Chapter VI

Narrative techniques in the select novels of Thomas Hardy

"All works of fiction tell a story but what sets them apart is the particular way in which the story is told".

-George Fleischer

Narrative techniques are the methods that writers use to give certain artistic and emotional effects to a story. Although the term gets used loosely in everyday speech to talk about narrative, a “story” is just a sequence of events in time. Not until a writer chooses how to present that story in language does it become a “narrative.” Many key narrative techniques fall into four categories such as plot, character, point of view and style.

When writers put a story, or sequence of events, into language, it’s called a narrative. However, writers aren’t bound to tell the story chronologically. The modern narratives have a broader function. After a close study of famous examples of modern narrative, one would realize that such narratives do not merely entertain but serve as ways to communicate writers’ moral, cultural and political perspectives. Moreover, narratives have contributed in achieving educational objectives in our everyday life. Different forms of media are enabling people to express and record their real life stories and to share their knowledge and their cultural values across the world. In addition, many documentaries on television adopt a narrative technique to communicate information in an interesting way.

The “plot” is the meaningfully organized structure in which the writer presents the story. According to Aristotle’s “Poetics,” good plots should have a beginning that draws readers into the main action and makes them want to know what’s next, a middle that follows from the beginning and needs further action to satisfy readers and an end that leaves readers with a sense of completion. Aristotle writes that plots should also be unified -- readers shouldn’t be able to remove any part of the text without losing crucial meaning. Another
model, Freytag’s pyramid, reworks Aristotle’s beginning, middle and end in terms of inciting action, climax and moment of last suspense.

Most narratives centre on one or more characters. Characters are shaped by what readers see them do and say, and so narrative techniques surrounding characters are related to those surrounding plot, point of view and style. As M. H. Abram’s notes in “A Glossary of Literary Terms,” readers interpret the characters, speech and actions to determine their “particular moral, intellectual, and emotional qualities.” In most narratives, characters are well developed, or “round”: readers understand their motivations and can think of them as complex, real people. Other characters may be more two-dimensional, or “flat”; there’s no need.

Point of view is the perspective from which a writer tells the story, defined by the narrator’s knowledge, presence and objectivity. The types of narrative viewpoint lie on a spectrum from first-person limited, where a single character who refers to himself as “I,” tells the story without all the information, to third-person omniscient, where an anonymous narrator tells the story about the characters and knows everything about them. Point of view can affect characterization by determining whether the author shows or tells readers about a character. “Showing” occurs when readers learn about characters mainly through their speech or actions, as in Ernest Hemingway’s short story “Hills like White Elephants.” “Telling,” or “exposition,” happens when the author uses the narrative voice or other characters’ speech to describe a character.

Style refers to the kinds of language a writer uses to tell a story, and it encompasses several elements. The narrative’s diction is determined by the writer’s word choice. Diction can be analyzed using terms like formal or colloquial, Latinate or Anglo-Saxon, abstract or concrete and technical or accessible. The narrative’s syntax refers to its sentence structures, usually discussed on a spectrum from complex to simple; a text that
switches narrators from chapter to chapter, for instance, might have one narrator speak in complex, Latinate phrases while another thinks in simple, colloquial language. Finally, the amount of figurative language, which literally says one thing while implying another, is another characteristic of style.

Perspective is the lens through which a story is told. A story told in the first-person point-of-view is one in which the narrator is the main character, and uses the pronoun "I," when describing himself. This type of perspective is intimate, but can limit the perspective of the reader and relies upon a narrator who may not be reliable. By contrast, stories in which the narrator simply tells the tale of other characters, and never uses "I" is called third-person narration. This narrator can be omniscient, or limited to the awareness of the thoughts of a single character. The narrative technique of an author in any novel is crucial to the readers understanding of the narrative. The way in which a novel is written influences the way in which the reader interprets the events which occur throughout the novel and allows the author to convey the feeling of time, place, and people in the society in which the author is attempting to impart to his or her readers, and Thomas Hardy is one such torch bearer in successfully creating an impact on his readers by giving an artistic and emotional effects to all his works.

(//http www.classroom.synonym.com/literary-definition.com//)

The crucial role that forms or structures play in the novelist’s presentation of life was obvious to Thomas Hardy. His novels are carefully constructed; and the once fashionable observation that his architectural training as a youth was the reason he built near, geometric plots does not account for the range of experimentation and inventiveness in the forms his novels. Hardy’s continuing popularity has to do with a combination of seriousness, tenderness, and tolerance that enables him to make significant interpretations of experience.
The structural features of his novels are not usually noticed either by general readers or by critics, even though structure is a dominant factor in creating the tragic qualities of the individual novels. The scheme he employed in most of his novels combine Aristotle’s dictum of stature within a society, Auguste Comte’s idea of cyclic change, and his own variation upon the idea of cycle that makes key events in the novel commentaries upon the completed action. Hardy’s utilization of this doneness in his novels does not limit his imaginative perceptions of the situations and the characters that embody the forms. Thus Henchard, unlike Clym and Eustacia, has an existence independent of the novel’s forms. He lives his life within a cycle, he is aware of the cycle – his awareness even accounts, in part, for his death but the range of employment of the cycle in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* has an enriching effect quite unlike the idea of conflicting temporal existences in *The Return of the Native*, in which every point of relation between the two protagonists is twisted into a polemic.

The key word in Hardy’s comments on form in fiction would seem to be organic. Everything affecting the plot and characters must be natural to the conditions in the novel and must grow out of those conditions.

In *The Profitable Reading of Fiction*, his longest statement of his idea of form in fiction, Hardy argues that there is a “beauty of shape” in fiction that gives a pleasure equal to that gained from pleasing shapes in pictures or sculpture:

> Briefly, a story should be an organism. To use the worlds applied to the epic by Addison, whose artistic feeling in this kind was of the subtlest, nothing should go before it, be intermixed with it, or follow after it, that is not related to it. (DK 12)

Hardy’s frame of reference in these remarks is obviously Aristotle’s dictum that the art work should contain a beginning, middle, and an end: but it includes more than the
bare features of neat relevance. It includes, as does Aristotle’s outline of dramatic principles, the necessity that all narrative devices be appropriate to the plot, atmosphere and final significance. Hardy’s interest in the naturalness, or organic nature, of the form of fiction is reflected in his remarks on style. The simplicity of his prose is a deliberate quality which he sought to achieve following a study of both punctilious and casual stylists. Hardy seems not to have viewed himself as a throwback to an earlier age of storytelling, as many of his readers have. At least, he explicitly admonishes that art must progress.

Most modern theories of tragedy assume, implicitly or explicitly, that intensity is a crucial quality in the tragic personae. Unless the protagonist can feel deeply, and unless the author is able to make us realize that the protagonist is feeling deeply and suffering keenly, we are unlikely to become involved enough to catch a glimpse of the nature of existence that propels the protagonist. There is no limit to the methods by which the author can create this intensity, and so the stress placed on this point does not constitute advocacy of one facet to tragedy over another: tragedy of character over tragedy of plot or tragedy of circumstance. In Hardy the intensity of a character’s perception of his situation is the principal bolstering factor in his expression of an element of tragic existence. Indeed, without this factor we could not begin to take Eustacia seriously as a challenger of nature’s enigma, much less as a character intended to create empathy; it is almost solely the intensity of Tess’s consciousness that makes her more than a chance-blasted milkmaid.

The novels by Hardy taken as a whole are distinguished by their display of learning and their simple directness of narration, a combination responsible for the aura of sophisticated folklore that Hardy often achieves. They also suggest an environment compatible with the momentousness of tragedy. These conditions differ sharply from those of Conrad and Faulkner, two modern novelists who have fictions. Their subtleties of style and presentation of philosophies evoke more complex reaction than Hardy’s qualities, although it
has been argued that subtleties such as theirs diffuse rather than encourage reader’s involvement and their characters and situations are too individualized to achieve the kind of reader’s abandonment of self that is needed for the profound empathy of tragedy. (JP 156-75)

The provocativeness of Hardy’s attempt to write tragedies is suggested by the perennially enlarged body of literature on “tragic novelist Thomas Hardy”. Although studies of Hardy’s ideas about and use of form and structure are few, the same cannot be said about studies on the quality of tragedy in his work.

Hardy in each novel uses a dominant aesthetic feature, or organizing principle, that informs the entire work and creates the peculiar quality of tragedy that distinguishes it: the arrangement of opposing qualities in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, the conflict of value systems in *The Return of the Native*, the indirect expression of tragic significance through a conflation of characterizations in *The Woodlanders*, the intensity that directs the characters’ behaviour in much the same way that it guides the reader’s reaction in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, without confusing the narrator’s personality for the author’s. These various devices of Hardy’s are manifested in the very nature of the novels, offering restrictions on and opportunities for the expression of certain kinds of emotions and themes. Hardy never repeated a dominant organizing technique, though he might use the technique again in a subordinate role; for example, the pattern of opposition that supports the theme in *Far from the Madding Crowd* reappears in later novels, especially in *The Return of the Native* and *Jude the Obscure*.

The forms Hardy uses indicate marked growth in his ability to direct reader attention to the crucial tensions in his novels. The direction of his development is not unusual – from an early stiffness and artificiality of concept evolves subtlety of concept and flexibility in utilization – but it is the extent of the development that is noteworthy. By the end of his career as a novelist he incorporates elements of historical theory and mysticism into a lexical
and syntactic matrix. His early novels contain obvious formal devices and are structured in a very strained fashion. The manner in which his novels are made to fit restrictive criteria makes them, in large part, exercises in self – apprenticeship. That after *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *The Return of the Native* he deliberately wrote his next novels in totally different manners (especially notable is his rejection, after the success of *Far from the Madding Crowd,* of the idea of a “woodlanders story”) reinforces the image of Hardy as autodidact, consciously putting himself to particular, and foreign, tasks. He gained genuine success – both artistically and financially – only after he realized that Wessex provided all the variety of dilemma, mood, and social levels that he had been searching for in other milieus.

Most of us see the world in terms of familiar features of our own lives. The scope of sociology demonstrates the need to take a much broader view of why we are as we are, and why we act as we do. It teaches us that what we regard as natural, inevitable, good or true may not be such, and that the ‘givens’ of our life are strongly influenced by historical and social forces. Understanding the subtle yet complex and profound ways in which our individual lives reflect the contexts of our social experiences.

In recent years in the field of sociology and social sciences “estrangement” has proved a heuristically fruitful concept. Though very few generalizations can be made concerning the way the concept of estrangement is understood by social scientists, yet they do not use it in any of the major contexts. Many sociologists understand estrangement precisely in terms of some forms of separation of the individual from some aspect of society. Sociologists differ from Hegel, Marx and Fromm in another respect. For almost all sociologists “estrangement” is psychological state of an individual (JC 849). It is conceived solely in terms of the presence of certain attitudes and feelings; the question of an essential nature of man does not even arise.
The use of “estrangement” in connection with some form of separation of the individual from some aspect of society is most common among the social scientists. Some writers do use the term in connection with work and interpersonal relationships; some others use it in connection with the phenomena of “powerlessness” and “meaninglessness”. This suggests that uses of the term from its different historical sources come together in its employment in the field of social sciences. Its use in connection with separation from society is reminiscent of Hegel. Marx’s early writing is recalled by its uses in connection with “work”, “powerlessness” and “meaninglessness”. And the use of the term in connection with separation from other people has long been a common one. Sociologists use the term in so many different connections that it cannot be viewed as designating a single phenomenon.

To be alienated is to feel a lack of meaningful relationships with other people, and to feel unhappy about this lack. Some writers (DD 5) characterize this type of estrangement from others in terms of “social isolation” which is construed in the sense of dissociation from the norms, values and culture of one’s society. But as long as the reference is to interpersonal relationships, the term “loneliness” is more suitable. Two types of “loneliness”, however, must be distinguished. An individual who tries unsuccessfully to establish meaningful contact with others is in a different situation from one who chooses to live alone.

Jan Hajda characterizes “estrangement” from others in terms of the feeling of a lack of community with others. For him, to be isolated is to feel “uncomfortably different in the presence of others because of one’s views ….interests … personal tastes …” (JH 5) Estrangement, as Hajda conceives it, is an awareness of “non-belonging or non-sharing which reflects one’s exclusion or self-exclusion from social and cultural participation.’ (JH 5) M.Aiken and J.Hage characterize estrangement from others in terms of “dissatisfaction in social relations” (MG 4).
Some sociologists employ the term “estrangement” in connection with the feeling of “powerlessness” in the face of existing economic and social structure. This type of estrangement is to be conceived in terms of the inability to control and influence social, political and economic structures.

A large body of modern sociological research has been devoted to discussion of the social condition of “anomie”. The term “anomie” was first given sociological significance by Emile Durkheim in *Suicide*. Seeman employs the term “anomie” in connection with a person for whom “there is a high expectancy that socially unapproved behaviours are required to achieve given goals” (MS 6). Middleton, Neal and Rettig understand “anomie in a similar way the last two define “normlessness” as follows:

“Socially approved alternatives are viewed as relatively ineffective, and the consequent necessity of unapproved behaviour in goal attainment is emphasised.”

Srole’s concept of “anomia” is measured in terms of agreement with five different statements, which express feelings of

1. being ignored by those in power
2. lacking confidence in one’s ability to fulfil one’s life-goals
3. going downhill in life
4. despairing of life’s being worthwhile
5. being unable to count on anyone. (Srole 6)

When we assess the usefulness of the term “estrangement”, after having reviewed the variety of way in which it is understood in modern sociological studies, it would appear that some of the uses of these terms are more helpful than others. The use of the term in connection with dissociation from popular culture and rejection of fundamental social values would seem to be quite appropriate. Such a use finds historical justification in Hegel’s use of the term in connection with a discordant relation of the individual to the social
The ideas of Karl Marx witnessed the growth of factories and industrial production, as well as the inequalities that resulted. Most of Marx’s work concentrated on economic issues, but since he was always concerned to connect economic problems to social institutions, his work was, and is, rich in sociological insights. Even his sternest critics regard his work as important for the development of society. According to the French author Emile Durkheim, a writer should examine social facts – aspects of social life that shape our actions as individuals. Durkheim believed that societies have a reality of their own—that is to say that there is more to society than simply the actions and interests of its individual members. According to Durkheim, social facts are ways of acting, thinking or feeling that are external to individuals to have their own reality outside the lives and perceptions of individual people which is evident in the novels of Thomas Hardy. The bulk of Hardy's fictional works initially published as serials in magazines were set in the semi-fictional region of Wessex and explored tragic characters struggling against their passions and social circumstances. Hardy makes society responsible for much of the sorrow and sufferings of the world. In a natural state man is free from many of these evils. Use and wants, human conventions and man-made laws are in conflict with the laws of nature. One of the principles of these social laws is that which places a ban on an unmarried woman who has by chance becomes the mother of a child. She is socially regarded as “ruined”. In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Hardy uses a variety of narrative techniques in order to convey his own impressions of the society in which both he and his character Tess lived. Hardy's use of a third person omniscient narrator who is all knowing adds to the vulnerability of Tess by the reader's knowledge of what other characters say and do, whilst simultaneously detaching himself from the tragedy of Tess. The use of extensive description of setting by Hardy allows the reader to interpret the action, reactions,
and moods of the characters in relation to the specific atmosphere in which they exist at the
time and the influence which such a setting has on the character's feelings and emotions.
Hardy's use of religious and mythological allusions and metaphysical symbols allow the
reader to reflect on the religious and socio-cultural environments in which the narrative is set
so as to allow the reader to better understand and interpret the actions and emotions of the
characters.

An effective narrative technique used by Hardy is the provision of a
more direct means of communication between his characters and the reader. This is achieved
through the use of dialogue, letter writing, and songs and poetry. Dialogue between
characters allows Hardy to present his characters to his readers in a more direct way. It
permits Hardy to allow his readers to interpret the characters in a way which is less
influenced by his own narration and by which the readers are able to judge for themselves the
characters by how they speak and communicate with others as well as the content of their
conversation. Letter writing and songs and poetry allow the reader to be directly informed of the
actions and their rationale as well as the feelings of a specific character by which the reader is
able to interpret these being influenced by the specific character rather than Hardy himself,
and also allows the reader an insight into the social and cultural backgrounds of the society as
reasoning for the characters behaviour and emotions. The way we read, interpret, and reflect
on a novel is greatly influenced by the author and his or her use of narrative techniques in
order to appropriately convey the characters and their society. The readers are not only
entertained but also learn some underlying message from the narration of Hardy. Moreover, a
narrative is set in specific cultural contexts. Readers can get a deep insight of that culture and
develop an understanding toward it. Thus, Hardy has acted as a binding force in uniting
humanity.
"Tess of the d’Urbervilles" presents complex pictures of both the importance of social class in nineteenth-century England and the difficulty of defining class in any simple way. Certainly the Durbeyfields are a powerful emblem of the way in which class is no longer evaluated in Victorian times as it would have been in the Middle Ages—that is, by blood alone, with no attention paid to fortune or worldly success. Indubitably the Durbeyfields have purity of blood, yet for the parson and nearly everyone else in the novel, this fact amounts to nothing more than a piece of genealogical trivia. In the Victorian context, cash matters more than lineage, which explains how Simon Stokes, Alec’s father, was smoothly able to use his large fortune to purchase a lustrous family name and transform his clan into the Stoke-d’Urbervilles. The d’Urbervilles pass for what the Durbeyfields truly are—authentic nobility—simply because definitions of class have changed. The issue of class confusion even affects the Clare clan, whose most promising son, Angel, is intent on becoming a farmer and marrying a milkmaid, thus bypassing the traditional privileges of a Cambridge education and a parsonage. His willingness to work side by side with the farm laborers helps endear him to Tess, and their acquaintance would not have been possible if he were a more traditional and elitist aristocrat. Thus, the three main characters in the Angel-Tess-Alec triangle are all strongly marked by confusion regarding their respective social classes, an issue that is one of the main concerns of the novel. An omniscient narrator is one who knows all and sees all. It allows the reader and indirect insight into the actions and emotions of specific characters.

The omniscience of the narrator allows the reader to not be influenced by the character in the interpretations of the character’s behaviour and feelings and also encourages the reader to sympathise with Tess in her tragic and unfortunate predicament. Using such a narrative technique, Hardy allows himself to be somewhat detached from his characters, often appearing as though he himself does not sympathise with the tragedy that is
Tess. The effect of the novel not being narrated by Tess is that we as the reader are given a perception of the lives of other characters which Tess herself is unaware of. It allows us to interpret for ourselves the predicament which characters other than Tess are placed in through our own eyes with the influence of Hardy and not through Tess. However, this style of narration prevents the reader from having a direct line into the thoughts and feelings of Tess and other characters, and does not allow for the character to directly communicate with their readers in a way which would inform the readers of the workings of the character's mind, what they do, and why they do it. However Hardy manages to overcome this difficulty through the use of other narrative techniques such as dialogue and letter writing.

Setting in this case refers to the specific surrounding environment and its atmosphere in which a character exists at a specific point in time. The particular setting in which a character exists reflects the character's moods, actions, reactions, and their rationale for these, whilst the setting also influences how a character behaves. Hardy's comprehensive description of these settings also conveys to the reader the insignificance of individual characters in relation to the social atmosphere in which they live as a whole. Upon the commencement of chapter two, Hardy describes the county of Marlott and the surrounding Vale of Black moor in terms of its rural beauty and cultural atmosphere whereby a May Day dance is being held. This description of setting reflects the peaceful atmosphere of the county at that time, much like that of Tess and her family, creating suspense for the events to come. Prior to Alec's violation of Tess, Hardy describes the setting of Chase borough as a decayed market town in the novel, where Alec, Tess, and their companions have chosen to spend their evening drinking. An atmosphere of chaos and disorder has thus been set with Tess's intoxicated and unruly companions turning into satyrs clasping nymphs. This creation of an embroiled and uncomfortable environment for Tess alerts the reader to advancing events.
Hardy's characters are greatly influenced by the religious and social environments in which they live. Religious and mythological allusions enable Hardy to convey these aspects of his society to his readers. In the opening of the novel, the first character the readers are introduced to is Parson Tringham. No physical description is given and his dialogue is limited, creating an alluding and mysterious figure. The parson represents the religiosity of Hardy's society and communicates to the readers that this is a religious society, whilst also setting the scene for Tess's introduction to the readers and for the events to come. At the commencement of the second phase of the novel "maiden no more", Tess is seen burdened with a heavy basket and a large bundle. This can be regarded as the metaphysical symbol of oppression and hardship. Sometime later as Tess and Angel depart from the dairy after their wedding ceremony, a cock is heard crowing. Such is an omen of bad luck, and according to biblical references, the cock crowing three times as it had done intensifies the omen even more. This religious allusion represents the religious implications and consequences for Tess's decision not to inform Angel of her past, whilst also creating suspense for the reader as to the events to come.

An effective narrative technique used by Hardy is dialogue between characters. How a character speaks and what they say allow a greater insight into the nature of their individuality. It permits the reader to judge the characters on the basis of their own communication with other characters rather than on Hardy's own interpretation of their converse. Dialogue also informs the reader of a specific character's thoughts and feelings as well as their intentions and rationale for previous actions. Upon the commencement of the novel, the reader is introduced to John Durbeyfield. His dialogue with the unknown parson indicates to the reader that this is an uneducated man who is a member of the lower classes. His dialect may give an indication of his country of origin but also conveys to the readers that he is possibly intoxicated, which we later find out he is, and also slightly pompous without
reason. Thus Hardy's use of dialogue here sets the scene for Tess's introduction to the reader. Also used by Hardy in order to create a more intimate relationship between the characters and his readers is the use of letter writing and songs. Having set their wedding date for New Years Eve, Tess and Angel relish their time together, however upon trying on her wedding dress, Tess cannot help but remember one of her mother's songs: "That would never become a wife,.. That had once done amiss" (Tess 199)

This song allows Tess to return to her childhood in her adulthood, and also allows her to convey a typical value of the society in which she lived, a women who had committed an indiscretion in her early years shall never be married. This song also imparts to the reader Tess's fears and doubts, and the extent to which her guilty conscience is imploring her to inform Angel of her past. During the climax of Tess's depression whereby she is in a state of "utter stagnation" (Tess 310), Tess receives a letter from her former dairymaid friend Marian, asking Tess to join her at Flintcomb Ash.

Once having arrived at Flintcomb Ash, and Tess having subjected Alec to an "insulting slap" (Tess 335), Tess resolves to write to Angel, imploring him to "save me from what threatens me!" (Tess 340). Having returned home to her ill mother, only to be informed of her father's death, Tess now resolves to write to Angel yet again, this time in a bitter letter abusing Angel for his mistreatment of her. Having received no reply from Angel, Marian and Izz write to Angel beseeching him to return to Tess.

The use of letter writing enables Hardy to create a more intimate relationship between his characters and the readers, allowing the readers to understand the character's behaviour and their rationale. Hardy's use of an omniscient narrator, descriptive setting, allusion and metaphysical symbols, and letter writing and songs in Tess of the D'Urbervilles enables Hardy to influence the way his readers understand and interpret the events of the novel. These narrative techniques are highly effective in establishing a
relationship between the characters and the reader and also in conveying to the readers the various aspects of Hardy's society. An understanding of these religious, social, and cultural aspects allows the reader to rationalise the actions and emotions of the characters in relation to the society in which these characters live. It is crucial for the readers to comprehend the background and aspects of Hardy's society in order that they are able to realistically explicate the plot of the novel in relation to the environment in which the characters exist. Hardy uses the microcosmic to demonstrate the general Tess is on numerous occasions directly representative of not only the women of the time, but also of the pastoral community as a whole. Hardy does this by way of graphic imagery and significant symbolism. For example where Tess and Izz are returning to work at Flintcomb-Ash Farm, Hardy cleverly portrays them all as being of the same kind. “Tess, with the other women workers, in their whitey-brown pinners…” By presenting them as a “concourse” all attired alike they represent an entire league of women, all the women of the era. In this passage a man, an “indistinct figure: this one black”, represents the enemy, the devil, and the evil of industrialization. His appearance described as a creature of “Trofet” – or hell is sent to “discompose its aborigines” or Tess and the other “natives”. Hardy has generalized this small-scale industrialization and mankind into all-consuming forces, typical of his ability to take the specific and transform it into the general. What the characters believed to be the voices of their consciences were really the echoes of social convention and the mistaken creation of their fancies.

The Woodlanders expresses some of the most important elements of Hardy’s analysis of the role of social pressures on man’s chances for happiness: the explicitly microcosmic nature of the setting, Wessex; and the overall sympathy given to all sufferers, no matter what their merit according to conventional moral evaluation. These elements are incorporated in the novel primarily in the structuring of the character relationships. To Oak, and to his society, to lose ones is to lose something intrinsic in his relations with others. With
the other farm workers, who had never had any position, Oak’s ill fortune is a matter for
commiseration and comment, but not for undue lamentation or affected pity. For Oak, then,
and for his society, frank, non-avaricious materialism is natural; and his advocacy to
Bathsheba of a cold-hearted engagement with Boldwood allows her a way of life that
compatible with both her personal reluctance and her public responsibleness. None of the
heroes of Hardy’s later novels is able to piece together a fabric that justifies according to a
social standard the individual’s self and his responsibilities; this indicates a cause – as well as
an effect- of the collapse of the détente between society and the individual in Wessex. Those
characters closest to Oak, Winter-borne and Melbury in The Woodlanders are unable to
provide a balance between the opposing demands of society and of individualism. Indeed,
Melbury’s temporary estrangement from principle deprives Giles of a context in which his
selflessness can be fulfilled.

*The Woodlanders* is a marked increase in emphasis upon society’s effort to
vitiate natural impulse. Instead of presenting one or two characters and implying by extension
of statement the universality of their problem, he presents a number of characters from a
spectrum of social and economic classes who face the common problem of reconciling their
personal iconoclastic desires with the demands of their society. The basics for evaluating
propriety in *The Woodlanders* are primarily social. Melbury after he perceives that something
is drastically wrong in his daughter’s marriage questions the justice of the custom “that a
woman once give to a man for life took, as a rule, her lot as it came, and made the best of it,
without external “interference” (WL 260), and later presses determinedly and swiftly for the
divorce without questioning the distinction between religious and civil grounds for divorce.
Giles too dwells primarily on the social ramifications of the proposed divorce. His feelings
upon hearing about it are those of bemused disbelief. Each character of *The Woodlanders*
represents an aspect of the totality of lives affected by social forces.
In *The Return of the Native*, the perspective of Clym’s psychic world differs from Eustacia’s from the outset. His characterization is based on idealistic intentions of speeding up social change, but he lacks the connotations of mystery and slumbering power of Eustacia that are developed through “Queen of Night.” Disillusioned with the effeminacy and vanity of his Parisian vocation as a diamond merchant, Clym has decided to sublimate his worldly ambitions to higher aims. He intends to raise the intellectual quality of life among the heath dwellers without forcing them to pass through the intermediate stage of social ambition and worldly advance (RON 203-4). This challenge to the established sequence of change and evolution makes him a figure comparable to Prometheus, who, thinking that mankind deserved some of the comforts of the gods, rebelled against the existing system even though it had placed him in high station. This similarity may be what Clym has in mind when he declares to Eustacia that he can “rebel, in high Promethean fashion, against the gods and fate as well as you” (RON 302), though by the time he says this he has become a furze cutter and seems not at all concerned that the opening of his school is being delayed. The social reverberations which Clym’s character causes depend upon his representativeness as well as upon his intentions. He represents two coexisting but separate societies, the heath and the outer intellectual world, which he had learned about in Paris and which had provided part of the rationale for his rejection of the life of business. The philosophies that those two societies impress upon Clym are not identical, but they are similar enough to separate further Clym’s psychic state from Eustacia’s. The two societies jostle for influence in Clym, but their impacts on his character are complementary.

The identification of Clym’s specific “society,” then, shifts; but there never is doubt that Clym, sensitive to the ideas around him, represents a societal orientation toward experience and knowledge; his intention is to bring together what he considers the most truthful and permanent features of his two societies. The basic point they have in common is
the advocacy of self-abnegation, of submission to extra-personal forces: to principles, and
effect which the two systems have upon Clym are that as a neo-Parisian intellectual he
optimistically intends to contribute to the spread of his principles, and that as a heath man he
becomes a non-thinking passive exister. The effect of his early contact with the heath has
been undermined by his adoption of the Parisian intellectualization of life, even though the
concepts that follow his “rational” meditation upon existence are quite similar to those which
he had absorbed from his years on Egdon. The healthy frankness of a philosophy of life based
on direct experience with nature has been replaced by the murky generalizations and fears
born of introspections in a closeted city life. His early novels contain obvious formal devices
and are structured in a very strained fashion. The manner in which these novels are made to
fit restrictive criteria makes them, in large part, exercises in self-apprenticeship. That after
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artistically and financially – only after he realized that Wessex provided all the variety of
dilemma, mood and social levels that he had been searching for in other milieus.

Hardy also incorporates class issues into his novels through the
creation of protagonists somewhat modelled the world to which they are born. Driven by a
strong sense of ambition and self-discovery, these figures pursue their talents in a world
socially higher than their own. These characters feel that their talents cannot be fully used and
developed within, Clym Yeobright in The Return of the Native, Grace Melbury in The
Woodlanders, and Jude in Jude the Obscure represent such figures. Through such situations,
Hardy's works demonstrate the precariousness of social mobility, the arbitrariness of class
differentiation, and furthermore, the impossibility and the fruitlessness of completely
disassociating oneself from one's origins in an attempt to move up the ladder of social class
hierarchy. The works of Thomas Hardy reflect the ideas of a man who was clearly obsessed with the issue of social class throughout his literary career. His works are personal in the sense that they depict Hardy's own lifelong struggles with social mobility and the class structure as a whole throughout his life.

"I think therefore I am." - Rene Descartes

This maxim of Rene Descartes’ sums up perfectly the philosophical underpinnings of existentialist thought. Existentialism has its roots in the writings of several nineteenth and twentieth century philosophers, among them Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, and Soren Kierkegaard. The philosophy is by most standards a very loose conglomeration of perspectives, aesthetics, and approaches to dealing with the world and its inherent difficulties. There are therefore countless permutations and flavours of existentialism which cross disciplinary lines and modes of inquiry. In the most general sense, existentialism deals with the recurring problem of finding meaning within existence. From this perspective, there are no meanings or structures that precede one’s own existence, as one finds in organized religion. Therefore, the individual must find or create meaning for his or her self.

Existentialist thought has garnered an unfair reputation for pessimism and even full-blown nihilism. This reputation is somewhat understandable.

The idea of created meaning strikes some as ultimately meaningless or even absurd. Some of the popular tropes associated with existential philosophy, such as angst, boredom, or fear, likewise strike the average observer as dripping with pessimism. However, nothing in the philosophical train of thought of existentialism dictates a negative view of humanity or reality. In fact, much of the philosophy revolves around the limitless capacity for ethically and intellectually engaged persons to enact change in the world. Positive change is then an imperative for the true existentialist; otherwise existence is a complete void. To put it another way, it is not simply enough to “be.” One has to be “something” or life truly lacks
meaning or purpose. From this point of view, existentialism has the potential to indeed be a very positive means of approaching reality. The writings of Soren Kierkegaard provided the base upon which later thinkers and artists built up the edifice of existential philosophy.

Kierkegaard was a Danish philosopher deeply interested in human psychology and Christian ethics. His principal concerns were with how people responded under crisis, and the choices one made in the shaping of one’s life. One of his most famous works is Fear and Trembling, an exploration of the nature of faith in the face of complete loss and fear. More than that, Kierkegaard paints a portrait of total loneliness, secrecy, doubt, and finally resignation to fate. His work complicates the simplistic and ideal notions of religious faith, showing real and absolute faith to be a kind of limitless, timeless sacrifice to an unknowable being. Later existential thinkers would frame their discourse differently, but Kierkegaard’s basic tenets have remained powerfully influential for generations of artists and thinkers. The seriousness of Soren Kierkegaard sustained campaign sealed his separation from normal domestic happiness and from the fellowship of his generation, condemned him to loneliness and a tragic role.

\[
\text{Like a solitary fir tree egoistically separate and pointed upward I stand,}
\]
\[
\text{casting no shadow, and only the wood-dove builds its nest in my branches.}
\]

\[(HJB \ 1)\]

Whether his was a case of the prophet without honour in his own country, or just a case, is a difference of opinion between his many disciples and admirers in the world to-day and others who having neither sympathy nor patience either with him or with his ideas explain both from the sufficient evidence of his neurosis and its cause. At least the disciples have read and studied him, and it is safe to say that nobody can read him to any extent without being permanently impressed by the exceptional intellectual and literary power of the man and the genuine totality of his Christian inwardness.
What is meant by this ethical reality of the subject? Since existence consists in movement, ‘the difficulty facing an existing individual is how to give his existence the continuity without which everything simply vanishes’. The answer is: “The goal of movement for an existing individual is to arrive at a decision and to renew it”. The thinker gives himself stable ethical reality by forming and renewing himself in critical decisions which are a total inward commitment (decisions, for example, as to vocation, marriage, faith). ‘Through having willed in this manner, through having ventured to take a decisive step in the utmost intensity of subjective passion and with full consciousness of one’s eternal responsibility (which is within the capacity of every human being), one learns something else about life, and learns that it is quite a different thing from being engaged, year in and year out, in piecing together something for a system’. (Srole 284-285)

Kierkegaard’s perpetuation of the moment of absolute choice is morbid, not a perpetuation in a sequence of phases in which the choice is made good in the development of a personality and of a ‘work’, but a concentration of the whole life in a repetition of the empty abstract decision itself with increasing intensity. This fatal hypertrophy of will has a terrible fascination, for one sees in the dilated organ a living decision repeating itself like an accelerating pulse, separated from the withered body it should have animated. The secret of the case belongs to Kierkegaard’s personal tragedy and does not concern the history of thought. For what he bequeathed to philosophy was his protest against ‘pure’ thought and irrelevant knowledge and his recall to the permanent basis of human living in the ethical isolation of the existing individual.

Nietzsche’s thoughts were fascinated by unexplored forbidden regions of abysses, glaciers, and mountain peaks. More vividly than any, he exemplifies the existentialist truth that. ‘Man as the standard of the value of things’: (HJB 41). Man must adapt him to existence or abolish himself – that was the whole disjunction of life, to choice
between two forms of nihilism. There are positions which can be thought but not lived; there are exploratory ventures from which there is no return. Nietzsche casts his supreme choice upon the finite world which Kierkegaard rejected and resigned.

In Karl Jaspers, an existentialist we see them deflecting the course of traditional philosophy. For Jaspers is the professional philosopher inheriting and participating in the *Philosophia Perennis* ‘around which all philosophers circle’, and at the same time he is profoundly influenced by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Jaspers says, ‘Being is such that this empirical world is possible’. (HJB 64) Jaspers leaves the heroic intensity of an impassioned intelligence for whom the tensions are real but dynamic and endurable, even if his doctrine founders as a philosophy it succeeds as philosophy, as the vehicle of a movement of thought which is a man’s life and carries essential recognitions able to inspire and enlighten new initiatives in the effort both to think and to live.

The whole philosophy of Sartre is constructed on the lived project which consciousness is. Man is resolved into his situation, into his relations and projects, not into any essence or nature. Man is in absolute ethical isolation and totally responsible. These exemplify the theses of existentialism, not those of rationalism or of materialism. Classical philosophy attempts to rationalize and to think Being. The many forms of skepticism and agnosticism agree in finding no possibility of certainty in answer to the questing of being. Existentialism also is a philosophy of being, a philosophy of attestation acceptance, and a refusal of the attempt to rationalize and to thicken being. Being can be experienced in a personal venture to which philosophy is the call. Yet the themes of refusal and agnosticism are rationalism is also heard in this new composition. We are given a world whose pretensions must be broken, a world to be both accepted and refused, a life to be built on the further side of despair; knowledge being irremediably incomplete and uncertain throws the weight of responsibility upon personal decision; reason alone can limit reason, and its
present duty is to restore the concrete and thus to eliminate the false theoretical problems which have haunted philosophy and illumine the real problems for which there are no theoretical solutions. As each aspect of the human situation is lit up, the light is reflected upon the personal isolation and responsibility of the existing at the centre.

Philosophy begins as an interruption a hold-up which puts all in question, suspense of spontaneity and normality: it is a separation of mind and body, of the citizen and his city, of man and the world. The problem is to get things going again, by justifying them with reasons; the questions must be answered, the universality and necessity of things assured. For existentialists, the separation is the foundation of all foundations, and to abolish it in a total reconciliation is to undermine personal existence itself, Existentialists cannot accept the concrete universal of Hegel as a solution for two reasons:

(i) History is the quantitative factual outcome of the individual decisions of others and can have no authority for the existing individual unless he chooses to give it such; (ii) Knowledge can only be partial knowledge of the past; the future remains open, ‘man is the future of man’. They cannot accept the abstract universal of Kant, even in the practical form which Fichte gave it, as a solution because man has no essence whose right and destiny it is to role and engross all. Man is only what he does, yet is always beyond what he does, without being anything in substance or in essence within himself: he confronts his empirical self and his historical existence in the actual world, and becomes human by what he makes his own and what he repudiates and what he projects – although of course he more commonly hides from himself in the labyrinthine forms of in authenticity. There is no profounder self in the depths of the personality, a soul of good within to which man seldom or never does justice; it is simply that he is always in question, always beyond himself, always infinitely more than what he would be if he were reduced to being what he is, that in good and in evil
he is beyond himself always, and this separation is the principle of personal existence.

(HJB 151)

The peculiarity of existentialism, then, is that it deals with the separation of man from himself and from the world, which raises the questions of philosophy, not by attempting to establish some universal form of justification which will enable man to readjust himself but by permanently enlarging and lining the separation itself as primordial and constitutive for personal existence.

Existential philosophies insist that any plain and positive answer is false, because the truth is in the insurmountable ambiguity which is at the heart of man and of the world. In Jaspers and Marcel it is plainly the ambiguity of a world which invites despair and instigates faith, without any possibility of objective certainty that would remove the risks. But in Nietzsche and Sartre, who reject philosophic and religious faith, the ambiguity remains, the ambivalence of values, the ambiguity of man who is both a thing and not a thing. Sartre gives the most dogmatic answer, but it is only an elaboration of this ambiguity which man introduces into the world in being what he is and of the impossibility of overcoming it: he seems to be giving the positive answer that human life is man’s vain attempt to overcome his separation and adjust himself perfectly to the world, but this is not a verdict, for it is the ideal aspect of the fact that neither a man nor the world is just what can be said to them – the adjustment is practical, partial, and continuous. The quest for certainty is bound up with the conception of a ready-made universe of which I can make a theoretical model, a rational system in which I have an appointed place and part. Hegel’s was the last monumental attempt of philosophy to think Being in this way. (HJB 153)

It is commonly believed that the idea of “estrangement” occupies a position of great importance in the thought of “the existentialist”. Whether this view is true or mistaken, the term is used extensively by Sartre and Tillich, less so by
Heidegger. Camus’s character Meursault, in *The Stranger*, is seen by critics as excellent example of a man extremely alienated from the people and the society around him. Heidegger’s discussion of estrangement occurs in his most famous *Of Being and Time* in which he distinguishes two fundamental ways of living, one of which he calls “authentic” and the other “inauthentic”. “Authentic” existence is a self-determined existence shaped and made in full awareness of the conditions of human life (e.g. death and responsibility).

“Inauthentic existence is one which is absorbed in the present, determined by impersonal social conventions and refuses to face up to the conditions mentioned above. Each of these types of existence is characterized by Heidegger as “potentiality-for-being” for man. That is, each type of existence is a potential way of “being” for man, which each of us may or may not actualize. “Authentic existence” is that sort of existence which is not determined by one’s relations to the others, but by one’s own choices. To exist in authentically is to be divorced from one’s “own most potentiality-for-being” (MH 222)

It is in this connection that Heidegger speaks of “alienation” to refer to a case in which one’s “own most potentiality for being is hidden from him” (MH 222). Heidegger use of the term “alienation’ is restricted to cases in which one does not exist in an “authentic” manner, cases in which one is cut off or separated from one’s potential authentic existence. Heidegger’s concept of “alienation” is quite similar to Hegel’s, Marx’s and Horney’s concepts of “self-alienation” in the sense of disparity between a person’s essential nature and his actual condition.

Paul Tillich, in his book Systematic Theology, constantly speaks of “estrangement” in terms of disparity between man’s actual condition and his essential nature. He argues that ‘estrangement’ is characteristic of human existence:

“The state of existence is the state of estrangement …. Man as he exists is not what he essentially ought to be. He is estranged from his true being” (PT 51)
Sartre considers the body to have “three dimensions of being”: (i) My body as it is lived by me as a subject. (ii) My body as it is known by the other, as it exists for someone else as an object. (iii) My body as it is experienced by me as a body known by the other (JS 351). It is the third of these dimensions in connection with which Sartre speaks of “estrangement”. My body, when I experience it as something “known by the other” is something alien to me, for it is different from my body as I subjectively experience it. This experience may have one’s body as its primary focus, or it may have oneself more generally. Sartre wants to say that true communion is impossibility; each one is irrevocably separated from others.

Hardy viewed man primarily from the existential, if not existentialist point of view. The unifying element in Hardy's existential perspective was his preoccupation with human existence in metaphysical terms. For both Hardy and existentialists man is thrown into the world by chance. Hardy's pessimistic ideas in his major novels foreshadowed existentialism in modern literature, although he was probably not acquainted directly with the work of Kierkegaard, and he opposed Nietzsche's ideas. All of Hardy’s novels function as parables about unfulfilled human aspirations. Like existentialist heroes, Hardy's characters try (in vain) to escape from determinism to personal freedom. In The Return of the Native, Eustacia tries to escape from the country, the wasteland of Egdon Heath, to sparkling Paris. In contrast, Clym tries to escape from an oppressive and dehumanised Paris to primeval Egdon Heath. In The Mayor of Casterbridge, Henchard tries to escape from an unsatisfying marriage. Tess, in Tess of the d'Urbervilles, tries to save her dignity and escapes from the humiliating relationship with abhorrent and a moral Alec. Jude and Sue, in Jude the Obscure, try to escape from the dehumanised public morality. In his novels Hardy promulgated ideas which stood in strong opposition to the accepted values of the Victorian era. Almost all the prominent themes in existentialist literature are present in Hardy's fiction. The characteristic
The affinities between Hardy's philosophical outlook and existentialism can be summed up by the following statements:

1. Individuals live in a hostile and incomprehensible world and are alienated from their human and natural surroundings.

2. They feel a sense of hopelessness, loneliness, anxiety and lack of direction.

3. They experience such existential anxieties as unfulfilled love, fear and concern about death.

4. They search for meaning in life.

5. These individuals are free to choose how they will respond to the painful existence.

6. They feel responsible for their actions.

7. The prospect of death without the hope of transcendence (or of resurrection) reveals that man's existence is meaningless and ephemeral.

8. The indifference of the universe is the cause of man's alienation in a world devoid of meaning.

9. It is only through love that people can achieve fulfillment, however brief.

The search for the meaning of life was for Hardy, like for the existentialists, the search for self, its final outcome being self-awareness. There is enough evidence in his fiction to claim that Hardy believed that personal freedom exists in self-awareness. The more we are aware of our human situation the more we are free. As man becomes freer, the deeper becomes his awareness of limitations imposed by the external world. These limitations result from contradicting and conflicting aspirations of different aspects of the world. Hardy gave the following interpretation of one of the fundamental dilemmas of existentialism, free will...
versus necessity or determinism, in a letter to Edward Wright, later reprinted in his autobiography, *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy (1892-1928)*:

The will of a man is [...] either wholly free or wholly unfree. When swayed by the Universal Will (which he mostly must be as a subservient part of it), he is not individually free; but whenever it happens that all the rest of the Great Will is in equilibrium the minute portion called one person's will is free, just as a performer's fingers are free to go on playing the pianoforte of themselves when he talks or thinks of something else and the head does not rule them. [FEH 124]

This elaborate musical metaphor conveys Hardy's belief that although human beings exist as insignificant tiny atoms in a vast, indifferent universe, they nonetheless can occasionally achieve personal freedom. However insignificant such freedom might be in the context of the entire universe, it has great significance for the individual. By the end of the nineteenth century English fiction challenged the moral and psychological assumptions on which the Victorian novel had rested. Thomas Hardy, along with Joseph Conrad, contributed significantly to the development of modern existentialist sensibility in fiction. He depicted the entrapments of the individual in an uncaring world with pessimism similar to that of Conrad. Hardy's concern for the human predicament and existential dilemmas influenced many writers of the twentieth century, including D. H. Lawrence, Franz Kafka, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, Samuel Beckett, John Fowles, and others.

This Existentialist movement considered man as a passive element of a society who was merged in his social setting. This chapter has tried to trace Thomas Hardy's existentialist beliefs which interfere in shaping the characters and characteristics of some of his novels.
The sole objective of this chapter is to trace how the category of inferior is produced within Hardy’s work and how the characters challenge the forced construction of their identity. According to Hardy, although individual identity is constructed by society, it is possible to subvert the power structure and the best instances can be given from Hardy’s *The Return of the Native*.

The egoistic nature of Eustacia’s existence, made evident by her disdain for Wildeve rejected by Thomasin and by her wish to live an active social life in a resort town, is especially manifested by her attitude toward the heath. Although willing to grant that it has beauty, she is quite unable to accept its visual attractiveness as ameliorating its unpleasantness (RON 220) More tellingly, Eustacia sees the heath as immediate object of Eustacia’s paranoid hatred, becomes an image for Destiny, God, the colossal Prince of the World that she constantly blames for her unhappiness, which is clear from her final outcry, “O, how hard it is of Heaven to devise such tortures for me, who have done no harm to Heaven at all!” (RON 422). A mark of Wildeve’s command over Eustacia’s inner nature is when he reinforces this concept by reassuring her that he, no she, is to blame for her predicament after Mrs. Yeobright’s death and the consequent estrangement from Clym (RON 372, 405). The story of Clym and Eustacia has a powerful quality not only because they are at cross purposes with each other but also because neither can achieve selfhood in the psychic world of the other. But not all is negative. The dramas of their separate existences are possible because the physical world of the heath, of indeterminate character itself, can contain both, and provide the necessary testing of both. It is ironical that the discontent of Eustacia on the heath and the moral evolution of Clym during his acquaintance with Eustacia provide the emotional peaks and ethical significances of their lives. Hardy points out that if it were not for the isolating and purifying features of the heath, Eustacia would be vulgar and petty (RON 78-79); if she and Wildeve had not died when they did, their lives would have
been attenuated “to an uninteresting meagreness, through long years of wrinkles, neglect, and decay” (RON 453). We cannot know what Clym might have accomplished with Eustacia alive; but with her absent from his life he falls into pathetic ineffectuality, preaching religious of pity for his life rather that for the message he gives, for which there is not a word of approbation (RON 485). In the absence of conflicting and irreconcilable forces, life has become mediocre rather than noble and perpetually refreshed.

In The Woodlanders, no matter how satisfactorily Melbury may perform the suffering and educative functions of the tragic hero, the novel’s central sufferers are his daughter and her woodland lover, Giles. Despite his representing a traditional society’s suicidal pandering to false values, Melbury’s mental suffering and sense of guilt for his misguided ambitions do not overshadow the more compelling agonies of temptation and resignation undergone by Giles, nor the more intense discord between self and society that Grace suffers as the embodiment of conflicting modes of existence. In Tess of the D’Urbervilles:

Tess might have seen that what had bowed her head so profoundly, of the world’s concern at her situation, was founded on an illusion. She was not an existence, an experience, a passion, a structure of sensations, to anybody but herself. To all humankind besides Tess was only a passing thought…. Most of the misery [at being an unwed mother] had been generated by her conventional aspect, and not by her innate sensations. (Tess 115)

Hardy, by deflating the social significance of the individual, is obviously shifting the idea of tragedy away from one that assumes the existence of an externally signifying figure to one that assumes each figure “signifies” only to him.

Thus the term “estrangement” is used by the most important existentialists, but they differ from one another in understanding it. Yet they all derive directly from Hegel and
Marx. The themes and the temper of their thoughts have penetrated everywhere in the West, not without distortion, and a remarkable number of outstanding and influential minds have been decisively affected. The contemporary fact is that the above discussed existentialists are to be seen as exerting real power and as exciting real contempt. The time has not yet come to attempt a sober historical assessment; for it is still as a contribution to our own thought and action that we have to consider their work, in facing the decisions of our personal lives and the problem of our civilization.

David Lodge has noted that Thomas Hardy is a cinematic writer. Hardy is a cinematic writer in two respects: he writes as if viewing the scene with a lens, and his fiction has been adapted into films and television programs. Lodge defines a cinematic writer as one "who imagines and presents his materials in primarily visual terms, and whose visualizations correspond in some significant respect to the visual effects characteristic of film" (DL 80). Hardy's writing style utilizes such film techniques as: long shot, close up, wide-angle, telephoto, zoom, etc. (DL 80). These techniques allow Hardy to focus on characters, scenery, and situations to manipulate the reader's response to the subject matter. The fact that Hardy's narrative style parallels cinematic technique creates problems for directors who attempt to reproduce his fiction on film; however, many have still tried, some even while Hardy was alive.

Hardy fits Lodge's definition in the way he shifts focus in a matter of sentences from the omniscient observer to the personal perspective of a character. The narrator of Hardy's fiction often introduces an observer onto the scene. This observer personalizes the description of the scenery, such as in The Return of the Native when he introduces a furze cutter in the second chapter to describe the appearance of dusk. These observers often act as voyeuxs, as camera lenses also do. The use of the character or observer as voyeur places even more emphasis on the visual appearance and reality of things. It is through Hardy’s creativity,
and through the control he exercises upon the novels, that his narrative techniques acquire vitality and specialness. His characters possess intensity and self-awareness; their experiences have universality. Large questions are posed about man’s relationship with the universe he must live in and with the other humans who in personal and social relations constitute his ties to humanity; those questions are explored with responsibility, because choices in Hardy stem from characters’ inner selves, and bear consequences. In the narrative, tragic vision is focused upon a closely knit series of events, usually occurring in a Wessex scene with qualities of a microcosm, and the vision is maintained through the control of authorial distance and point of view. These characteristics that make up tragedy for Hardy are conventional when stated boldly without attempting to distinguish shadings. But when they operate within his linguistic framework of yoked naturalness and elaborateness and within his direct and piercing portrayal of the suffering that man causes other men and himself, they help to create the most substantial world which is to be found in English literature during the last hundred years.

We live today –at the beginning of the twenty first century, in a world that is intensely worrying, yet full of the most extraordinary promise for the future. It is a world awash with change, marked by deep conflicts, tensions and social divisions, as well as by the destructive onslaught of modern technology on the natural environment. Yet we have possibilities of controlling our destiny and shaping our lives for better that would have been unimaginable to earlier generations.