

A World of Unrelieved Pessimism in Hardy's Novels

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Abstract

Hardy's philosophy of life is full of pessimism. There are various reasons why Hardy took a pessimistic view of life. His personal nature was mainly responsible from the beginning for his pessimistic outlook. He was a man of melancholy nature. Not only had the personal factors of his life but the conditions of his time had a direct influence on the philosophy of his life. The industrial revolution was bringing about a disintegration of the old social and economic structure. The villagers had to leave their villages. They went to industrial cities and became landless labourers. They lived in slums and led a life of poverty. They had to work for long hours on low wages. All this had its effect on religious, social and political ideas. Later on there was a conflict between the ideas contained in the Bible and theories of Darwin. This created an Atmosphere of doubt and suspicion. Moreover the sufferings of the Wessex people also had a great effect on him. This paper focuses on unrelieved Pessimism in his novels

Hardy a Philosopher

There is a distinction between philosophers and artist. Philosophers express their clear cut philosophy in their works as Hegel or Kant have done. They have a systemized body of

thought which they preach through their works but the artist gives a picture of life and along with it he may or may not give his impressions. In such a case he may either express different views in his different works or there may be a consistency in his works. Shakespeare has expressed varied views in his works so that everybody takes him to be a supporter of his views. Hardy has consistency in his views. So there is a talk of his philosophy of life though he denied the title of a philosopher. Even then his views on men, nature and life colour all his writings. As such we can get from his works, as he has himself called it, "a series of fugitive impressions" and not any cut and dried philosophy of life. Grimsditch remarks, "one of his latest prefaces," apology to late lyrics and earlier (1922) reiterates in no uncertain terms this protest which has often been made against being saddled with definite convictions relative to the ultimate reality underlying the scheme of things, so that when views and opinions are here mentioned it should be understood that these words are employed merely for the sake of convenience". Prof. Routland also supports this view when he remarks, "Hardy repeatedly disclaimed the title of a philosopher... For he was before all things an artist but his art owes something of its greatness to his thought can hardly be denied that he was a thinker he tacitly admitted in the apology prefixed to late lyrics and earlier."

Causes of Hardy's Pessimism

Hardy's philosophy of life is full of pessimism. There are various reasons why Hardy took a pessimistic view of life. His personal nature was mainly responsible from the beginning for his pessimistic outlook. He was a man of melancholy nature. Baker's comments in this regard are, "according to all accounts of Hardy's early life he was an extremely sensitive temperament, rather given to melancholy, easily moved to tears...." All his life he had a love for "the gloomy, the ghoulish and the mysterious. "He found that the people of Wessex were leading a life of ignorance and poverty. Their lives were full of suffering, disease and death.

Conditions of his age

Not only had the personal factors of his life but the conditions of his time had a direct influence on the philosophy of his life. The industrial revolution was bringing about a disintegration of the old social and economic structure. The villagers had to leave their villages. They went to industrial cities and became landless labourers. They lived in slums and led a life of poverty. They had to work for long hours on low wages. All this had its effect on religious, social and political ideas. Later on there was a conflict between the ideas contained in the Bible and theories of Darwin. This created an Atmosphere of doubt and suspicion. Moreover the sufferings of the Wessex people also had a great effect on him. He saw that they were crushed not only buy the social system but also by the weather. According to Lord David Cecil," since the world he looked at seemed so full of pain and disappointment, then he argued that, pain and disappointment, were outstanding characteristics of human existence. The disposition to a melancholy views was confirmed and increased by the age in which he lived.... for it was an age of transition... Xviii century rationalism had united with the new romantic spirit of rebellion against convention to shake the fundamental basis of belief religious, social, political which the people of old England had unquestionably accepted..." "Towards middle of the century it was further disturbed by the higher criticism of the Bible and Darwinian Theory of evolution". Hardy was deeply affected by all these changes. He felt the laws of happiness due to all these factors. According to a critic," the theme of hardy's great novels is in some degree the tragic result of the impact of this view and a strange spirit on the lives of Wessex men and women...."

Pessimistic Philosophy of Hardy

As such Hardy could not have a happy view of life. According to Lord David Cecil," this disposition to a melancholy view was conditioned and confirmed by the age in which he lived". His view of life is Pessimistic. It has been variously described as a dark or Sombre or twilight view of life. It has also been called determinism or fatalism.

Life as Hardy saw it

Medicine that disease, suffering, poverty, and death work everywhere in the world. Moreover, he found that conditions in the world were such that men's ambitions and hopes were never fulfilled. Hardy once said," I discovered several years ago that I was living in a world where nothing bears out its promise in practice." this view was opposed to the general view of the age as expounded by Browning in the following lines:-

God's in his heaven

All right with the world

Hardy amended this line in Tess as follows-

God is not in his heaven

All's wrong the world.

According to Baker," we had a grudge against the universe which he could not throw of, a feeling of resentment at injustice and wanton cruelty which must have some object on which to rack itself. The problem of Evil monstrous and harassing conundrum. Assuredly, some power that hated good must be in the saddle thwarting every Endeavour of man to circumvent his fate. The absurdity of a trust in Providence drove him to the opposite belief." in his novels there is something beyond men's approach that causes tragic and. He fancied," he says," that a figure stood in his van, with arm of uplifted, to knock him back from any pleasant prospect to be indulged in as probable."

To Hardy life appeared wickedly cruel, a series of hopes perpetually cheated and aspiration continually mocked at. At its best it is "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and Fury signifying nothing." this is the view life that Hardy has expressed with unwearied persistence in his novels. This basic conception is called pessimism and Hardy has been branded as the most Pessimistic of English writers. Some critics like Alfred and Pinto do not agree with this view, but their views are not generally accepted.

In Hardy, the ultimate and depends to a very great extent on this force which is generally working against man; it is bound to bring tragedy in the lives of important characters. Lord David Cecil remarks, "a struggle between man, on the one hand and on the other hand, and omnipotent and indifferent fate- that is Hardy's interpretation of the human situation. Inevitably it imposes a pattern on his picture scene. It determines the character of his drama." so it can be said that character is not responsible for the tragedy in the lives of Hardy's characters. Duffin also does not think that character is responsible for the ruin of a person in Hardy. He remarks, "you think that a man is the author of his own salvation, the ruler of temporal fate? Consider the life and death of Henchard". Further according to him, "character is simply one of the circumstances in man's environment but it is of a special and unique nature...." it modifies other circumstances and in that sense may be responsible for either the making or marring of the future of a man. But generally chance is more powerful and brings about the ruin of man.

The struggle between man and fate appears in different ways though chance is the most typical of them. According to Lord David Cecil, "Hardy employs fate in various forms, sometimes it appears as a natural force sometimes it embodies as some innate weakness of

character.... Chiefly, however, the force of Fate in Hardy's novel incarnate themselves in two guises- as chance and love. Of these chance is the most typical. In no other novel does chance exercise such a conspicuous influence on the course of events." hardy has been criticized for this but the happenings in his Novels can be easily explained by his philosophy of life. According to him, life is a struggle between man and destiny which is inscrutable. So no one can know about future happenings. David Cecil remarks," inexplicable unexpected blows of chance." Hence the frequent use of the element of chance Hardy seems to be justified.

Fate against men

In the novels of Hardy the problem is whether character is fake or not. After reading them, conclusion is that that fate is more powerful than character. According to Hardy, the environment is too strong for men who are but Pygmy beings fighting against the giant of circumstances. The Desire and aspirations of man are not fulfilled as Clym wanted to become a teacher but he lost his eyesight due to excessive reading. Eustacia married Clym with the hope of going to Paris but her wish was not fulfilled. Lord David Cecil,' struggle between men on the one hand, on the other hand an omnipotent and indifferent that is hardy's interpretation of the human situation." it is strange that the world is so constituted that kindness to one means cruelty to another. From experience and observation of the world and life hardy came to the conclusion that this world is not the best possible. It is but an Imperfect world, a sorry scheme of things. Life is a tragical rather than a comical thing, moments of gaiety are interludes and part of the actual drama, and" happiness is but an occasional episode in the general drama of pain"

Conclusion

From experience and observation of the world and life Hardy came to the conclusion that this world is not the best possible. It is but an Imperfect world, a sorry scheme of things. Life is a tragical rather than a comical thing, moments of gaiety are interludes as such Hardy could not have a happy view of life. According to Lord David Cecil, "this disposition to a melancholy view was conditioned and confirmed by the age in which he lived". His view of life is Pessimistic. It has been variously described as a dark or Sombre or twilight view of life. It has also been called determinism or fatalism

As a result of this, his novels are full of tragic incidents. Hardy's first important novel under the Greenwood tree had a happy ending but afterwards his novels became tinged with his pessimistic philosophy of life. It finds its fullest expression in the Dynast. According to Grimsditch, "strongly colours the fabric of Greater novels, and it would be impossible to understand Hardy without examining it more carefully....". Pair of Blue Eyes has a tragic end. In Far from the Madding Crowd Fanny Robin, Boldwood and Bathsheva suffer. The return of the native as much tragedy in it. Diggary Venn suffers stoically throughout the course the novel. Mrs Yeebright dies of snake snake bite after great suffering. At the end, Eustacia and Wildeve are drowned. Clym has to face much suffering in the course of the novel. In the mayor of Casterbridge the early life as well as the last period of Henchard's life is full of suffering and misery. He meets his tragic that at the end of the novel. In the woodlanders many characters suffer much. In Tess, life of Tess a long record of suffering and misery leading to her hanging and death. Hardy has summed up the whole story in the following words "justice was done and the president of Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his Sport with Tess." in Jude and Obscure, Jude and Sue both suffer very much. In short, such is the general picture of Hardy's novels.

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