

Ain Shams University
Faculty of Education
English Department

***A Study Of The Element Of Conflict
In Thomas Hardy's Major Novels
With Special Reference To
The Return Of The Native.***

A Thesis

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To

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By: Mohamed Adel Mahmoud

Abstract

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) is a great and distinct writer, novelist, poet and dramatist. He stands among the prominent literary figures in the English Literature as Scott, Shakespeare and Chaucer. Hardy's greatness was due to the fact that he was able to picture a lot of what was going on in his time through his characterization, his dramatic power, his humour, and his pictures of the countryside. Besides, Hardy has a vast knowledge of humanity, and an infinite pity for the little lives of men. He is an artist, and the maker of a beauty in words of a kind long familiar in English literature. His situations are free from exaggeration. and his powers of description are quite unrivalled among contemporary writers. He is even said to be "the father of literature" and "his name is spoken of with reverence by men of every shade of thought" (Braybrooke1969:162-3).

Thomas Hardy sees that life is full of pain, sufferings and conflicts, so this thesis deals with one of the most important themes; i.e., the element of conflict in Thomas Hardy's major novels: 'Far from the Madding Crowd', 'Tess of the d'Urbervilles', 'The Mayor

of Casterbridge' and 'The Return of the Native'. But the main concern is given to '**The Return of the Native**' for being regarded by critics as the most outstanding of Hardy's works.

This thesis attempts to arrive at a better understanding of Hardy's novels and of his conception of man and life, shows that conflicts live as long as Man lives, and concludes that the more Man observes his faith, believes in God and in the after-life, is satisfied with fate and confesses his responsibility for his deeds, the more he has the ability to face the influences of these various conflicts.

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Preface

A conflict generally means a struggle between opposing forces. Psychologically speaking, conflict can be defined as an emotionally hurting state that results from the dispute between the contradictory desires and the unfulfilling needs or nonallowing to the repressed desire to express itself consciously or it can be the dispute and the struggle between the conscious and the unconscious forces particularly between the id, the ego and the superego (These are, according to Sigmond Freud, the three systems that form an affective structure to the character).

The writer of this thesis proposes to deal with the element of conflict in Thomas Hardy's major novels: 'Far from the Madding Crowd', 'Tess of the d'Urbervilles', 'The Mayor of Casterbridge' and 'The Return of the Native'. These four novels are selected to represent the corpus of the present study as they are considered by critics to be Hardy's most popular. But the main focus of attention will be on 'The Return of the Native' which has been regarded by critics as the most outstanding of Hardy's works and which shows the element of conflict and its various forms so obviously.

Conflict in Thomas Hardy's novels is distinguished from conflict as presented by other nineteenth century novels which focus mainly on class-conflict. In Hardy's works conflict takes different forms: self-conflict, conflict between rural circumstances and the aspirations cherished by those confined in them towards a more refined existence, conflict between Man and nature and conflict between the will of Man and that of fate. All these types of conflict can emerge and be felt from only one situation. If the protagonist is diagnosed with a fatal catastrophe, he or she has a conflict

with fate or nature, and probably has an internal conflict in learning to accept his or her fate.

What has stimulated the writer of this thesis to make a study of this particular point is the fact that this is a point that has not been dealt with thoroughly or examined at length before. Also in an attempt to arrive at a better understanding of Hardy's novels and of his conception of man and life, this thesis provides a study of these various forms of conflict.

The writer of this thesis uses the interdiscipline approach in this study as it is related to a lot of branches of learning such as literature, philosophy, psychology, history, religion and sociology.

This thesis is divided into four chapters and a conclusion. **Chapter One** will be a review of the literature on Thomas Hardy, the man and the writer. This chapter shall be divided into two parts; biographical and critical studies. In the biographical studies, one shall refer to the influences that have helped to form Hardy's thought and shape his view of life. Reference will be made to the influence of Hardy's family on him, his emotional relationships to the fair sex, tutors as Horace Moule, his religious background, the philosophers and the thinkers such as Arthur Schopenhauer, Thomas Huxley and Charles Darwin, the scientific theories, the social problems, and the intellectual movement running in his age that help to shape his view of life. This chapter will also deal with other aspects that influence Hardy such as the agricultural life, music, superstitions, witches, and folklore. In the second part of this chapter, namely, critical studies, one shall deal with what the critics have said about Hardy and his works. In this part, light will be shed on three main points: Hardy's concern with tragedy, the

philosophical realism of his novels, and the subtlety of psychological insight.

The other chapters trace the achievement of the element of conflict. **Chapter Two** presents a study of conflict between Man and his or her self in Hardy's major novel 'The Return of the Native' with reference to the other three major novels mentioned above. Self-conflict is a struggle that takes place within a character either when instinct is at odds with values, when the character is pulled by two courses of action or by differing emotions or when an individual is confronted with a difficult choice or and unpleasant situation. Characters in these novels are torn between their duties towards society and their own selfish or unselfish motives and their ambitious desires.

Chapter three shall deal with the conflict of man against nature in Hardy's 'The Return of the Native' and 'Tess of the d'Urbervilles' with reference to the other two 'Far from the Madding Crowd', and 'The Mayor of Casterbridge'. Conflict between Man and nature sets a character against the forces of nature. This chapter will show how Nature in Hardy's novels functions as a major force having many moods. Sometimes it seems to help Mankind, at others it seems to turn against human beings. Nature also can be a form of fate. Some characters struggle against it and are shown to be in conflict with it. We will also see how Hardy pictures man as part of Nature which is also humanized.

Chapter four shall concern itself with the conflict of man against an omnipotent and indifferent Fate in 'The Return of the Native' and 'The Mayor of Casterbridge' with reference to the other two 'Far from the Madding Crowd' and 'Tess of the d'Urbervilles'. This conflict with the unknown sets a character against that which is beyond human

comprehension. This chapter will show that Fate can be in the form of external agencies such as chance, coincidence, love or social conventions and it can be internal when man's character becomes his Fate. This chapter will also allude to the fatalistic attitudes of Hardy's characters and will indicate to Hardy's philosophy.

And finally comes **the conclusion** which indicates that conflict with its various forms shown in Hardy's works assures his concept of man and life in which he sees the universe a huge impersonal mechanism, directed by some automatic and unknown principle of life, pursuing its mysterious ends completely indifferent to the human feelings on one hand. The fact that Hardy has lost his faith underlies this vision. On the other hand, these forms of man's conflict reflect both Hardy's belief that Man is also responsible for determining his fate good or evil, and his attempt to find a hope for Man or a way out of his misery but he can not because he himself has lost the right path by believing neither in God nor in the after-life which can be the only consolation for man's suffering. The conclusion also shows that conflicts live as long as Man lives. And the more Man observes his faith, believes in God and in the after-life, is satisfied with fate and confesses his responsibility for his deeds, the more he has the ability to face the influences of these various conflicts, whatever they are.

Chapter one

Introduction

Thomas Hardy, the man and the writer.

The literature on Thomas Hardy, the man and the writer, may be grouped under the following two main headings:

I- Biographical Studies

II- Critical Studies

Biographical Studies

Thomas Hardy was born on 2nd June 1840 in the village of Higher Bockhampton near Dorchester. He died on 11th January 1928 in Max Gate, the house he built for himself.

If we have to start our discussion with the first influences on Thomas Hardy, we have to allude first to the most important role played in his life by his mother and by his father.

Hardy's mother, Jemima the closest person to Hardy, played a role of great importance in his life. First, she led a hard life. Trevor Johnson (1968:11) says that she grew up as an orphan and experienced the pains of poverty. The unhappy youth of this woman no doubt accounted for her belief in fatalism which she communicated to her son, as Timothy O'Sullivan (1975:21) says, the mother "imbued" her son "with some of her fatalism" which became "Hardy's notion of the blind, unfeeling and unthinking force which governs existence..." Jemima's influence on her son

lasted for a long time. Evelyn Hardy (1955:32) mentions that in 1870, Hardy wrote in his notebook: "Mother's notion (and also mine) [is] that a figure stands in our van with arms uplifted, to knock us back from any pleasant prospect we indulge in as probable." Thus the mother's role in forming Hardy's thoughts and outlook of life is quite obvious as she was the first to incite him with the idea that the universe was indifferent to man's aspirations and that man stood alone in the face of circumstances.

Besides, one cannot ignore the part played by Hardy's mother in making of him a learned and educated man. This is because she herself was fond of reading. Robert Gittings (1975:9) says "from her mother she inherited a passion of reading and had obtained some of her library of books." Thus, The majority of Thomas Hardy's education took place prior to any attempt at standardization, and therefore, the burden of this responsibility fell upon his mother and the acquaintances he made as a small boy and young man. Robert Gittings (1975:11) observes that it was his mother, "who gave Thomas, in.. .first year at school, Dryden's translation of Virgil's Aeneid, and Dr. Johnson's Rasselas and a translation of St. Pierre's popular, sentimental "Paul and Virginia" to read." In this connection also, Irving Howe (1985:6) observes that "Solid reading was encouraged in the Hardy family, especially by Thomas's mother, a woman of firm character and ranging memories, who allowed the boy his indulgences as a "born book-worm" and helped him start a library with a gift of Dryden's Virgil, Rasselas and Paul and Verginia." Consolidating this, F.E. Halliday (1978:19-20) states that:

"[Hardy's] mother was a great reader and ambitious for her son. She had inherited her love of books from her mother, ... who had collected a small library and was well versed in the classics of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, from Milton and Bunyan to essays

of Addison and Steele, and novels of Richardson and Fielding." Halliday (1978:19-20), moreover, adds that Hardy's mother's "early life was always a source of distress. However, she found solace in her mother's books, and support in needle-work and cooking, until her youthful troubles ended with her marriage."

In the fall of 1848, at the age of eight, Hardy joined his first school at the Stinsford Parish, where he learned mathematics and geography. This school was run by the National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church. "Hardy's mother, as always, was concerned with, and had more ambitious plans for Hardy's education, and supplemented his readings. She withdrew Hardy from the conformist school, and in 1850, she enrolled him at a school in Dorchester, run by the nonconformist British and Foreign School Society under the respectable headmaster, Isaac Last" (Holmes:1997). At Isaac Last's school, Hardy learned Latin and mathematics. In this connection, Irving Howe (1985:7) writes, Hardy "became acquainted with the possibilities of serious intellectual work. He began to study Latin and after a time could read slowly in Virgil, a writer he would love throughout his life, and in Lucretius, a writer with whom he had affinities of temperament." Hardy's parents arranged that he should be given a good dose of Latin and "read Caesar and Eutropius. These simple histories appealed to his innate feeling for the past and kindled an interest in Roman Dorchester, and Roman Dorchester stimulated his interest in Latin" (Halliday1978:26). Therefore, at the age of 15, he began learning French and continued self-improving as well. It is clear then that Hardy's mother was his driving force. She always encouraged him to be a learned man. Robert Gittings (1975:24) remarks that : "The driving force behind this continued self-improvement was, of course, Hardy's determined mother. She appears to have been as watchful over his moral development as she was over his intellectual growth.

Thus, Hardy obtained from his mother love of reading which helped him later when he devoted himself entirely to writing both novels and poetry. It is well-known, Emily Florence Hardy (1962:230) says, that Hardy found time to dip "into a good many books" the reading of which impressed the young Hardy much and prepared him for his later assimilation of the radical thought of the thinkers of this age. Lennart Bjork (Page1980:104-5) notices that from Hardy's reading of Walter Begehot's Estimates, Hardy "may for the first time have been introduced to an extended and more formal discussion of the problems and ideas of writers whom he was later greatly to sympathize with. Thus he read that Gibbon in his youth was left on his own to wrestle with the old problems of 'fate, free-will, fore-knowledge absolute'." Thus, if it is necessary to attribute Hardy's interest in reading these books and other ones to a specific origin or source, one must attribute this to his mother.

In the course of his life Hardy was under the influence not just of his mother who helped to shape his outlook, but also of his father who had a considerable role to play in Hardy's life. Hardy inherited some habits from his father who as Robert Gittings (1975:17) notes used to carry a telescope with him wherever he went to take a sweeping view

"and point out landmarks, including the houses where he was doing building work. This habit, of taking a bird's-eye view of a whole area, stayed with Hardy all his life, like the mystical delight in high places which was most imaginatively expressed in his poem Wessex Heights. His father's easy-going enjoyment, contrasting with the more purposeful attitude of his mother, was something the small boy [Hardy] relished with a secret admiration. When his father died in 1892, Hardy wrote his name and date against the lines from Hamlet:

Thou hast been
As one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing,
A man that fortune's buffets and rewards

Hast ta'en with equal thanks.

His father's enjoyment of nature was matched by his mother's extraordinary store of local legend and story. Together they filled Hardy's world with landscape and human dealing, the special blend that was to mark his poems and novels, so that emotion and place coalesce unforgettably."

It was his father who used to take him to see the violent scenes that must have affected his outlook of life. Robert Gittings (1975:22) remarks: "Effigies of the Pope and the Cordinal were burnt, among insulting anti-Catholic tableaux. The ten-year-old Hardy was taken by his father to see the violent display."

Moreover, Robert Gittings argued that Hardy's mother and father told him stories of savage events. These tales of their own childhood had a deep influence on the morbidly sensitive boy; it seems clear they had little idea how far these memories of a rougher and more brutal age, commonplace to them, would sink into the imagination of their small son. One story from each parent was re-called by Hardy long after, with a kind of amazing horror. His father's tale was of hanging that had taken place when he himself was young. Hardy witnessed the execution of four men, whose only crime was that they had been present when others had set fire to a rick. One of these was a lad of eighteen, so emaciated and half-starved that they had to put weights on his feet before they could break his neck. This story horrified Hardy more than any other; but his mother's tale was also terrible, especially to an ultra-sensitive boy. She told him about a girl who had committed suicide, and whose burial she remembered as an event in her own childhood. Few followed the girl to her unblessed grave. There was no coffin to carry her, and no wreaths, though one other girl threw flowers on the exposed body. When it was put into the grave, a stake was driven through it, before the earth was heaped over her,