



Thomas Hardy's Contribution to English Literature

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Abstract :

It is unbelievable that a man who was considered the 'Dark Horse of Letters' can emerge as a great writer in English Literature. Hardy became both great novelist as well as poet. People called him pessimist. His works have stood the test of time and he has been established as an optimist. Hardy is considered a major writer of twentieth century. Even some writers have called him the Father of modern English Poetry.

Thomas Hardy was born on 2 June 1840, in Higher Bockhampton, Dorset. Son of master mason and builder, his early training as an architect gave him an intimate knowledge of local churches which he vividly and successfully utilized in his writing. His mother Jemina, encouraged his interest in literature. As a child he was immersed in rustic life legend and folklore. Therefore he was acquainted with quite early in life the harness of rural living. Between 1856 and 1862 he met the Dorchester dialect poet William Barnes and Horace Moule who motivated his intellectual aspirations and subsequently introduced him to the theories of Charles Darwin. Charles Darwin's Theory impressed him so much that he gave up the idea to be a country parson and devoted his life to reconcile the motion of a generous God with Darwin's theory of Evolution through natural selection. He also saw the increasing impoverishment of the south-west part of England which features so strongly in his novels. His personal experience was bound with the people and custom,



monuments and institutions of Dorset which he placed permanently on the literary map by the ancient name of Wessex.

Thomas Hardy as a Novelist :

The Poor Man and the Lady (1869) was Thomas Hardy's first published novel, in which scenes of rustic life were blended with satire against the upper classes. This novel was rejected by Macmillan and suggested that he should try the publishing firm of Chapman. Hardy wrote *Desperate Remedies* (1871) when he worked with the architect George Rackstrow Crikmay in Weymouth. This novel has scenes from the sea-coast and four architects as characters. In this novel Hardy attempts to show in non-theological terms, the working of sin and chance of and against all this the limited human power for redemption or remedy. In *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872) novel described as a rural painting of Dutch school, is a light and rather sketchy piece of work with delightful glimpse of the country way of life that was already dying. The more typical Hardy emerges with *A pair of Blue Eyes* (1873), in which two rivals for the same woman return to England and find that they are travelling on the train that carries her coffin.

Hardy's reputation was established with the publication of *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874). It is based on his native theme, depicts rural life dominated by fate. *The Hand of Ethelberta* (1876) novel is about Ethelberta Petherwin who wants to join highbrow but corrupt society. Hardy examines the potentialities of the individual will and the outcome is happiness. He classified the novellas Novel of Ingenuity. His great work was *The Return of the Native* (1878). From the opening description of Edgen Heath, his ability to use natural settings as more than mere background becomes apparent. The Heath becomes a part of conflict, potent and variable as human character. *The Trumpet Major* (1880) is one of the earliest of Hardy's work to show his interest in Napoleonic wars which he heard so much in his youth. *A Laodicean* (1881) novel draws on his early years as an architect. *Two on a Tower* (1882) novel discussed about Hardy's serious

interest in astronomy and science. This novel sets human affairs against the vast stellar universe through the character of a young astronomer.

Hardy's treatment of the clash between the old and new ways of life is described in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886). Hardy states that the incidents in novel arise from three events: the sale of wife by her husband, the uncertain harvests which immediately preceded the repeal of Corn Laws, and the visit of royal personage to the aforesaid part of England. The working out of natural scenes within human affairs is used again in *The Woodlanders* (1887), where the question of right of women is raised in condemnation of the system which compels Grace to remain with her unfaithful and dissolute husband. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) deals with a situation similar to the Eliot's Adam Bede but with the different attitude and very different consequences. *Jude the Obscure* (1896) is Hardy's last novel depicts the conflict between spiritual and carnal life and explores the restraints of Victorian tradition.

Thomas Hardy as a Poet :



Thomas Hardy was a poet at heart and novelist by profession. His first love was poetry. In fact he began his career as a poet and failed to publish his poetry as magazines turned down. This was because of his subject matter was new, atheism, agnosticism, criticism of tradition. However Hardy went on writing poetry throughout his career and published a sizeable amount of poetry in magazines. His poems were appreciated. Hardy concentrated on poetry seriously from 1890's.

Hardy's poetic output is quite large. His collections are Wessex Poems (1898), Poems of the Past and Present (1902) Time's Laughingstocks) and other Verses(1909), Satires of Circumstances (1914) Moments of Vision and Miscellaneous Verses (1917), Late Lyrics and Earlier (1922), Human Shows, Far Phantasies, Songs and Trifles (1925) and Winter Words (1928).

Thomas Hardy as a Short Story Writer :

Thomas Hardy wrote four volumes of short stories and





he published many of them in different English and American magazines and dailies. *Wessex Tales: Strange, Lively and commonplace* (1888) was published in two volumes by Macmillan. *A Group of Noble Dames* (1891) is a collection of 10 short stories. *Life's Little Ironies* (1894) short stories take place in the present. They reveal Hardy's unhappiness about Victorian society's morality. Hardy's *A Changed Man and Other Tales* was published in 1913.

Thomas Hardy's Epic Drama: The Dynasts

Thomas Hardy's *The Dynasts* is a major epic drama dealing with the era of Napoleonic Wars, composed between 1897 and 1907 and published in three parts. The *Dynasts* has three levels of characters. First there are peasants and ordinary people. Next there are actual historical figures, including members of parliament, national rulers and military leaders preoccupied with Napoleon's ambitious attempt to dominate Europe. Finally there is a group of celestial observers.

Conclusion :

Hardy's novels develop as expositions of tragedy, comedy and farce. Much of the poetry in the early volumes recalls images, scenes or incidents from personal past and immediate history. Hardy's poetry deals with nature, love, marriage, religion, God and atheism.

References :

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2. Under the Greenwood Tree. London. Tinsley Brothers, 1872.
3. A Pair of Blue Eyes. London. Tinsley Brothers, 1873.
4. Far From the Madding Crowd. London. Smith Elder, 1874
5. The Hand of Ethelberta. London. Smith Elder, 1876.
6. The Return of the Native. London. Smith Elder, 1878.
7. The Trumpet Major. London. Smith Elder, 1880.
8. A Loadicean .London. Smith Elder, 1881.
9. Two on a Tower. London. Smith Elder, 1883.
10. The Mayor of Catsterbridge. London. Sampson Low Maston Searl, 1886.

