

**THE PRESENT IN RELATION TO THE PAST
AND FUTURE IN THE POETRY OF THOMAS HARDY (1840-1928)**

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Essentially, the prevailing mood of the poetry of Thomas Hardy is more grey and depressed than that of the other Victorian poets. Many of his poems present, with quite gravity and a carefully controlled elegiac feeling, some aspect of human sorrow, loss or frustration projected through a certain situation. His novels and poems are mostly set in rural Wessex to show how the forces of nature outside and inside combine to shape human destiny. Indeed, it is to him that Britain is indebted for the revival of the old name of Wessex; the beautiful southern part of England and for that also he "was closer to English peasantry than any other poet since Langland".¹ Hardy found his subjects in the circumstances of everyday life against a background of uncertainty and scientific progress. His themes, however, do not always express a simple reaction to the new scientific and philosophical ideas that characterize most of the late Victorian period.

In the poetry of Hardy, what is impressive is the association of a given emotion with particular memories. For this purpose, he "will use an antique or a poetic word or phrase... use of ballad rhythms often helps to give an elemental quality to his poetry, suggesting that this incident or situation... stands for some profound and recurring themes in human experience."² On the whole, Hardy, the poet is often "anti-formalist in his aesthetic"³ and his language "has the simplicity of a countryman's speech coupled with the sophisticated vocabulary of an educated man"⁴. His education enabled him to see in the actions of humble people a depth and a significance that they could not express. This linguistic mixture blends in his hands to fit the rhythm and the stanza-form of the poem and eventually arouses the feeling and communicate the poet's attitude. Such mixture of country phrases, Anglo-Saxon words and Latin and foreign terms results in a unique effect typical of Hardy. Whereas the country phrase brings the experience close to the reader, the formal one gives his poetry depth, more weight and universality.

Living in an age where the materialized civilization invaded almost every aspect of the Victorian life, Thomas Hardy was religiously, socially and intellectually alienated from the majority of the late Victorians. He was brought when the Victorian England was changing from an agricultural to industrial nation reaching maturity during that transitional period of scientific achievement, religious unrest and new philosophical trends. Hardy witnessed the growing advance of industrialism and what the new belief in scientific evolution would do to the old beliefs. His long span of life, with its ups and downs, is present in his novels, poems and short stories. The themes of his poetry show the extent of engagement with ideas and trends of his age. He found his subjects in the circumstances of everyday life speaking of the nature of immortality, industry science and religion, freedom of human will, love and friendship, chance, the existence of pain and horror, war and loneliness.

In many of Hardy's poems we see him seizing an emotional moment that takes him temporarily from the present either backward, in a flash-back or forward, in contemplation; often in a contradictory mood. One of Hardy's basic themes is the passing of time and the nostalgia to the past. In "The Ghost of the Past", Hardy emphasizes his obsession with memories, where he says :

We two kept, the Past and I

The Past and I;

Through all my tasks it hovered nigh,

Leaving me never alone.⁵

The fear of time haunts many of Hardy's poems. On a personal level, those poems stand as an elegiac recitation lamenting the loss of innocence, youth, love and early faith. They also express an elegiac feeling

for the loss of what is valuably human in man; the loss of the compassion, tenderness and altruism in the post-industrial society of Victorian England. Hardy's obsession with the past reflects a nostalgia to an ideal world where people could live by love and sympathy. At times ,this obsession leads the poet to fall under the spell of the very distant past.

Thomas Hardy was born in the family cottage ,situated on the edge of heath land ,up a lane in the hamlet of Higher Bockhampton in parish of Sinsford, some two miles Dorchester. He lived, thus ,a rural childhood in a family that maintained warm relationships and was especially close to his brother Henry and his sister Mary who was "almost his childhood companion"⁶.Jemema,the poet's mother ,"was a determined reader ,with a fund of stories, embodying local lore ,while her husband loved nature and music"⁷.Both of them" filled Hardy's world with landscape and human dealing , the special blend that was to mark his poems and novels"⁸ .All his life, Hardy had the wish to "remain as he was ,in the same spot and to know no more people than he already knew"⁹.He sought to freeze life and live forever in that happy shell of childhood which he idealizes in his old age in such poems as "Boys now and then" and "Childhood among the Ferns" in which he echoes this wish .The poem captures the pleasant memories of childhood vividly :

**And queried in the green rays I sate ;
'Why should I have to grow to man's estate,
And this a far-noised World perambulate?'**

In "The Self Unseeing" ,the poet captures a memory of dancing enraptured to the music of his violin :

**Childlike , I danced in a dream ;
Blessings emblazed that day ;
Every thing glowed with a gleam ;
Yet we were looking away !**

The youthful memories of Hardy's parental grandfather , Mary Hardy , of the cottage at Higher Bockhampton awakened in him a profound love of nature as his early poem, written in 1865 when the poet was still young , " Domicilin "reveals :

**I Marked her ruined hues,
Her custom - straitened views,
And asked , ' Can there indwell
My Amabel ? '**

The clerical activities which attracted the attention of Hardy so early helped, to a great extent, shaping his fresh frame mind. He was an orthodox Anglican by upbringing. His grandfather and father had been involved with the Stinsford choir. Young Hardy, who was extraordinary sensitive to melody, loved the church music, attended services regularly and taught for a while in the Sunday School. Furthermore, we are told that he "was thoroughly familiar with the Bible and the Anglican liturgy"¹⁰ .He kept retaining a strong emotional attachment to the Christian liturgy and church rituals, particularly as manifested in rural communities. A nostalgia for his lost faith imbues many of his poems. Such nostalgia for those days is recorded in his poem , "Afternoon Service at Mellstock" :

On afternoons of drowsy calm

We stood in the paneled pew,

Singing one-voiced a Tate-and-Brady psalm

To the tune of 'Cambridge New'.

"The Oxen" is one of the major poems that expresses the poet's desire to feel the religious premises of childhood which have become now pleasant memories of his early youth .The poem is reminiscent of the innocent acceptance of the Christian beliefs .The poet still has the desire to believe the story of the oxen that miraculously knelt at the hour of the nativity of Christ :

**So fair a fancy few would weave
In these years ! Yet I feel '
If someone said on Christmas Eve
'Come , see the oxen kneel
'In the lonely bartan by yonder coomb
Our childhood used to know '
I should go with him in the gloom
Hoping it might be so .**

In Hardy's world , time and love are two irreconcilable enemies where time is the usual victor at the end . This relationship between the two is another thematic exploration of the past in relation to the present . On a trip to St. Juliot's in Cornwall in 1870 ,Hardy met Emma Lavinia Gifford and were married four years later . On 27 November 1912 ,she unexpectedly died of impacted gallstones and heart failure. Hardy's grief was unexpected and overwhelming . He was consumed by guilt about the years of neglect and also by her account of the joyful days of their early meetings in her diary "Some Recollections". He relived in Emma's diary the happy days of their acquaintance and engagement and fell a victim to deep remorse for his indifference to her .Her memory stimulated the composition of more than a hundred and twenty love poems ,written between 1912 to 1928 , dedicated to her dear memory as a kind of atonement .The poems were an attempt of resurrecting the old love for Emma ;a nostalgia to recapture the past happy days . Emma's death left him in spiritual vacancy from which no other woman could save him ; not even Florence , his second wife . Emma's sudden death left Hardy also a vulnerable victim to loneliness ,so hard for a childless old man in the winter of his life . Even during his last days ,Hardy expressed a wish to be buried at Stinsford with his family and his first wife .

Emma is the "voiceless ghost" Hardy seeks in "After a Journey". He revisited the Pentargan Bay in Cornwall ,one of the places which enshrines the happy memories of their courtship ,in the hope of enjoying Emma's presence and companionship . This revisitation was in the March of 1913 , after a journey of life which lasted for forty years ¹¹ . The poet records that experience in that poem which begins with the lines :

**Hereto I come to view a voiceless ghost ;
Whither , O whither will its whim now draw me ?
Up the cliff , down , till I'm lonely , lost ,
And the unseen waters' ejaculations awe me .**

She is also the "ghost-girl-rider" in "The Phantom Horsewoman" written in 1913 . This poem , along with the rest on Emma , emphasizes one paradoxical fact that "the past is a searing presence "¹²which is doomed to vanish :

**A ghost-girl-rider . And though , toil-tried ,
He withers daily ,**

**Time touches her not ,
But she still rides gaily ,
In his rapt thought
On that shagged and shaly
Atlantic spot ,
And as when first eyed ,**

Draws rein and sings to the swing of the tide .

Emma is also present in such poems as "The Walk" , "Beeny Cliff" and "At Castle Boterel" . The poems speak about the destination and the rambles of the poet and his wife . In the latter , Hardy looks back in time to an excursion taken with his beloved one . The poem is actually " a mixture of poignant nostalgia on the one hand and a deep pathos of age and acceptance on the other " ¹³ . Emma's memory is also the subject-matter of such poems as "On a Discovered Curl of Hair " , "Ten Years Since " , "The Going " (the poem that opened a sequence of poems on her death) and " If it is Ever Spring Again " which a lyric evocative the romance of the past . Spring is usually associated with love and the stirring and the beauty of nature . The refrain gives an intentional lightness of touch and the reference to love is nostalgic and sentimental :

**If is ever spring again ,
Spring again ,
I should go where went I when
Down the moor-cock splashed , and hen ,
Seeing me not , amid their flounder
Standing with my arm round her .**

Significant among the poems that celebrate Hardy's love and nostalgia to his deceased wife is "The Voice", written in December 1912 :

**Woman much missed , how you call to me ,call to me,
Saying now that you are not as you were
When you had changed from the one who was all to me ,
But at first , when our day was fair .**

The fact that she is "much missed " and the poet's wonder create a sense of doubt and uncertainty .The call serves as an incantation of the poet's longing for her re-appearance and subconscious desire to hear her voice again .She appears as "at first" and this is the form that Hardy wishes to see again .He hopes to see her as "she was in August of 1870"¹⁴as J.O.Baily asserts .The poet wonders :

**Can it be you that I hear? Let me view you, then,
Standing as when I drew near to the town
Where you would wait for me : yes , as I knew you then,
Even to the original air – blue gown !**

The third stanza offers a possible explanation for the supposed voice .Since he receives no answer or sign of her presence , the poet begins thinking that it might be the sound of something else :

**Or is it only the breeze , in it's listlessness ,
Travelling across the wet mead to me here ,
You ever being ever dissolved to wan wistlessness ,
Heard no more again far or near ?**

The word "breeze" suggests softness and tenderness which is normally associated with women's voices .He thinks that her wistless spirit is not so zealous to met his wistful soul and therefore the possibility of contact or reunion turns into an illusion .

The growing sense of disillusionment , which creeps spontaneously from one stanza to another , leads eventually to an unwilling acceptance and satisfaction :

**Thus I; faltering forward,
Leaves around me falling,
Wind oozing thin through the thorn from norward,
And the woman calling.**

Despite its dream-like presence, the call seems to have satisfied the poet at the end. The word "faltering" indicates a moment between reality and dream. The "falling" leaves and the cold wind refer to that voice from the world of death. The "oozing" wind that passes "through the thorn" intensifies this feeling and may also refer to the poet's spiritual conflict and loneliness. Nevertheless, the poet is still haunted by the desire of hearing his wife's voice once more and therefore ends his poem with the making belief statement "And the women calling".

When Hardy looks back at his past life, the passing of youth comes into his troubled mind in quick gloomy flash back. The energy and the happy days of youth will diminish with the passage of time and the onset of death is inevitable. Man should learn to accept this horrible fact. In "During Wind and Rain", the poet says:

**They sing their dearest songs.
He, she, all of them-yea
I reble and tenor and bass
And one to play;
With the candles mooning each face....
Ah, no; the years O!
How the sick leaves reel down in throngs!**

The poem exerts a powerful effect through the associations of memory, which moves the poet to journey into the past. It is basically an elegy ; mourning those who were young and happy in their house and now inhabit "a high new house"; the house of death. The poet builds up his picture by simple domestic details and the refrain "Ah, no; the years O!" recalls as from the past we are invited to rejoice to the desolate present.

Hardy's obsession with the memories of the past leads him to search for inspiration in the distant corners of legends and folklore. In "When I set out for Lyonesse", for example, the reader is led as back as

the time of Arthur, the legendary king of England. The name Lyonnese itself has legendary associations for it was supposedly the scene of many incidents in the Arthurian story and in the romance of Tristan and Iseult. It is very important in Cornish tradition and folklore. Hardy's choice of words creates a sense of remote history and an atmosphere of archaism. In fact, the past here informs the present, almost as if a knight has gone in quest to win the love of his lady. The first verse deals with the journey; the second with the guesses and what happened while he was there; and the third registers his return "with magic in his eyes!":

When I came back from Lyonnese

With magic in my eyes,

All marked with mute surmise

My radiance rare and fathomless,

When I came back from Lyonnese

With magic in my eyes!

"Night in the Old Home" is another poem invoking the mental and spiritual stability of the past and also goes beyond the limits of the near personal history of the poet. In this poem, the poet speaks about the difference between him and his ancestors:

'-O let be the Wherefore! We fevered our years not thus:

Take of life what it grants, without question!' they answer

me seemingly.

'Enjoy, suffer, wait: spread the table here freely like us,

And, satisfied, placid, unfretting, watch Time away beamingly,!

The long lines of this poem reflect the background looking area spanned by memory. They took life as it came; whereas the poet keeps questioning it and expresses his feeling of loss and frustration. He can not share their innocent acceptance of what life might give.

This feeling of loss and frustration was to a large extent due to the poet's troubled relationship with the question of faith. It was also responsible for keeping the romantic picture of the past always fresh at the back of his mind . It was his inexhaustible source of inspiration ;a jewel at the bottom of his mind whose radiance was increasingly needed with time. The past for Hardy meant the nostalgia to the sweet memories of the childhood innocence , the pleasant moments of love, the energy of youth, the mystery of the romance and the joy of faith.

Hardy did not rejoice the loss of his old spontaneous belief in God. He was all the time nostalgic to regain his previous spiritual tranquility and often longed to re-establish communication with the Creator, but all was in vain. He retained a strong emotional attachment to the Christian liturgy and church rituals, particularly as manifested in rural communities. The son of a violinist and a bookish mother, Thomas Hardy intended to go into the church as a youth, but he suffered a crisis of faith which he could never recover.

The mid-Victorian Period (1840-1870) was characterized by a battle between science and religion which found "its most potent symbol in the great debate at Oxford in 1860 between Bishop Wilberforce and Charles Darwin's disciple T.H.Huxley".¹⁵ During middle years of the nineteenth-century the scientific climate witnessed rapid changes with a series of discoveries and inventions. The result was a re-consideration of traditional beliefs and an examination of new ideas. Some of the new theories directly challenged the long-established religious principles. Charles Lyell's principles of Geology(1830) posited a

great antiquity for the earth and a very long period of its gradual and regular change. His ideas called into question the literal truth of the story of Creation in *Genesis*. In the field of biology, Robert Chambers, in his popular book *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844), maintained a theory of biological evolution through the operation of natural law.

The intellectual atmosphere of the debate between science and religion was further enflamed by the publication of Charles Darwin's controversial book of evolutionary theory, *On the Origin of Species* (1859). The orthodox Christian belief was devastated by Darwin's theory of natural selection, because its notion of randomness and cruelty could not be reconciled with faith in a divinity ordered creation. When the book appeared Hardy was only nineteen and was "among the earliest acclaimers"¹⁶. The evolutionary struggles for existence as described by Darwin, chimed with Hardy's fatalistic temperament and undermined his religious faith, as it actually did that of so many Victorians. Hardy's notebooks record his lifelong interest in Darwin, and his fiction and poetry explore the tragic implications of humanity's diminished place in an empty and meaningless universe.

Some poets who were contemporary to Hardy, like Meredith and Swinburne, were not troubled by the replacement of the old dispensation of the universe and were satisfied by a universe ruled by the natural law. The fundamental difference between such attitudes and Hardy's view of the universe is that "the natural order did not so satisfy Hardy; and yet he was unable like Tennyson and Browning, whom it equally dissatisfied, to convince himself of the existence in the universe of a supra-natural force"¹⁷. His poetry is essentially an intellectual drama; a conflict between the reason that accepted the scientific interpretation of the existence and his heart that felt that such an interpretation was too horrible to be true. It would be so tragic because of the terrible pain and the savage cruelty it would cause to humanity.

According to these circumstances, man would not be the master of his own destiny; he is the slave of what Hardy calls 'The Immanent Will'. This will is unconscious and is "neither moral nor immoral: loveless and hateless...which neither good nor evil knows"¹⁸. Nature, according to Hardy, is indifferent to human values; chance is blind and time is cruel and insatiable. Since this state is intolerable; Hardy sought many escapes from the conviction that man must suffer without reprieve. Because he can not control his fate, Hardy believes that man is to be admired the more for the courage and fortitude with which he faces the inevitable. But the most profound of his many escapist conceptions was that of the force inside man which grows in consciousness of the roughness of humanity's fate and tries to alter it. At times, Hardy himself repudiated this hopeful, rather naïve, conception of this force since it can not cope with the injustice and pain of the human life.

Nevertheless, Hardy was indignant when the term pessimist was applied to him. His unorthodox religious beliefs made him an outcast. He called himself a meliorist, believing in the doctrine that the world may be improved by human endeavour. He spent much time on the social meliorists of the era, such as Herbert Spencer, Auguste Comte, Charles Darwin and John Stuart Mill. "Social amelioration", J.P. Ward says, "roughly speaking was the view that human progress could now be achieved not by more or less strict enactment of biblical and church injunctions, but by applying the new natural science, to material improvement"¹⁹. Hand in hand with this social meliorism for Hardy went his increasing religious agnosticism²⁰. Such an evolutionary meliorism as a basis for a moral doctrine is extremely insecure; and to an observer of life as a poet as Hardy that insecurity is obvious enough. Nevertheless, he "frequently conceived of (and wrote about) supernatural forces that control the universe, more through indifference or caprice than any firm will"²¹. He could not rest from questioning the nature of the force which might control the universe, in so far at least as he considered the universe is controlled.

As a result, Hardy's poems that stem from the present towards the future are often different in tone and in attitude from those written on the past. They are usually coloured by his loss of faith, by the growing spirit of industrialism and by the increasing threat of war. When Hardy thought of the present and looked forward into the future of mankind in a chaotic world, his mood would often darken. In this new world picture, early faith is replaced by uncertainty, hope and joy of childhood by old age and the mystery of death and immortality, love by loneliness and the lack of communication, the innocence and beauty of the rural communities by wars and the terrible effects of urbanity and the age of the machine.

Hardy's "The Darkling Thrush", (written on Dec.31,1899) would be a good starting point in this context . This popular poem is also known by its subtitle "By the Century's Death bed". It takes place on New Year's Eve, the last day of the 19th century, the end of the Victorian Age and also the life of Queen Victoria. If the title of the poem translated into contemporary idiom, it would be "The Thrush in the Dark".²² It is a transitional poem, written in a transitional period illustrating the trepidation and doubt many people felt about the future as the Victorian era came to an end and the modern era was about to begin. On a personal level, the poem embodies Hardy's despair and pessimism and his nostalgia for his lost faith.

This thirty-two line poem uses a bleak and wintry landscape as a metaphor for the close of the nineteenth century. It consists of four octaves , with each stanza containing two quatrains. The movement of the first two stanzas is from an observation of a winter landscape as perceived by an individual speaker to a terrible vision of the death of an era that the landscape seems to disclose. Winter is usually associated with death and desolation and this is the atmosphere that the poet creates when the poem opens.

The poem begins with a tired old man leaning on a coppice gate in a desolate area at the edge of a wooded grove. His description of the gloomy scene indicates that he sees little or no hope in future. Frost is gray as a ghost, winter has dregs, the sun is a weakening eye, stems are like strings of a broken lyre which stands for harmony and the music of poetry.²³ The first stanza ends with the speaker's awareness of the fact that the other humans have "haunted" their homes:

The land's sharp features seemed to be

The century's corpse out leant,

His crypt the cloudy canopy

The wind his death – lament.

The poem moves gradually from visual observation to emotional coloration .He feel that this moment in time marks the end of the century. The poet compares the dry land in front of him to an immense dead body lying, reminding him of the death of the century. All around him, and all the clouds become the coffin's top and the wind his death lament :

The tangled bine – stems scored the sky

Like strings of broken lyres,

And all mankind that haunted high

Had sought their household fires.

In this barren region, every spirit is under the pall of death. All signs of life have frozen :

The ancient pulse of germ and birth

Was shrunken hard and dry,

And every spirit upon earth

Seemed fervourless as I .

When a song of a thrush enters the scheme, the whole atmosphere begins changing. It spreads warmth and hope into the early desolate and lifeless area. The bird's song is spontaneous and unpremeditated. It is the life force that breaks in a joyful act. For the poet, the song is not a matter of survival; it is a choice. It is an ardent, full – hearted song :

At once – a voice arose among

The bleak twigs overhead

In a full – hearted evensong

Of joy illimited;

This change in diction creates an atmosphere of optimism and the words "evensong" , "carlolings" and "blessed Hope" have unmistakable religious connotations. The poet is "unaware" of the bird's "blessed Hope" because he can not find anything "written" in the landscape that may justify such a feeling of ecstasy :

That I could think there trembled through

His happy good – night air

Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew

And I was unaware.

Whether the poem is supposed to be of hope or despair is really a matter of controversy. For some readers the poem should be read as "a hymn not to faith, but to doubt"²⁴. Those who adopt this attitude argue that though the poem seem to end with a note of hope, yet it is only communicated through the "trembling" voice of the bird. All the evidence "written" around in the landscape, however, points to the contrary. To read the poem as an expression of hope and optimism is to ignore the gloom of the opening lines which keeps growing. The fact that the thrush may somehow be conscious of a "blessed Hope" of which the poet is not, is not a statement of affirmation. It is rather a fond wish or an attempt of making belief. Thus the poem ends not with "knew", but with "unaware".

Other commentators, however, see that the poem ends with a note of hope and optimism. They argue that Hardy's reverence for life knew no bounds and this extended from a glorification of human life to that of animals and plants. He found in Darwin's claim of the kinship of all creatures a stimulus for a deeper compassion towards animals which he viewed as weak fellowcreatures.²⁵ He respected life in its simplest forms and for him, insects and animals may have a deeper insight and understanding of life than man, and this what happens in "The Darkling Thrush". Nevertheless, the nature of hope based on a merely biological consideration remains mysterious and justifiably uncertain.

Though birth is a favourite subject for poets, yet in " To an Unborn Pauper Child", Hardy urges the child not to come into a world of suffering and apprehension:

Breathe not, hid Heart : cease silently,

And though thy birth – hour beckons thee,

Sleep the long sleep:

The Doomsters heap

Travails and teens around us here,

And Time – wraith's turn our songsingings to fear.

The poet extends this idea by asserting that nothing can be changed by the coming child. Subtly we are reminded of the child (Jesus Christ) who came and wrought change. He asks the question if the child knew all there was to know about his future life would he accept to come?. Nevertheless, man has to submit to the inevitability of the birth anyway and the poet, therefore, shows his miserable future life:

Fair would I , dear, find some shut plot

Of earth's wide world for thee, where not

On tear, one qualm,

**Should break the calm,
But I am weak as thou and bare;
Nor man can change the common lot to rare.**

Hardy's obsession with the mystery and fear of the future life of mankind extends from birth to death and to the concept of immortality. In his group of poems on death, his style tends often to be ironical. His sonnet "In the cemetery", for example, is an ironic comment on human nature and the inevitability of death :

**'One says in tears', 'Tis mine lies here!'
Another, "Nay, mine, you Pharisee!"
Another, "How dare you move my flowers
And put your own on this grave of ours!"**

There is also the ironic comment that we weep over what appears (the grave and the flowers which symbolize the dear departed) rather than weeping over the horrible reality that we can not see "And as well cry over a new – laid drain / As anything else, to ease your pain!"

The ironic vein underlines such poems as "By Her Aunt's Grave" and "Ah, Are you Digging on my Grave". Both poems deal also with death and after. In the second poem, the poet mingles the theme of death with memory, love and disloyalty. The poem is almost a parody of the kind of elegy which pays tribute to the dead. It consists of the supposed words of the dead wife and the words of her living dog. Here both man and the dog are found wanting; for the man marries another, "yesterday he went to wed / one of the brightest wealth has bred" and the dog comes near the grave of the women only to bury a bone :

**"Mistress, I dug upon your grave
To bury a bone, in case
I should be hungry near this spot
When passing on my daily trot.**

Thinking of death, leads Hardy often to think of the dark, mysterious world of immortality, in such poems as "Hap", "Her Immortality", "Her Death and After" and "Beyond the Last Lamp". In "A January Night", there is the supernatural association of the night with the man recently dead. The poem ends with the enigma of ignorance:

**It is the spirit a stray
Of the man at the house below
Whose coffin they took in to – day?
We do not know.**

In the same way, "After the last Breath," depicts not the conventional death – bed scene but a moving and constrained reaction to the aftermath of death:

**Blankly we gaze. We are free to go or stay;
Our morrow's anxious plans have missed their aim;
Whether we leave to – might or wait till day
Counts as the same.**

In "Afterwards", Hardy speaks of his own death and of what people may say of him then. The poem tells a lot of Hardy the man and the poet. He imagines them speaking of his reverence to nature, compassion to animal, thinking of the mystery of immortality and of his death:

**And will any say when my bell of quittance is heard in the gloom,
And a crossing breeze cuts a pause in its outrollings,
Till they rise again, as they were a new bell's boom,
He hears it not now, but used to notice such thing's?**

Hardy's restlessness with the present and his anxiety and pessimism about the future is not caused only by his spiritual vacuum but also by the cruelty of urban life and the bad effects of the modern industrial spirit. In many of his poems, Hardy explores the negative influence of the life in city on the destinies of the new comers. In "The Ruined Maid", for example ,he express his sorrow and disappointment for the loss of innocence and in "The New comer's Wife", he shows sympathy towards the naïve deceived man. He also expresses his protest for running the risk of moving to cities in "From Her in the Country" where a countrygirl muses on her simple life and expresses her desire to change it. In "An Expostulation", the poet addresses the country girl as such:

**Why want to go a far
Where pitfalls are,
When all we swains adore
Your features more and more
As heroine of our artless masquings here,
And count few Wessex' daughters half so dear?**

"Nobody Comes" is another poem written in old age. It shows a remarkably keen observation, particularly in the description of the telegraph –wire. The telegraph and the car have come into the land and had a negative impact on the traditions that used to bring people together. Industry has led to a social and familial disintegration. Although telegraph wires provide a means of communication, the sight of them on a lonely road seems to symbolize to the poet, man's sense of isolation:

**A car comes up, with lamps full – glare,
That flash upon a tree:
It has nothing to do with me,
And whangs along in a world of its own
Leaving a blacker air.**

Interestingly enough ,the romance of the past, the horror of the present and the anxiety towards the mysterious future meet in such a short poem as "Drummer Hodge". This economical and very restrained poem contains an implied criticism and condemnation of war which was, to Hardy, one of the major causes for the distortion of the romantic picture of the old times. In form and in content, this poem is typical of Hardy and consists of three stanzas. During the 1880's and 1890's ,British imperialism reached its peak and was culminated by the Boer War (1899 – 1902).²⁶ Though the poem is restrained, yet it can evoke great sympathy for Hodge, the West County boy, who has fallen in that war in South Africa. The young man's innocence and youth make his premature death seem all the more wasteful . Drummers were usually the very youngest of soldiers and were considered too young to fight and Hodge is a name that is often given for people from the countryside.

The poem opens with the burial details of the body of Hodge who seems to have been killed shortly before. He has just been thrown ;not lowered with dignity and military honors, into his grave. He is not even placed in a coffin and is buried " just as found ". The pathos of Hodge's fate is made more striking by the restrained manner in which Hardy relates his burial . Those who have buried him are not identified and are referred to as "They" only:

They throw in Drummer Hodge, to rest

Uncoffined – just as found:

His landmark is a kopie – crest

That breaks the veldt around;

And foreign constellations west

Each night above his mound.

Hodge is not given a headstone to mark the site of his burial spot and the only landmark to show the position of his grave is the "Kopje crest / That breaks the veldt around". The foreignness to Hodge of his resting place is emphasized by the use of these African words and by the strangeness, to him, of the stars that rise over his grave which may symbolize the fate, the tool of the Immanent Will, that controls people. The strangeness of the terrain, of the soil even, and of the constellations that nightly appear over the grave of Hodge is frequently stressed in the rest of the poem.

The second stanza points at the contrast between the past and the present states of Hodge. It is a quick flash – back pointing at the simplicity innocence of the past social life of this young soldier and his present state of loneliness and alienation. The identification, here, between Hardy himself and Hodge can hardly be missed. The contrast in this stanza is between the simple English boy who came fresh from his West County home (in Wessex) and his remote, alien resting –place :

Young Hodge the Drummer never knew-

Fresh from his Wessex home-

The meaning of the broad karoo,

The Bush, the dusty loam,

And why uprose to nightly view

Strange stars amid the gloam.

The third stanza foreshadows the possible future of this young soldier. Like the rest of Hardy's poems the future (which is represented by immortality in this case) seems to be indefinite; a matter of conjunction. The irony here is that despite his ignorance of his surroundings, Hodge will now be part of the South Africa veldt forever; his dust will return to nature. His remains will nourish the roots of "Some Southern tree".

In Hardy, man is equally subject to the supremacy of nature as he is to fate. This stanza, too, ends with a reference to the alien constellations(symbolizing fate) which will "reign" forever over the grave of this young soldier:

Yet portion of that unknown plain

Will Hodge for ever be;

His homely Northern breast and brain

**Grow to some Southern tree,
And strange – eyed constellations reign
His stars eternally.**

Notes

- ¹ Maurice Wollamn (ed.), *Ten Twentieth – century poets* (London : Harrap, 1975),p.89.
- ² M.H. Abrams(ed.), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Vol.2 (New York:W.W. Norton & Company. INC, 1968),p.1409.
North Carolina Press, 1961), p.74.
- ³ Samuel Hynes, *The Pattern of Hardy's Poetry* (Chapel Hill : The University of
- ⁴ Maurice Wollman (ed.), p.91.
- ⁵ James Gibson (ed.), *Thomas Hardy : The Complete Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1976). This is now the standard edition and all the references of Hardy's poems are to this edition.
- ⁶ Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy : A biography* (Oxford : Oxford University Press,18820, p.42.
- ⁷ Geoffrey Harvey, *The Complete Critical Guide to Thomas Hardy* (London : Routledge, 2003), p.5.
- ⁸ Robert Gitting, *Young Thomas Hardy* (London :Heinemann Educational, 1975), p.6.
- ⁹ Florence Emily Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy 1840 – 1928* (London: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1975), p.16.
- ¹⁰ John Powell Ward, *Thomas Hardy's Poetry* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993), pp.11-12.
- ¹¹ J.O. Bailey, *The Poetry of Thomas Hardy : A Handbook and Commentary* (Chapel Hill : The University of North Carolina Press, 1970), p.300.
- ¹² Paul Zietlow, *Moments of Vision : The Poetry of Thomas Hardy* (Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1974),p.152.
- ¹³ Graham Handley, *Chosen Poems of Thomas Hardy* (London : Pan Educational, 1978), p.38.
- ¹⁴ J.O. Bailey, p.298.
- ¹⁵ Geoffrey Harvey, p.11.
- ¹⁶ Michael Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work of Thomas Hardy* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p.58.
- ¹⁷ E.K. Brown and J.O. Bailey (ed.), *Victorian Poetry* (New York :Ronald, 1962), p.xxxiv.
- ¹⁸ Florence Emily Hardy, p.409.
- ¹⁹ John Powell Ward, P.19.
- ²⁰ Agnostic (fr.GK agnostos: unknown), a person who thinks that nothing can be known about the existence or nature of God or anything except material things and that knowledge of all matters is relative.

²¹ "Thomas Hardy", *Wikipedia* (URL: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki>) [November 11,2006].

²² The comparison between Keats's poem "Ode to a Nightingale" and Hardy's "The Darkling Thrush" is quite common. The similarity in diction between these two poems is striking and it is no coincidence that "darkling" should show up in both poems. Such comparison, however, is beyond the scope of this paper.

²³ In poetry, especially in the Romantic Period, the lyre is a recurrent symbol for the creative interaction between the poet's speculative mind and the external world. If the poet is in good mood, his mind and nature can join in a creative harmony and there would be a parallel between its music and that of the natural world.

²⁴ A.E. Stallings, "The Darkling Thrush : A Centennial Appreciation" (URL: <http://www.alsopreview.com/aside/aethrush.htm/>) [Dec. 4, 2006].

²⁵ Joanna Cullen Brown, *A Journey into Thomas Hardy's Poetry* (London: W>H> Allen &Co. PIC, 1989), pp.99-91.

²⁶ This war was waged between the British and Dutch settlers of South Africa. Hardy in this poem does not show a patriotic enthusiasm, he rather concentrates on the pity of war and its effect on the ordinary soldier.

علاقة الحاضر بالماضي والمستقبل في شعر

توماس هاردي (١٨٤٠-١٩٢٨)

يمتاز شعر توماس هاردي بنغمته الكئيبة وبنظرة تشاؤمية فهو غالباً ما يتحدث عن الحزن والضياع والإحباط. في أشعاره ورواياته يتحدث غالباً عن سكان مقاطعة ويسكس الريفية و يمتاز شعره بتنوعه اللغوي حيث تجد فيه المفردة البسيطة والصعبة، الحديثة والقديمة، المحلية والأجنبية لتحقيق تأثير معين وإيصال الفكرة إلى ذهن القارئ. وقد عاش هاردي سنواته الأولى بهدوء وسكينة وكانت حياته المبكرة سعيدة ومستقرة عاطفياً واجتماعياً ودينياً، حياة ريفية بعيدة عن صخب المدينة محاطاً بعائلته وأصدقائه.

في أغلب قصائده، يقوم هاردي باستغلال موقف صغير أو لحظة عاطفية ينطلق منها تارة إلى الماضي وأخرى إلى المستقبل وأصبحت قضية الحنين إلى الماضي وتقدم الزمن من أهم موضوعاته. يمثل الماضي للشاعر براءة الطفولة والإيمان الفطري والحب والذكريات الجميلة وجمال الطبيعة في قصائد مثل "أولاد اليوم والأمس" و"الطفولة بين الأحرار" و"عمى الروح". وفي قصيدته "الثيران" يعبر الشاعر عن رغبته في تصديق قصة الثيران التي، كما تقول الحكاية، وجدت راحة ساعة ولادة السيد المسيح (ع). وفي قصائد أخرى يحن الشاعر إلى أيام الحب الذي ربطه بزوجته المتوفاة في قصائد مثل قصيدة "الصوت". وفي قصائد مثل "عندما انطلقت إلى لا يونيس" يرجع الشاعر بالذاكرة إلى الماضي البعيد: ماضي القصص التراثية والأساطير. الماضي إذن يمثل للشاعر مصدر الإلهام، و زمن البراءة والحب و عبقوان الشباب و متعة الإيمان.

إن سبب شعور الشاعر بالإحباط وحنينه الدائم إلى عبق الماضي يرتبط ارتباطاً وثيقاً بأزمة الشاعر الروحية والذهنية. لقد أثرت نظريات دارون التي اطلع عليها الشاعر أيام الدراسة سلباً على حالة الشاعر الروحية بالإضافة إلى تنامي الروح المادية والنزعة الصناعية عند منتصف القرن التاسع عشر. عندئذ شرع الشاعر بالبحث عن معنى للوجود وقاده التفكير إلى الاستنتاج بأن العالم تحت إرادة قوة خفية لا يمكن التنبؤ بأفعالها وعلى الإنسان في هذه الحالة أن يبحث عن القوى الكامنة داخله لتسيير حياته. إن نظرة التشكيك والغموض هي المسئولة لدرجة كبيرة عن النغمة الرثائية لأشعار هاردي.

وعندما ينظر الشاعر إلى المستقبل فإنه يجد الخوف والموت والعمى والحرب والضياع في قصائد مثل "العندليب في الظلام" و "في المقبرة" التي يعلق فيها الشاعر بهكم عن طبيعة البشر و حتمية الموت و "هودج الطبال" التي ينتقد فيها مادية الحرب. في قصائد مثل "موتها وما بعد" و "بعد القنديل الأخير" يفكر الشاعر في عالم الخلود المظلم والغامض وفي قصائد مثل "الفتاة المحطمة" و "لا أحد يأتي" يعلق الشاعر على الآثار السلبية للحياة المادية للمدينة على حياة الناس.