

(Eng. Hons.) Hardy's pessimism

(4th Sem.)

Thomas Hardy is one of the few English novelists, along with Dickens, to have acquired a universal reputation. Raymond Williams concludes, — 'Hardy is our flesh and our grass'. Darwinian thought and the raising wave of agnosticism certainly undermined young Hardy's faith in Christianity and the church and though he chose to tell simple, moving and passionate stories of love and romance in the traditional manner, the elements of doubt, irony and ambiguity entered the Hardy universe, as of necessity. The sense of fatalism and tragedy we associate with his name was thus the response of a highly sensitive imagination at a given moment in British history. This, as we know, was the time when the Industrial Revolution had begun to penetrate the English countryside and affect the matrix of relationships in a society that had remained almost unchanged for centuries. Though Hardy's major novels — "The Return of the Native", "The Mayor of Casterbridge", "Tess of the D'Urbervilles" and "Jude the Obscure" — dramatize the existential agony of man, it must not be forgotten that his tragic vision was not devoid of humanism.

It is a mistake to think that Hardy mourned the passing away of pastoral or rural England, or that the forces of Science and

technology had darkened his vision. The feudal values, the exploitation of the peasantry, the stronghold of superstitions, the reactionary role of the manor and the church — all these aspects of the English countryside wrung no requiem from him. It was the time when education had begun to close the gap between town and country and that the gifted sons of yeomen and of the working classes could no longer be decoyed into dreams of the ~~old~~ past. Hardy sought to explain this despair in terms of a deterministic philosophy, yet he hated life intensely and does not think it worth living. He perceives it in the grip of cruel, blind and oppressive Unknown Will —

"Like flies to aanton boys; are are to the gods,
they kill us for their sport."

Not that his successful creations are all virtuous as they commit sins in a grand manner. of course, we shall come across many a one who become the instruments of evil fate and become the cause of the ruin of his protagonists. Chance in its purely malevolent aspect enters our life and spoils it, brings trials and tribulations, sorrows and sufferings, pain and agony in its train, what is the use of being a play thing in the hands of the President of the Immortals."

"The Label of 'A Pessimist' is affixed to his name forever and for ever. But he resented it during his life time."

He said that he was simply recording sincerely, faithfully and truly the impressions of life that he had received. Though he is a pessimist and there is a dark, grimly dark and gloomy side yet there is a bright sunny side. He is not a misanthrope like Hobbes who thinks man essentially a beast, mean, abject, detestable and an odious creature. He is a pessimist like the classical writers who consider man merely a puppet in the hands of mighty Fate — unjust, cruel, blind and jealous of happiness of mankind. In his opinion — "As in looking at a carpet, by following one colour a certain pattern is suggested, by following an other another" and he said that in his novels he had simply traced out such a single pattern by looking at the carpet of life.

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