

Thomas hardy.  
biography, novels and  
characteristics



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The publishing of his novel *Far From the Madding Crowd* raised a problem that was going to reappear during his time: when it was published, some subscribers protested against one of the episodes in which a young woman is seduced. They wanted the writer to be more careful when dealing with such a subject (since the 19th century society was very conservative). 2. The publication of *Tees of the derailleur's* cost him more trouble than any previous works. By this time he was fifty years old, he'd been working as a professional novelist for several years and was recognized internationally.

The treatment to which *Tees of the derailleur's* was subjected was very humiliating for him. Hardy was a man who was easily hurt by criticism and the situation when *Tees of the derailleur's* was published must have been intolerable for him. We don't really understand why he didn't anticipate the criticism on the novel as *Tees of the derailleur's* was written from a Non-conformist tradition point of view. Non-conformism was a sect that separated from the Church of England; it was a strong religious belief.

Thomas Hardy sent the first part for publishing which included the deduction of *Tees* and the baptism of her dying child.

The editors REJECTED the episode since the novel was supposed to be designed for family reading. The editors told him to remove these two episodes, but he refused to agree and the contract was cancelled. He then sent the novel to another publisher who ALSO REJECTED it saying it was too frank with issues like sex and marriage. Hardy sent it to a third publisher in vain. Hardy realized he had no option but to remove the two episodes, and he defines this process as "dismemberment".

This way he could publish it with some modifications as several sketches for adult readers.

When the novel was published in book form, the two episodes were restored and this provoked violent reactions from many reviewers. But the controversy boosted the sales up. Some critics even praised the novel, saying it was great and they praised the tragic power and the moral seriousness of the novel. Though, the majority of the reviewers were very critical. 3.

Upon the publishing of *Jude the Obscure*, some critics said the novel was indecent and obscene, it was criticized roughly, but others praised it saying it was a masterpiece.

The editors told him to be more careful with his writing. Initially, *Jude the Obscure* was going to be a novel on education, but then he changed it and it became a novel about sexual relationships and marriage; so he called his editor to cancel the contract but the editor refused to cancel it and Hardy was forced to remove some episodes, but again restored them when he published them in book form. 4. The fourth of his novels, *The Well-Beloved*, was serialized before *Jude the Obscure*, but published in book form after it.

He told his editor there was nothing in this novel that could be considered offensive, though this statement was a little hard to believe and he was criticized for immorality, and he responded that he didn't understand why there were such reactions since he wanted to write a fantasy romance.

He stated that maybe the critics were obsessed with sex and not him. Why did Thomas Hardy stop writing novels? There are three possibilities: 1. He was really disappointed by the way his last novels were received. 2. Now that he was earning a lot of money, he decided to start writing for himself instead of for his audience and editors.

Remember that Hardy started writing novels to make a living as a writer. Since he had earned enough and was quite renowned, there was no need to keep writing novels. For him, writing for himself was writing poetry. 3.

Hardy did not abandon fiction; fiction abandoned Hardy. He was aware of the fact that at the end of the 19th century there was a group (in which Henry James was included) of writers interested in literary theory and in writing experimental fiction. Compared to their fiction, Hardy's fiction seemed old-fashioned. His first book of poems after leaving novels doesn't represent a great break with the world of novels.

Wishes Poems takes place in the same place as his novels and in this first book he recreates rural world. What is interesting about his poems is that they show little divisions into periods. In other words, there's no difference between his early poems and his later ones. Even though he uses a variety of forms there is no development in his poetry. He said poetry was his essential writing and fiction was his accidental writing.

In his letters, he used to denigrate his novels and always discouraged people who were more interested in his novels than his poetry as he wanted to be recognized as a great poet rather than as a great novelist.

Critics were a little slow to take Hardy seriously as a poet for two reasons: 1. He received many public honors, including honorary fellowships from Oxford and Cambridge. This was a really great honor because Hardy never attended university and he didn't have a degree.

2. He was now dining with the most distinguished members of the English society. The man who was from a hamlet and had scandalized England became now a national institution. He was living in a mansion very different from his village house and received distinguished visitors and maintained correspondence with distinguished people all over the world.

At the same time, he kept a very careful eye on his business interest and matters such as copyright and royalties. His wife died in 1912 and this affected him deeply because it was a sudden death and it had revived the emotions he had felt forty years ago, but at the same time he realized those feelings belonged to the past and so he was sad about the realization of his emotional change. After her death he wrote some of his most beautiful poems, Poems of 1912-13. Two years after, he married his secretary and she published his biography signed by her, *The Life of Thomas Hardy*; even though it was written by Hardy himself.

It took him ten years to write it. NOVELS Major novels vs. Minor novels In Thomas Hardy's major novels the setting is quite restricted, it's usually a rural one that in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* there is more than one setting because she wanders around, but all of them are rural. In the major novels the social range is also quite restricted. The main characters are country people, in contrast to the upper class people as secondary characters. These

novels are about people who work and who need to work in order to earn a living.

Hardy shows a very profound knowledge of rural occupations and describes them, For instance, how to milk a cow. Hardy never planned major novels as a series and there are no reappearances of characters in his novels, but he decided to publish them in parts afterwards. The description of major novels as character and environment is a bit misleading as the reader gets the idea that the plot is not very important, penthouse it is. Hardy was one of the greatest Victorian storytellers, so plot is very important. What do these novels have in common?

In the first novel, *Under the Greenwood Tree*, the situation is very simple: a country man is honest and innocent, and he's in love with the heroine.

Then, there is a man from the upper class and he has more things to offer to the heroine than the country man. Nevertheless, it has a happy ending 0: the heroine marries the country man. Even though there is a happy ending, beneath there is deception and disillusion because when they finally get married, he asks her " We'll have no secrets from each other, darling, will we ever? And she answers " None from today' (she means to say that she wasn't completely truthful before). There is a contrast between Tees and the other heroine, as Tees is truthful, while the other isn't, in a destructive way.

In *Far From the Madding Crowd* the situation is more complex because three men aspire to the heroine's hand. One is an honest country man, the second is a farmer who has always repressed his feelings and when he gives vent to

them the result is violent, and the third is an upper class soldier who likes flirting with women.

In this novel, Hardy felt the pressure of giving a happy ending, but this time the happy ending is only reached by suffering, as two characters die in the process. The sexual problem is complicated by the social one: the heroine is attracted to the soldier (not only cause he is attractive, but also because of his social status), in the end, the country man marries her but after a lot of suffering.

In the next novels, the complications produced by different varieties of love become more profound and the destruction of human lives by blind passion and unwise marriage becomes more extreme.

In *The Return of the Native*, there are plenty of marriages but they all seem to fade and people seem to choose the wrong partners. There are adulteries, disappointments, ambitions...

By the time Hardy wrote this novel, he didn't have the courage to analyse the consequences of adultery, so the characters who committed adultery end up dying. In *The Woodlander*, the treatment of marriage becomes more explicit and Hardy rejects a happy ending, it signified an advance in courage and honesty when dealing with some matters.

Hardy rejects moral timidity in the novel. The man who dies isn't the villain, but the innocent country man and the villain succeeds in the end.

The heroine wants to marry the country man but her she is educated and has traveled a lot she should marry a "better" man, and so he is ambitious.  
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When a doctor comes to the village, the father thinks he is the right man for his daughter and she agrees. The upper class doctor, though, goes away with another woman, and the heroine becomes aware of the worth of the country man.

Then the question of divorce is raised, but at the end there's no happy ending, for the first time in Hardy's novels.

He tried being more realistic and from now on, love is going to be associated with disappointment. *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is the next novel. The heroine is trapped between two men: Alec is a diabolic character and there's a scene in which he says "I'm the one who come to tempt you", he's the typical villain of Victorian melodramas and the typical seducer of popular ballads and songs;

Angel is the opposite, his family background is impeccable, and we expect a lot from him but when he has to show charity towards Tess, he fails, and when he comes back it's too late (which is very typical of Hardy's stories). In *Jude the Obscure* (this novel was planned to be about a man who couldn't go to the University of Oxford because of social prejudices and Hardy wanted to criticize the English education system, but he changed it), the hero is trapped between two women who represent spirit and flesh.

The latter threatens Jude to an annihilistic level and she shows the noxiousness of Tess without the innocence and simplicity, she uses her appeal to trap the hero.



One of the main themes is the destructive power of sensuality and it's obvious that there's a big change in Hardy's treatment of sex and love. It has traveled all the way from the romantic vision of *Under the Greenwood Tree* to the realistic analysis of frustration, deception and disappointment of *Jude the Obscure*. Some critics have found a parallelism between Hardy's change of attitude on love and marriage and the deterioration of his own marriage.

Others believe that, while he was writing *Jude the Obscure*, there was a controversy in England on the subject of divorce because of the "Apparel case", in Ireland.

Apparel was an important nationalist politician who had an adulterous relationship with the wife of another politician, who knew about this and asked for a divorce. Apparel was able to be with his lover after being forced to resign. Nevertheless, what's obvious is that all the major novels take place in a specific setting, a specific period of time and a specific society amidst the process of change.

**SETTING** In the major novels, the setting is restricted, usually a rural community for obvious reasons.

Hardy wrote of the landscape he knew well and he accepted the role of chronicler of rural life. The collector's edition of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* included a map of Wiltshire to satisfy the curiosity of his readers (who wanted to know to what extent the author reflected their known landscape), he commented that he had freely adapted buildings and landscape to his purposes as writer. The Journey from one village to another implies a very important change.

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The normal communities live according to the natural rhythms of life.

E. G. Upon forcing a strawberry into Tees' mouth, Ales asks " Don't you like strawberries? And she answers " I do, when it's the season" The fact that the setting is so narrow may explain why there are so many coincidental meetings (critics believed these coincidences to be a blemish in Hardy's novels). Other explanation is that since the novels were serialized he wanted to include mysteries, revelations and surprises to keep the novel selling well and to attract the readers.

Hardy wasn't the only one to use coincidental encounters for this.

Also, Hardy was obsessed with the fact that one cannot escape the past and this is what happens to Tees (she travels around, and everywhere her past follows her). People inside the village are ignorant of what happens outside the community, and by way of compensation of their ignorance they gain security and stability in the association with the environment, which often extends beyond generations.

And that's why some of the most painful episodes take place when a character has to abandon their house or when the house is destroyed. For Hardy, buildings derive their interest from the lives that have been associated with them.

And this isn't surprising, since he was an architect. For him, buildings were documents depicting the history of a family or community. He differentiates between human interest and architectural interest, saying that human interest comes before.

He distinguishes between aesthetic and associative responses generated by a building, associative responses were more important to him (beauty of association or beauty of aspect).

Hardy emphasizes how buildings remind the contrast between durability of buildings and fragility of human beings. In the case of *Tees* and *Jude*, there's an important change. In *Tees* of the derailer's the setting is geographically restricted but we see her wandering through a series of communities. The scenes at the Dairy and the Flintlock-Ash are portrayed with usual fullness and they are amongst the best in the novel.

In the Dairy there are three elements that are combined that contribute to this: the way Hardy describes the summer season, the fertile landscape and the physical qualities. Also, while *Tees* is in the Dairy the sun becomes a symbol which is also present at the end of the novel. The landscape is used to reflect the feelings of the characters. *Tees* is happy, in love and enjoying life. But when Angel abandons her she goes to Flintlock-Ash, where the land is infertile, there is no sun and all images are related to winter.

This hanged is interesting and this setting is appropriate for *Tees'* sadness.

Hardy also gives a sociological explanation for the fact that nothing grows in Flintlock-Ash: the owner of the land doesn't live there and the village belongs to a landlord who isn't interested in rural life. Whereas the owner of the Dairy lives there, loves rural life and is a member of the community. In *Jude the Obscure*, the main character never succeeds at finding a home (as he is an orphan). SOCIETY country people and there's usually an outsider who

invades the rural community but who doesn't identify with it.  
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Normally these outsiders come from the upper class and they usually belong to the merchant class.

For Hardy, these outsiders are a threat to the social stability of rural communities and they are also a threat to the close relationship between natural setting and its inhabitants. Hardy enjoyed describing rural activities in his novels. Hardy was aware of the material benefits of education; his own life is a good example of this: he was the son of a country builder and through his education and intellectual self-raising he became a famous professional writer whose novels were read all around the world and he could spend the last hairy years of his life in a mansion with indoor and outdoor servants.

Hardy wasn't so sure about the immaterial benefits of education and this is especially clear in his last novel, *Jude the Obscure*, as education is represented as generating unhappiness because once one gets an education, they become aware of the existence of other possibilities and don't accept easily their current situation. In *Tees of the derailleur's*, Tees went to school and because of this she speaks her dialect and Standard English with "persons of quality".

Education has erected a barrier between Tees and her mother because they belong to two entirely different worlds.

Also, she likes Angel because he's educated and considers him the right person (although, he is not). In *Jude the Obscure*, education also generates unhappiness because Jude is a young man who wants to go to university

but he can't and this creates a lot of distress to him. PERIOD OF TIME Hardy's novels take place at a particular point in history.

It's true that in his first novels he looks back to the past recreating the world of his father's youth, but what is interesting is that in his novels time takes an unusual significance.

Human history is shown as stretching back into prehistoric times, therefore minimizing the importance of any given human life. We are conscious of lives in the present being in close association with countless anonymous lives in the past. And the fact that the setting in his novels has been occupied since prehistoric times intensifies the close relationship between the living and the dead. In other words, Hardy makes clear that the present characters are just repeating what others have done in the past, so there's nothing unique in those individuals.

In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Tess wonders what's the point of doing anything when others have done it before me? "; this view of life is called cosmic view of life.

Hardy wanted to reconcile this view with an emotional and spiritual view of life. This is why although he repeats again and again that, he also emphasizes the value of individual human lives. As said before, Hardy recreates Victorian society and country life and was very much aware that the society was changing and this is obvious in the novel at the beginning.

The impression we get is that society is changing but not always for the better. In his last two novels, the rate of change seems to intensify: there's a

gap between Tees and her mother and lots of things have already changed. The rural communities Hardy shows in his first novels are characterized by a stability that disappears in *Tees of the derailer's*, but the changes.

In *Under the Greenwood Tree*, the church band has been replaced by an organ. By the time Hardy writes *Tees of the derailer's*, the action moves closer to the time of composition.

Hardy's not recreating the world of the past, but the present. He's recreating the ache of modernism. E. G.

*Tees* is forced to confront the new order: she goes to the railway station with Angel and she says that she realizes people who are bringing milk to London don't even know a thing about cows. Train symbolisms change and this scene also makes reference to rural depopulation in the 1880s. In relation to how fiction abandoned Hardy; his novels were traditional rather than innovative. He wasn't interested in the experiments of modernist writers.

Modernist writers were experimenting with different point of views and chronology, but Hardy wasn't interested in this. *Tees of the derailer's* follows a chronological order and Hardy uses the traditional third person narrator.

PICTORIALS What was original and unique about his style is the so called pictorials: the emphasis on the visual presentation of experience. Hardy was very sensitive to visual impressions and he was always looking for the right words to express the emotions produced in him by the world. Since he was so sensitive to this, he was very fond of painting.

As a young man he visited the National Gallery very often and throughout his life he continued visiting galleries and collection not only in England, but also in the continent. His taste and knowledge of painting are manifested on different levels in his novels. The most basic level: there are references to painters and paintings.

Many of these allusions spring from the desire to compensate for inadequacy of language to describe the world. "Greenish shade of Correcting". Though, it is true these references created a sense of inferiority and frustration in the readers if they didn't know the painter or painting mentioned.

On a more important level, Hardy's knowledge of painters and art is manifested in his tendency to group figures in his fondness for creating special effects of lighting and shadow and perspective.

More than any other English writers, Hardy likes to place his characters in doorways or windows or reflecting them in mirrors or pools. Also, very often a scene is seen through an open door or a hole in the wall; very peculiar of Hardy. He likes to play with perspective, very often he reduces human figures to very tiny specs; he plays with perspective like painters do.

Through buildings, weather phenomena, etc. The painter could give the audience lots of information on time and space. Through costumes, dresses and tools he could give a lot of information on the character's social background, Job.

.. Through facial expressions, gestures and posture; the painter could give information on characters' mood, attitude..

. This kind of painting that depicted a story was called NARRATIVE PAINTING and it's found in Hardy's novels. He presents an object and wants the reader to draw their own conclusions. In other words, he wants the reader to interpret the signs that are being offered, and reconstruct the story from the objects shown.

Hardy had a great knowledge of classic Victorian painters and one of the main characteristics they used was to tell a story through the objects that were presented in the painting.

Hardy wants to share this skill with his readers from the point of view of country people, because in all his novels there's a country man who's capable, in spite of his limited education, to reconstruct the story. The narrator is an observer and interpreter of signs; it's not that he knows everything, but that he interprets the signs.

HARDY'S IDEAS ON HUMAN BEHAVIOR AND SUSTINE If Hardy wanted to teach something with his novels, it wasn't something cheerful. In *Tees of the derailleur's*, the impression one gets is that we seem to inhabit a universe that specializes in misfortunes and calamities. Things go wrong at an alarming rate.

Critics have said that maybe this view of life was determined by Hardy's own temperament: he was a man with a somber view of life, often depressing; he was sensitive and deeply affected by whatever was disappointing in his age.

He was also very deeply affected by all that was bleak and alarming in the findings of contemporary science. He believed only the uneducated could be



happy, whereas it was more difficult for educated people to be happy. Some critics say Hardy was a fatalist (a person who has the impression that there's a system that controls human affairs without regard of human wishes). Other critics don't agree there's an existence of determinism in his philosophy. There's no system controlling, and there's no divine providence either, nothing controls human lives, and beyond the world there's nothing.

But if this is true, if all things are a result of chance, chance seems to be a malign power, his novels seem to specialise in pain instead of happiness. Life is dark, but Hardy seems to insist on making it darker. This is why T. S. Eliot said he was a morbid writer who enjoyed making a dark picture of life. In his novels, there's the impression that nothing happens by chance, and even if it does happen by chance, Hardy is the one to give the last turn to the screw.

Chance seems to only intensify the characters' suffering and pain. Very often, the most tragic events derive from the most trivial ones.

Hardy always got very upset when critics claimed that he denied the neutrality of nature and that he thought destiny was in the control of a malign power (as this was not true and he believed nature is neutral). Hardy believed human beings had a rosy view of their life because most people believe they were special and so had a special future, Hardy thought this was very. Lastly, critics gradually changed their view on Hardy's ideas.

He was described first by his contemporaries as a pessimist and he defended himself saying he was an EVOLUTIONARY MELODIST.

What he is trying to say is that providence isn't going to help us (human beings) because it doesn't exist. But, we can help ourselves. If we are alert and adaptable, we can survive and succeed.

For him, what is really tragic is not the disaster itself, but the fact that it could have been avoided. He believed humans had to be alert for these moments in which something could be achieved by the individual will. Hardy shows how characters put themselves in helpless situations through their foolish and irresponsible actions. Hardy always emphasized that he said the worst because he believed in the best.

In his novels we get the impression that the disaster could've been avoided and that characters make bad choices and adopt a fatalist attitude and this generates the worst disasters. But also, even if they had made a different decision, nothing would've changed. We feel chance puts a lot of pressure on the characters. Other critics have tried to give us a different view of Hardy's ideas. Some said that in his novels he is describing the fall/decay of the old agricultural order in England, they have argued that Hardy was very troubled by this decline and this is why there's so much pessimism in his novels.

Though, this is not exactly true: he was aware that many traditions were lost with the changes introduced in agricultural worlds, but also, he was aware of the fact that many changes were positive. The life of laborers had improved a lot and Hardy was always on the side of progress, he supported everything that improved human welfare and believed in the need for progress through human effort. Thomas Hardy said the miraculous is what makes a story in

the old way. It's true that many of his novels make reference to traditions and legends which were familiar to the readers.

In this sense, in his novels, local superstition, magic and folklore play an important role.

It's true that some of Hardy's characters seem to derive from popular songs and folk tales and ballads, but also, they are more than revivals of traditional characters because they are all unique. In many ballads the seduced maiden kills her seducer with a knife and this is what happens in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, but at the same time, *Tess* is unique and has a life of her own.

In relation to miracles in his stories, Hardy said that unless a story has some uncommon and strange elements it won't attract readers. The ordinary provides realism and this is the problem of the reader: to achieve a balance. In working out this balance, uncommonness must be in the events and not in the characters. The world of his novels isn't the world of the most antique ballads and folk tales.

Another influence of traditional forms: the use of changeless characters or non-developing characters. Characters don't change;