

# THOMAS HARDY

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WHEN Thomas Hardy died last January in his quiet Dorset home, he passed from a countryside that had loved him companionably; from a nation which had delighted to honour him (he had received the Order of Merit in 1910, and Oxford, Cambridge and Aberdeen had given him doctorates); from a circle of famous writers who had long since acknowledged his quiet deanship; and from a whole world of thoughtful readers to whom Sue and Ethelberta and Elfride and Bathsheba and Tess, Jude and Henchard and Clym Yeobright and Gabriel Oak, had become their living fellows

. . . . 'mid this dance  
Of plastic circumstance.

At the funeral service in Westminster Abbey the wise and the simple, high men and humble, came to do reverence to the dignity and sincerity of the life of this great genius. Sir James Barrie was there, who wept as he placed Mrs. Hardy's sheaf of lilies on the grave. Rudyard Kipling was there, and John Galsworthy, Arnold Bennett, John Masefield, Bernard Shaw, Alfred Housman, John Drinkwater and Sir Edmund Gosse. The Prime Minister was there, and Ramsay Macdonald. The dead man's nearest ones—his widow and his sister, accompanied by his old Stinsford friend and physician, Dr. Mann—were the chief mourners. The beautiful ceremony ended with the singing of Hardy's favourite hymn—*Lead Kindly Light*—the same hymn which, sung by "the little, attenuated voices of the children", had so moved Bathsheba in *Far from the Madding Crowd*. The interment was over, the Dead March from *Saul* was played, and Hardy's ashes rested beside the other tenants of Poet's Corner. By his wife's wish his heart was buried in Stinsford's small churchyard (Stinsford is the "Mellstock" of *Under the Greenwood Tree*), and there too Newman's noble hymn was sung. Hardy himself had hoped to lie in his loved Wessex, "unless the nation wishes it elsewhere." He had admired Shelley much. Perhaps it would have pleased him that the last act should, in some sort, provide a parallel.

Like Shelley, Hardy had no party in religion or art or politics but mankind itself. He must have shared Emerson's feeling:

I like a church; I like a cowl;  
 I love a prophet of the soul;  
 And on my heart monastic aisles  
 Fall like sweet strains, or pensive smiles;  
 Yet not for all his faith can see  
 Would I that cowléd churchman be.

Yet his agnosticism is so Catholic, his melancholy so spiritual, his irony so compassionate, his sober gospel of "evolutionary meliorism" (as he himself has called it) so honest and constant, that not only for his fame but for his faith as well it seems wholly fitting that he should rest in the Abbey. (One of his last poems—*A Refusal*—protests against the exclusion of Byron.) For if the essence of religion be a conscientious appraisal of one's own time and task; a belief in the possibility of growth, of improvement; a desire to co-operate with the process of such evolution; and the manifestation of a gentle spirit in all one's human relationships—then Hardy was a deeply religious man. It hurt him to be thought a pessimist, and I have heard him comment on the variousness of humanity and on the difficulty of being understood.

That loose and superficial opinion of Hardy, however, persists in many quarters. The Swedish Academy, for example, has never found his work meritorious enough to justify the award to him of the Literary Nobel Prize. Only five years ago a writer in the *Svensk Tidskrift*, of Stockholm, defended this decision in the following words:

The best explanation of the attitude of the Academy toward Mr. Hardy is the one that is nearest at hand—namely, that the Academy, after a thorough and judicious estimate of the merits of Mr. Hardy's authorship, has found that his dark naturalism, with its deterministic psychology and its pessimistic outlook, does not fulfil the requirements stipulated by the founder for the Literary Nobel Prize, which, by a clause that so far as known has not yet been annulled, limits awards of the prize to authors who have been creative in an "idealistic direction". The phrasing of this clause is, to be sure, not very happy; but the intention, in any event, is clear enough, and if its meaning is respected a refusal of Mr. Hardy's candidacy may be considered as wholly justified. Perhaps the Swedish Academy has also found that the enthusiasm for Hardy prevailing for the moment is a bit exaggerated. The situation undeniably is that, while Hardy at the present time is being described by a number of contributors to our press as an author practically without any weaknesses, his production as a matter of fact—as has been acknowledged by English critics—is quite uneven and far from always wholly admirable. His form is heavy and restrained. The development of his action is often unreasonably slow, and the atmosphere oppressive with its gloomy monotony.

In thus emphasizing these defects it is not intended to deny his importance, which would be unjust and foolish. On the other hand, it may be doubted whether he really is entitled to such an absolutely unrivalled position in modern literature as some of his admirers in this country have wished to attribute to him.

Aside from the obvious consideration that it may be said of no author's works that they are "always wholly admirable" or that they possess the same degree of merit, the foregoing statement no doubt presents the case against Hardy as reasonably as so brief a word permits. For myself, I have never been able to discover in what his alleged pessimism consists. What indeed is pessimism? The *New English Dictionary* defines it under three heads, as follows:

1. The worst condition or degree possible or conceivable; the state of greatest deterioration; antithetical to optimism.
2. The tendency or disposition to look at the worst aspect of things; the habit of taking the gloomiest view of circumstances; antithetical to optimism.
3. The name given to the doctrine of Schopenhauer, Hartmann, and other earlier and later philosophers, that this world is the worst possible, or that everything naturally tends to evil.

Of these usages, the first two are, of course, merely popular, while the third refers to the usual content of the word as employed in the world of thought. Yet Schopenhauer, who, like Spinoza and other philosophers, has interested and influenced Hardy, makes pessimism only an incidental part of his exposition of the Will as "the immanent essence of the world." With this exposition Hardy's thought largely agrees, to be sure, but Hardy's thought, however powerful an ingredient in his art, is still an ingredient. Like Shelley, he has sought to imagine that which he knows. He is not writing as philosopher, but as poet. The philosopher's business is to explore and explain the principle of Being in terms of related and organized ideas; the poet's, to depict the scenes of life and interpret its circumstances imaginatively, as symbols of possible ideas. As Hardy has modestly written in his preface to *Poems of the Past and the Present*, "unadjusted impressions have their value, and the road to a true philosophy of life seems to lie in humbly recording diverse readings of its phenomena as they are forced upon us by chance and change." And elsewhere he reminds his readers that, although many of his first-person lyrics may seem disconnected and even, perhaps, reciprocally inconsistent, this difficulty will be overcome if they are regarded, in the main, "as dramatic monologues by different characters."

A long review of Hardy's writings (whether as novelist or singer, he is pre-eminently poet) assures us that he subscribes to neither of the facile sayings that this is the worst of all possible worlds, or that it is the best. His view of contemporary civilization, certainly, is not very reassuring; but most of us have learned, since 1914, to question somewhat the excellence of organized society. Hardy's intellectual honesty compels him as thinker to envisage the problem of the world-order as completely as he can before he ventures to prescribe any means of improving it. If we refuse to be frank enough, courageous enough, to look in the face the worst that life has to offer, if we ignore its painful facts and insist on living self-indulgently in fools' paradises, we can be fictitiously happy, no doubt, but we shall rob ourselves of the power to make any real progress. As Hardy has said of himself in the second poem of the group he calls *In Tenebris*:—

Let him to whose ears the low-voiced Best seems stilled by the  
clash of the First,  
Who holds that if way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look  
at the Worst,  
Who feels that delight is a delicate growth cramped by crooked-  
ness, custom and fear,  
Get him up and be gone as one shaped awry; he disturbs the order  
here.

Other poems in which Hardy comments upon the disfavour with which some readers have regarded him are *To a Lady Offended by a Book of the Writer's*, *The Problem*, *To Sincerity*, *In Front of the Landscape*, *In the Seventies*, *She Who Saw Not*, *Xenophanes the Monist of Colophon*, and *The Aerolite*. But just as Browning had his word to say to the critics who for forty odd years had charged him with obscurity, so Hardy for once issued a direct rejoinder to the like traditionalists who condemned his pessimism. This reply appears in the Preface to *Late Lyrics and Earlier*. Although it is too long to quote here in its entirety, some selected portions may serve to acquaint us with Hardy's thought of his own position:

While I am quite aware that a thinker is not expected, and indeed is scarcely allowed. . .to state all that crosses his mind concerning existence in this universe, in his attempts to explain or excuse the presence of evil and the incongruity of penalizing the irresponsible—it must be obvious to open intelligences that, whout denying the beauty and faithful service of certain venerable cults, such disallowance of "obstinate questionings" and "blank misgivings" tends to a paralyzed intellectual stalemate. Heine observed nearly a hundred years ago that the soul has her eternal rights; that she will not be darkened by statutes, nor lullabied by the music of bells. And what is to-day, in allusions to the

present author's pages, alleged to be "pessimism" is, in truth, only such "questionings" in the exploration of reality, and is the first step towards the soul's betterment, and the body's also.

He then quotes the second line of the four taken above from *In Tenebris*, and suggests that the "way to the Better" through "a full look at the Worst" requires the frank recognition of reality along each stage of the survey—

with an eye to the best consummation possible: briefly, evolutionary meliorism. But it is called pessimism nevertheless; under which word, expressed with condemnatory emphasis, it is regarded by many as some pernicious new thing (though so old as to underlie the Gospel scheme, and even to permeate the Greek drama); and the subject is charitably left to decent silence, as if further comment were needless.

And this already classic reply concludes with the expression of the hope, however forlorn,

of an alliance between religion, which must be retained unless the world is to perish, and complete rationality, which must come unless also the world is to perish, by means of the interfusing effect of poetry—"the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; the impassioned expression of science", as it was defined by an English poet who was quite orthodox in his ideas. But if it be true, as Comte argued, that advance is never in a stright line, but in a looped orbit, we may, in the aforesaid ominous moving backward, be doing it *pour mieux sauter*, drawing back for a spring. I repeat that I forlornly hope so, notwithstanding the supercilious regard of hope by Schopenhauer, von Hartmann, and other philosophers down to Einstein who have my respect. . . .

If these words will not persuade their author's critics to abandon the charge in question, perhaps no words will. In his work, *The Ultimatum of Pessimism*, Professor James W. Barlow, of Trinity College, Dublin, confesses his dislike of the superlative terms—pessimism and optimism—and would distinguish four as against two classes of thinkers: (1) Bono-meliorists, who hold that life is good, and hope it may become still better; (2) Bono-pejorists, who regard life as good, but fear its deterioration; (3) Malo-meliorists, who consider life largely evil, but hope for its improvement; and (4) Malo-pejorists, who think life evil, and likely to become more so. Certainly, in the light of Hardy's own explanation and in the temper of his fiction and poetry viewed as a whole, he is to be identified as a sincere adherent of the third group.

Ranking is always a difficult and dangerous process, and criticism here runs the risk of conforming to personal preference

rather than to abstract principles. If I were to try to indicate roughly the order of the better novels of Hardy as regards that combination of structure, style, atmosphere and sympathy that represents them at their best, I should give first place to *The Return of the Native*, following it with (2) *Jude the Obscure*, (3) *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, (4) *Far from the Madding Crowd*, (5) *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, (6) *The Woodlanders*, (7) *Under the Greenwood Tree*, (8) *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, and (9) *Two on a Tower*. Of these, Hardy calls the first seven "novels of character and environment", and the other two "romances" or "fantasies." The first class is by far the largest, numbering half of the whole, and has obviously engaged his chief interest in his story-telling. In other words, he quickly came to feel and believe, as most great modern novelists have done, that plot is useful chiefly as a device for disclosing character, and that the study of the springs and sources of action is much more interesting than mere reportorial registrations of action;

To the motive, the endeavour, the heart's self,  
Your quick sense looks: you crown and call aright  
The soul o' the purpose, ere 'tis shaped as act.

Hardy began his work as a novelist, however, with one of the three stories he calls "novels of ingenuity." The plot of *Desperate Remedies* is melodramatic and unconvincing, for its author was, as he says, "feeling his way to a method." It is redeemed in its high moments by the thoughtful beauty of its style and by the pensive, innocent charm of its heroine, Cytherea. *The Hand of Ethelberta* is in the same category, but it is better organized and depends less upon the element of surprise, save, perhaps, in the somewhat stagey conclusion. Ethelberta is a rather self-reliant heroine, yet a real enough woman, while her butler-father Chickereel is a true forerunner of Barrie's Admirable Crichton. There is a conversational hint in the seventh chapter of the Hardy view of tragedy, and in the eighth an incisive remark on genius. The descriptions of the slowly disappearing fog as seen from a cathedral tower in Paris, of the approach of autumn at Knollsea, and of the sea in storm between Sandbourne and Knollsea, are as good as anything in the book. Here, too, we find, as in all of Hardy's novels, the frequent literary allusions that betray the well-read man. Shakespeare is cited or quoted some six or seven times, and there are references also to Defoe (a great favourite of Hardy's), Milton, Scott, Hood, Swift, Shelley, Wordsworth and the Bible. *A Laodicean*, the third of this group, divided by a decade from *Desperate Remedies*, is less praiseworthy than its predecessors.

The first of the character novels to appear was *Under the Greenwood Tree*. Here is Hardy in light, humorous, idyllic mood, and here for the first time we taste the full flavour of his Shakespearean rustic characterizations. "Good, but not religious-good." "That man's silence is wonderful to listen to." "Wives be such a provoking class of society, because though they be never right, they be never more than half wrong." Rural wisdom thus gravely records itself.

The romance, *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, followed within a year. While it is difficult to agree with Abercrombie's large praise of the mastery of plot shown here, it is still more difficult to accept his classification of it as a minor novel. The story is certainly well plotted, but the balance seems over-nicely maintained, and the correspondence of event with event, circumstance with circumstance, is rather too precisely achieved. The symbolic aspects, too—in tower, tomb, earrings, vault and ship—are obtruded a shade too anxiously. But the comic relief is handled with fine skill. We close the book with intimate memories of Stephen Smith, Henry Knight and Elfride Swancourt; and William Worm, peasant, we shall not easily forget. Among the *obiter dicta* are these:

A man in love setting up his brains as a gauge of his position is as one determining a ship's longitude from a light at the mast-head.

It is extraordinary how many women have no honest love of music as an end and not as a means, even leaving out those who have nothing in them. They mostly like it for its accessories. I have never met a woman who loves music as do ten or a dozen men I know.

In *Far from the Madding Crowd* Hardy created his first really great novel. It is great in its organization, in the magic marriages between moments and settings, in the clear fresh felicity of its style, in its searching soul-analyses, in its long choral conversations among the naive folk of the soil, and in the always effective and often enchanting pastoral prose-poetry. This last pulses rhythmically of night skies; of "water-meadows traversed by little brooks, whose quivering surfaces were braided along their centres, and folded into creases at the sides"; of "a day which had a summer face and a winter constitution"; of Warren's malt-house and the yokels gathered there; of the Corn Exchange; of the sheep-washing (more poetic, this, than Thomson's verses on the same theme); of bird-life; of a rick of straw afire; of a winter sunrise (chapter XIV); of early spring (XVIII); of storm (XXXVII); of poor

Fanny's solitary funeral in the rain (XLII); of the swamp (XLIV); and of the sea (XLVII). The tale is great also in its temper of patience, of pity, of humour, of quiet irony, of home-bred wisdom. The humanity of Gabriel Oak and of Bathsheba Everdene becomes so unmistakable that they seem to step in and out of the story at will. We accept them. We are aware of them. They are in our life. Next to them comes bashful Joseph Poorgrass, true son of the soil, who with his artless associates must provide the homely orchestra for this romantic tragedy. Passionate Boldwood and pleasure-seeking Troy are real enough, but they await their creator's signal to think and to act. The tragedy is true to itself as it follows the history of Fanny, but is forced a little in Boldwood's case, the author disposing of him too summarily perhaps, while in other respects also he shows some haste and strain in the closing chapters.

The core of Clym Yeobright's problem in *The Return of the Native* is found in Book III, Chapter IV: "Three antagonistic growths had to be kept alive: his mother's trust in him, his plan for becoming a teacher, and Eustacia's happiness." In Book VI, Chapter III, we find the melancholy solution: "He had but three activities alive in him. One was his almost daily walk to the little graveyard wherein his mother lay; another, his just as frequent visits by night to the more distant enclosure which numbered his Eustacia among its dead; the third was self-preparation for a vocation which alone seemed likely to satisfy his cravings—that of an itinerant preacher of the eleventh commandment." But Clym, although a person, is also a pawn in the play of the Vast out of which came man and unto which he must return—the Vast that is symbolized here less in any one earthly history or consciousness than in earth itself in one of its most ancient and inscrutable aspects—Egdon Heath. Egdon Heath is the true hero of this great epic, throughout which its undertone reverberates, its secret power controls, while by its unifying immobility may be measured the movements of the human creatures who cross and recross its surface. The architectural balance and proportion of the story deserve high praise, and its use of symbolism is strangely subtle. The tragic Eustacia attracts into tragedy both Clym and Wildeve. She is not a divinity, but "the raw material of a divinity." The analysis of Clym in Book II, Chapter VI—"The Two Stand Face to Face"—is as impressive in expression as in insight. Wildeve, Thomasine, Diggory Venn and Mrs. Yeobright are also completely characterized, and the rustic (Cattle) chorus is even better controlled than in earlier work. Indeed, one of the greatest merits of *The Return*, next



to its structure, is the reality of its perspective, each figure, whatever its relative position, being idiosyncratic and alive. The minutely faithful descriptions of landscapes and atmospheres, and the many memorable aphorisms, are as intimate a part of the fabric of this masterpiece as the explorations of character and the caused and causal events that make for fear and doom and for the thinned-out subscript of what is, in some sort, a "happy ending."

Like its predecessors, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* plots a series of matrimonial entanglements. Michael Henchard is its sole hero, its Hamlet-Tamburlaine, with himself at war and with the Fate that alternately infuriates and enfeebles him. It is peculiarly a person-parable, having much less nature-symbolism and a somewhat less finely dovetailed plot than *The Return*. As in all of Hardy's novels, some of the prophetic incidents are too plainly identified as such, and we could wish away some of the phrasal mannerisms and syntactical slips; but so powerful and so fine is the art of the telling that a few lapses in mere artifice seem hardly worth noticing.

Henry James once said that Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* is the most consistently gloomy of English novels of the first order. He could hardly have read then *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* or *Jude the Obscure*. But if these tales walk into gloom, they do so in order that they may examine it, explore it, express it. The idealism of Hardy is apparent enough in such passages as these from *Tess*: "Beauty to her, as to all who have felt, lies not in the thing, but in what the thing symbolizes." "In considering what Tess was not, he overlooked what she was, and that the incomplete can be more than the complete." The first of these reveals the sensitive strength of Tess's nature; the second, the sensitive weakness of Angel Clare's. Dramatically considered, the plot of *Tess* is skilfully developed. Tess's ignorant slaying of her father's horse and her subsequent self-reproaches serve as a remote exciting force in relation to her real crime, and the "accidents" which lead to the latter so promote the tragic intensity of the tale that even the touches of melodrama seem artistically austere and acceptable. *Jude*, although it admits (and successfully carries) even more of the sensational, impresses me as a greater work, in which the theme of conventional as against essential morality, of legalism as against legality, is more widely examined, more deeply interpreted. Jude-Arabella, Jude-Sue, Sue-Phyllotson—all these problematic relations are further complicated by the Arabella-Cart union and by the Sue-undergraduate partnership. There are several stages in the Jude-Sue movement. Each looks for and loves the other before the

first meeting, and each so continually echoes and intensifies the other's peculiar qualities that neither can find peace and happiness, even in their mutual love.

This is the most allusive of the novels in literary reference, and its judgments are uttered with the quietude of a spirit wise and experienced as well as earnestly protestant against things-as-they-are. Jude's tragedy is dreadful, but it has its own dignity; while poor Sue's fate involves degradation. If she desired social happiness as well as individual, she should have tried to adhere to her time's norms as far as possible, recognizing the while that an eternalist can often modify the terms of time by meeting them. Her mind's misgivings constantly made for her heart's unhappiness. No wonder that in those earlier days "when her intellect scintillated like a star" she had likened the world to "a stanza or melody composed in a dream"; "it was wonderfully excellent to the half-aroused intelligence, but hopelessly absurd at the full waking." It seemed to her that "the First Cause worked automatically like a somnambulist, and not reflectively like a sage; that at the framing of the terrestrial conditions there seemed never to have been contemplated such a development of emotional perceptiveness among the creatures subject to those conditions as that reached by thinking and educated humanity."

On account of this and kindred utterances Hardy has been regarded as one of little faith. One might as well complain of Job, or of Shelley. Hardy's spirit, as already suggested, is deeply religious. He is seriously concerned with the core of problems whose periphery is enough, too often, for dogmatists. All his life has been a prayer—a prayer to humanity to love its neighbour (bird, beast or man); a prayer to Nature to heed and help the predicament of humanity; a prayer to the static and changeless Imprecipient (as in the After Scene of *The Dynasts*) to become the God-beyond-God of man's hope, dynamic, aware, beneficent.

The late Joseph Conrad, after extolling the work of Hardy, once remarked to me: "But I do not need his novels for myself." No. The Hardy mood is man's riper mood to-day, and, as Hardy himself believed, his thought and hope find their intensest expression in his poetry. He preferred the poetic medium for several reasons. For one thing, verse is so much more condensed than prose; and then, as the world ages and there is less and less time for our many tasks and turnings, poetry, he thought, may again come into its own.

Hardy began writing verse in his youthful days when he was an apprentice in architecture to John Hicks, of Dorchester. He destroyed most of his early efforts, and both his father and Hicks

discouraged further poetic adventures. During his career as novelist, he produced, of course, relatively little verse, but resumed the poet gladly in 1898. His works in this kind include *Wessex Poems and Other Verses* (1898), *Poems of the Past and the Present* (1901), *Time's Laughingstocks and Other Verses* (1909), *Satires of Circumstance* (a phrase first used in *The Hand of Ethelberta*), *Lyrics and Reveries* (1914), and *Moments of Vision and Miscellaneous Verses* (1917). All of these are included in *Collected Poems* (1919). The three parts of *The Dynasts* appeared respectively in 1904, 1906 and 1908; and that whole work stands now as Volume II of the Poems. *Late Lyrics and Earlier* (1922), *The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall* (1923), and *Human Shows and Far Phantasies* (1925) complete the record.

The shorter poems of Hardy number well over eight hundred. He classifies them as lyrical, narratory and reflective. For the most part, they are intellectual precipitations of emotional and dramatic values. As regards pattern, they are complete architectural miniatures; as regards tone, they have a more than Wordsworthian or Arnoldian austerity, together with Hardy's characteristic economy, clarity, definiteness, terseness and precision. Always, says Sir Edmund Gosse, Hardy's poetry avoids the commonplace; I should rather say that it quietly uncloaks the commonplace, and reveals unsuspected intensities lurking there. The chief theme is love—its worth and its imperfection, its sympathy and its passion, its constancies and its disloyalties, the "passages of proof" wherein "time qualifies the spark and fire of it." Often in these passages Hardy uses the framework of marriage, elopement, flirtation, unchastity, misunderstanding, betrayal, desertion, fatherhood and motherhood. Death and bereavement provide a second interest, their mysteries challenging all his powers of thought and imagination. He is especially attracted by the "ghost" *motif* (in no merely psychical sense) and by the *motif* of the speaking dead. His philosophic poems comment upon the relativity of all human experience, the indifference of nature, nescience, heredity, conformity, change, fame, age and time. There are nearly a score of poems in which he regards the Unknown (the Unweeting, as he often calls Him); in seven instances Christ ("a shape sublime") is considered, usually by means of a dramatic narrative based on gospel or legend; while tribute is paid to the memory of the Apostle Paul in two noble poems: *In the British Museum* and *In St. Paul's a While Ago*. *In the Servants' Quarter* vividly recalls Peter's denial. Some thirty poems bear witness to Hardy's tolerant attitude toward church and clergy.

Hardy is a neo-romantic in his sympathy for children, animals, trees and flowers: There are many poems, compassionate or companionable, on birds and beasts. Among the best of these are *Shelley's Skylark*, *The Bullfinches*, *The Darkling Thrush* (which Alfred Noyes thinks "one of the finest lyrics in the world"), *The Selfsame Song*, *A Sheep Fair*, *Bags of Meat*, *a Popular Personage at Home* and *Why She Moved House*. The most beautiful of the flower verses appears in *The Year's Awakening*, while trees are celebrated in *Transformations In a Wood*, *The Master and the Leaves* and *Last Week in October*. The poet's great love of children shines out in such poems as *To an Unborn Pauper Child*, *Midnight on the Great Western*, *In a Waiting-Room*, *The High School Lawn* and *The Child and the Sage*.

In the large, then, the interests of the poems correspond to those of the novels, and even the literary allusions are often alike in choice. Shakespeare and Shelley, for instance, are each introduced four times, Keats three, and there are references also to Homer, Plato, Socrates, Xenophanes, Catullus, Milton, Schiller, Gibbon, Hugo, Heine, Burns, Scott, Wordsworth, Meredith, Swinburne, and to Hardy's great friend William Barnes. There are also many specific parallelisms in incident and deduction. Music, painting and architecture claim many a lyric, as do seasons and anniversaries, sunrises and sunsets, rain and snow, moons and stars, seas and streams. The war poems fall chiefly into two groups: those relating to the South African War and those inspired by the Great War. Very moving among these latter are *Men Who March Away*, *In Time of the Breaking of Nations* and *Before Marching and After*. Napoleon—always to Hardy a figure of curious intention and portent—and the Napoleonic wars are touched in novel, short story and poem alike, and at last magnificently interpreted in *The Dynasts*, foregleams of the supernal machinery of which appear scattered throughout the poems. And last, the poet has a few quiet words for himself and his misunderstanders in *The Impercipient*, *Lausanne*, *To a Lady*, *In Tenebris*, *A Poet*, *The Pedigree*, *When Dead*, and in the intimate self-composed memorial, *Afterwards*.

In form the poems are strikingly various. There are not a few sonnets, for the sonnet's compactness has had its close appeal for Hardy, but his rhyme-schemes here are often rather lawless and he sometimes mixes his modes. He has also employed Sapphics, terza rima, the triolet, the villanelle and the rondeau. Of this last we have excellent specimens in *The Roman Road*, in the song of the Pities in *The Dynasts* (Part III, Act I, Scene ii), and one less satisfying in *Midnight on Beechen*. He has liked much the terza

rima, whether strict or adapted, as in *A Plaint to Man*, *In a Cathedral City* and *Friends Beyond*.

In many of the lyrics the thought seems not only to prescribe but to create its own peculiar music, so felicitous is the harmony between the thought-rhythm and the rhythm of line or stanza. It is difficult to restrict mention of examples, and any list must seem somewhat superfluous and personal, but of the following poems at least the statement holds good: *The Sleep-Worker*, *God-Forgotten*, *The Superseded*, *In Tenebris*, *He Abjures Love*, *New Year's Eve*, *To Sincerity*, *When I Set Out for Lyonesse*, *A Singer Asleep*, *Starlings on the Roof*, *The Oxen*, *The Interloper*, *Who's in the Next Room?* *Jubilate*, *For Life I Had Never Cared Greatly*, *Afterwards*, *The Wanderer*, *Meditations on a Holiday*, *Intra Sepulchrum*, *An Ancient to Ancients*, *Waiting Both*, *Any Little Old Song*, *The Graveyard of Dead Creeds*, *The Absolute Explains* and *Premonitions*. Contrary to the usual supposition, there is much music in Hardy's poetry. Sometimes it is a grave, low chanting of faith, regret or conjecture; sometimes a deliberate *tour de force* of scheme and scale, as in the facile monorhymes; sometimes a burst of ironic yet passionate indignation; sometimes a lilt of hope and even of joy.

Even of joy, for Hardy has his Keatsian moments in the worship of pure Beauty. And of hope, for some high Plan may betide,

As yet not understood,  
Of Evil stormed by Good;

or, as in *The Darkling Thrush*,

Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew  
And I was unaware.

And even of faith, as the lines *On a Fine Morning* may momentarily testify; although, as Brennecke remarks in *Thomas Hardy's Universe*, the ultimate hope usually "takes three general forms: the Nirwana of non-existence, the growth of consciousness in the Will, and a melioristic belief in a gradual improvement in life through the idealistic efforts of enlightened men."

Hardy's architectonic faculty is as apparent in his slighter as in his more solid work. He is master of a large and often unusual vocabulary, and of many fresh and compelling images. In his intellectual austerity he seems to derive from Donne and from Wordsworth and Arnold, but his choices of dramatic moment and his packed phrases remind us rather of Browning, whose view, indeed, that "love is the only good in the world" he seems to share. Critics who have disliked his hard-surfaced style are coming, perhaps, to

recognize the straightness of its directions and the kindly softness of its edges. Abercrombie prefers to all the other poems those "momentary dramas of passionate or ironical human event, in which the ardent emotional essence of character is so fined down and intensified that it needs but to be stated in some undecorated vigour of language, masterfully controlled into pattern, to become unquestionable poetry." There is much to be said for this view; but, feeling that great poetry must realize itself musically far within the kingdom of thought (whatever other values may be added unto it), I find myself giving first place to the philosophical rather than the psychological poems. The former seem to represent Hardy's central structure, the latter its buttressing.

Only a word is possible here of Hardy's lovely version of the Tristram-Iseult legend—*The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall*. The subtlety of its understanding and the delicacy of its reserve combine with its pure grace of style to make it a memorable thing.

*The Dynasts*, that colossal closet-drama in three parts, nineteen acts and well over a hundred scenes, Hardy himself regarded as his master-work. It is dramatic in style and intention, lyric in enveloping emotion, epic in scale and elaboration. The influence of the Promethean dramas of Æschylus and of Shelley is visible here. Indeed, in scope and power it suggests comparison also with the panoramic supernormalisms of Dante, Milton and Goethe, while the chronicler's fidelity to his sources resembles the spirit of Marlowe and of Shakespeare. But it is more than a chronicle in that it pursues an appreciable philosophy of history; and more than a séance, so to speak, in that it tries for a monistic unity in the thought of both earthlings and symbolic intelligences beyond earth.

Not only do the conversations of the chorus and the historical continuity give backbone to the whole structure, but the very stage directions suggest the idea of an anatomical Europe. These directions also replace in part the descriptive poems-in-prose of the novels. There are, to be sure, occasional lapses in tonal unity, and even at times small technical blemishes, but these only slightly affect the total impression and influence of the work. Here, heightened into both the form and the spirit of great poetic drama, we have the equivalents of the tragic problems and comic relief of the novels, given world-significance on a world-scale. Nelson's death, the retreat from Moscow, Waterloo, and solitary Napoleon's farewell—these are scenes greatly conceived and greatly written; while scores of lesser scenes make real to us the changes in the social and political fabric of the time.

Some, however, have thought *The Dynasts* insufficiently universal. "Too much Wessex and not enough world", as an American student once objected. He thought, too, that Napoleon rather than England should be the hero, and that Napoleon<sup>1</sup> is inadequately humanized, is a mere lay figure in the hands of the Immanent Will. But neither England nor Napoleon is the hero of *The Dynasts*. The true hero is Humanity. The tragic conflict, as the onlookers in the Overworld are aware, is between "the feverish fleshings of Humanity" and the "Inadvertent Mind" of It—the fundamental if impercipient projector of all being. Hardy is not concerned here with the exaltation of his country as such, but with the truth of art. The world is made up of its own miniatures, and Hardy is content to be English in the Shakespearean temper. As he said to me in 1922, those who wish to do anything really original should live in close relation to one place, inviting the collaboration of soil and folk. He said, too, that the length of *The Dynasts* had aroused objection, but that his great difficulty had been condensation, which he had striven for constantly and, he thought, had achieved. He told of the Oxford and antecedent London performances—how the philosophy was cancelled and a group of objective scenes presented, and he wondered why a similar experiment had not been tried in North America. Apparently he did not know (nor did I) that it had been tried, and successfully, by a group of amateurs in Toronto in 1917.

In the spirit of his work as of his personality Thomas Hardy has long seemed to me to be Truth's saint—a courageous man who has never flinched nor compromised nor evaded, yet has loved and pitied his fellow-mortals through a long life worthily lived, a life that has done its loyal if often perplexed service to that Soul of which our universe is a movement, a gesture, an aspiration perhaps.

1. Napoleon, despite my student-friend, seems human enough—indeed, very human in Part I, Act VI, scenes i, iii and v; Part II, Act II, scene vi, and Act V, scenes i and ii; and Part III, Act I, scenes i, iv, vii and xii; Act III, scenes i and v; Act IV, scenes ii, iv and vi; and Act VII, scenes ii, vi and ix.