...... Don’t abandon me to them, Sue, to save your own soul only! They have been kept entirely at a distance since you became my guardian - angle!..... I am in terror best, if you leave me, it will be with me another case of the pig that was washed turning back to his wallowing in the mire!”.

As all the effort of Jude and Sue end in misery:

... Their failure to find a compromise between the best of Hellenism

Contributes to their personal tragedy.......17

Hardy’s symbolic presentation of Little Father Time is such a vision, not a mistake in a novel of social realism. The paradox of absurdity comes home with full force embodied in a child, when one remembers Jude’s youthful hopes. This boy in a fit of despair over the misery of the world - despair inherited from his father and grandmother-he hands himself and Sue’s two babies on the back of the door - an appalling scene. “Done because we are too many”, Jean Brooke Comment: “Yet Little Father Time’s negation does not constitute the total effect of this great and terrible vision of the human condition.....”19
It is a bleak vision of life to which Hardy tries to give a scientific endorsement preposterously all illegitimately. The doctor called to examine the corpuses of Little Father Time and the other children makes the comment:

..... there are such boys springing up amongst us - boys of a sort unknown in the last generation - the outcome of new views of life
..... He says it is the beginning of the coming universal wish not to live........

Both Jude and Sue remarry their former spouses, inspire of a legal divorce on each side, and with resultant miseries to all four. Jude’s love for Sue is real, he longs for her till his last. But Sue refuses his last pleading of love and a new beginning in an agonized gesture:

Their suffering suggests the life that will evolve beyond their own.

Deserted on his deathbed by all, Jude hears the shouting and applause rising from the sports outside. And as the cheering of the Oxford men continues, he whispers to himself in isolation the consummate lamentation: Not only is Jude dead, with all his aims unfulfilled, but he dies with the triumphant shouts from the river ironically punctuation his memories of Job:

“Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, there is a man child conceived.” ‘Let that day be darkness; let not God regard it from above, neither let the light shine upon it. Let that night be solitary, let no joyful voice come therein’. ‘Why died I not from the womb? Why did I not give up the
ghost when I came out of the belly? ..... For now should I have lain
still and been quiet. I should have slept: Then I been at rest!’ ..... 
wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the
bitter in soul?’.

Jude whispers nearly the whole of that superb passage. He lies
stretched out alone on the bed. And with Arabella cynically leaving her
husband’s corpse to enjoy her and provide for her future next “Chance”. Sue has
returned to Phillotson. This time, clenching her teeth and eloping her eyes, she
surrendered to him physically for whom she feels a physical aversion. This act
may be more tragic than Jude’s death. “She’s never found peace since she left
his arms and never will again till she’s as he is now!” says Arabella in the final
word of the novel.

The theme to an alienation in dramatic visual terms seems crystal-
clear throughout the novel. We discover that, Arabella prodding her disheveled
state in front of the cottage after her quarrel with Jude. The separate rooms that,
Jude and Sue occupy. Sue caressing Jude through a window or by letter, where
the barrier of distance enables her to find release in tenderness from her fear of
physical life. Again, Jude dramatically marking Sue’s decision to return to
Phillotson: ‘he went to the bed, removed one of the pair of pillows there on, and
flung it to the floor’. David Cecil’s comment aptly sums up the purpose of this
novel:
...... Hardy’s tender heart, stirred by the suffering of working-men with intellectual aspiration and uncomfortably warm sexual temperaments, wished to write a book bringing house these sufferings to others. And he is therefore at pains to give an accurate presentation of such a life.......20

Hardy does not celebrate isolation and separation. He mourns them, and yet always with the courage to look them steadily in the face. The losses are real and heart-breaking because the desires were real, the shared work was real, and the unsatisfied impulses were real. Work and desire are very deeply connected in his imagination. The Passion of Marty or of Tess or of Jude is a positive force coming out of a working and relating world and seeking in different ways its fulfillments. That all are frustrated is the essential action: frustrated by very complicated processes of division, separation and rejection. People choose wrongly but under terrible pressures: under the confusions of class, under its misunderstandings, under the calculated rejections of a divided world. Hardy moves closer to them in his actual development, so that the affirmation of Tess and Jude- an affirmation in and through the defeats he traces and mourns-becomes the strongest in all his works.
References

1. The Return of the Native, p. 196.


9. Ibid., p. 294.

16. Ibid. p. 119.
18. Ibid., p. 258.