

An Aspect of Modernity in Thomas Hardy's Late Poetry Submitted

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Skepticism, one prominent aspect of modernity, is seen evidently in Hardy's poetry which grew in him from the beginning of his literary career as a poet. However, this tendency got matured within him and well emerged in his late poetry. It accompanied him throughout his life which made him adopt an attitude of loss of faith, death of spiritual love and deep, agonizing sense of loneliness.

Going back to his early life, one can see that Thomas Hardy's attitude was attributed to certain influential reasons which can be considered as shaping factors for his deplorable spiritual state. Thus, the publication of Darwin's Theory : *The Origin of Species* actually set a deep impact on Hardy's mentality, turning him to be a purely secular thinker .He began to mistrust the authenticity of religion, regarding it as an invalid belief .On the other hand, some other causes made him have the sense of bitterness toward life. His failure in his first marriage was accompanied with his disappointment in his early literary career as a poet .He could not acquire his living properly since people then had no interest in poetry. So he was obliged to turn to novel and began writing and publishing novels

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against his own will for he was born to be a poet .Consequently, man in Hardy's world is ill-fated, destined by his fate.

Thus, in Hardy's world, for example, loss, death and loneliness are inevitable conditions. This is partly a fact of his age, but it is also the conditions of man in Hardy's universe. In reading his poems, one notices how often they reveal a solitary figure. "The Darkling Thrush" is a good example, reflecting this tendency. In such poems, a self observes the world, but is not quite a part of it. It is the existence of the self as a watcher of the living. The figure in the poems is rarely engaged in an action or involved with other persons; sometimes he is even removed from the world as a ghost in ' I Travel as a Phantom Now' or as a dead man in 'The Dead Man Walking' - or he moves forward in time to imagine a time when he will be dead as in the fine 'Afterwards'. Every one of Hardy's eight volumes of verse has some kind of farewell or acknowledgement of separating age, at the end- as though Hardy expected each book to be posthumous. This sense of retrospection of a voice speaking from the far side of life is a part of the dominant tone of Hardy's poetry. Let us consider for example, the little poem entitled" That Moment":

The tragedy of that moment
Was deeper than the sea,
When I came in that moment

And heard you speak to me!

What I could not help seeing
Covered life as a blot,
Yes, that which I was seeing,
And knew that you were not

(Motion, p. 195)

It is really difficult for a reader to penetrate through this vague utterance. Yet for Hardy it was clearly a complete piece of reality, and adequate to his poetic needs. This sense of the poem as a habitual, private act of ordering may explain the presence among his poems of a great many events that record what must seem to the reader quite trivial incidents. In "Autumn in King's Hintock Park", for example, an old woman sweeps up leaves in the grounds of a great country house, and thinks about nature and the passage of time-that is all.

During his years in London (1862-1867) Hardy had begun to write poetry. Some of the love poems of this period- for example "Neutral Tones" are among his finest and most characteristic works. "Neutral Tones" is a miracle of achievement for this self-manufacturing poet; the poem confuses studies of his development, in that such a completed poem occurs so early:

We stood by a pond that winter day,

And the sun was white as though chidden of God,
And a few leaves lay on the starving sod,
They had fallen from an ash, and were gray.

(Motion, A.p.4.)

He is a poet of continuous combination: here the power of the Dorset landscape, the tragedy of love, and the suffering of loss "in the words that play uselessly now between the lovers. The retrospective backward look, a common subject in Hardy, gives no brightness except for repetition gone old in the mind, but still painful". Thus Hardy has become expert in creating usual images for those patterns that impose themselves.

However, this lyric is a description of a particular occasion probably a parting scene, on "that winter day". A scene which is harmonious with the mood of the lovers. This winter scene generalizes the cruel nature of love. The first stanza is a sort of explanation: the lovers are introduced along with the place where they met. Each detail has a symbolic meaning- the white sun, the few gray leaves are expressive of the barrenness, the colorlessness of the landscape and, the quantity of heroes' emotions- their hopelessness and a sorrowful, cold despair. The mention of the winter day is not an indifferent or neutral matter: the death of nature is a parallel to the death of feeling, and the whole imagery of the poem is colored with the conception of present or future decay.

Hardy wrote to Galsworthy in 1921, "do not look particularly attractive in England and Europe political aspects". He added, "... that books would decay, and the only form of writing would be for football and boxing journals, and for the cinema. There will be a new Dark Age". (*Gittings*, p.255).

The epithet "white" applied to the sun is unusual, especially when accompanied by the simile "as though chidden of God". It seems the sun went pale because it bitterly felt the blames addressed to it by God. The "starving sods" in the context means dry and frozen, which parallel the hunger of heart that tortures the lovers.

The first verse which sets, "also prepares the readers for the exchanges, which are largely un verbalized between the lovers (Gibson, p.20). The second and the third verses dwell on the heroes' themselves. The two verses run on parallel lines. There is not a direct statement of the heroes' emotions; both describe the man's impression of his mistress's looks, of which naturally, her eyes and mouth are the most powerful. This is a characteristic tendency that found its full expression in a large portion of twentieth century poetry- to substitute distinct images in the place of feeling and thus to reveal them without actually naming them.

His favorite device is dissociation of ideas that go together: to the lover, the eyes of his mistress, according to accepted standards,