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PHILOSOPHIC IRONY

IN THE WORKS OF

THOMAS HARDY

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PHILOSOPHIC IRONY IN THE WORKS OF THOS. HARDYIntroduction

That a subject as large as this needs defining and limiting is quite evident. Readers of Hardy know that his name spells Irony, and therefore it would be quite impossible, in the space of this brief essay, to attempt to cover all the phases, all the implications, philosophic and otherwise of the Irony in all the works of this great poet and novelist. Hardy was a prolific writer over more than half a century; even in the poetry he wrote more voluminously than many of our important poets. It will be necessary therefore at the outset to attempt to describe limits to the topic and subject matter--limits which can reasonably be expected to be dealt with in a satisfactory way within the space of time and pages devoted to this paper.

The principal aim in mind in undertaking this work is to examine at close range the irony of Hardy that was philosophic content. To do this satisfactorily will necessitate firstly, an attempt to arrive at a working definition of irony. Secondly it will be necessary to examine Hardy's philosophy in a general way, particularly in light of the influences. Then there will remain to be done a thorough investigation into the irony in the Novels which serves as a medium for Hardy's expression of his philosophic concepts. The novels will receive most attention in this study. There are several obvious reasons for this. Hardy published his novels first; it is true that he was writing poetry also throughout the novel-writing period but only an occasional poem was published.

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The Novels, therefore, contain his most important views of life from the time that he began to write till almost his sixtieth year. The intention is not to write a running commentary on every ironic situation in the novels but rather to choose various incidents from the novels to illustrate the question at hand. The Poems must also be looked into. While, I believe, they do not contain any important new Theories, they are, in the main, new ironic situations and therefore deserve consideration. However, in view of their number, a thorough-going investigation into the irony of the poems must not be expected; the reader will understand, therefore, that I shall be free to range over the volumes of poems and to use those which will throw light on the problem.

No study of Hardy would be complete without a study of The Dynasts; for it is in this epic-drama that the poet has marshalled his ironic forces and he shows them most intimately at work. The Dynasts is important as being a summary of his system, which he shows working with the help of irony. It too, I believe, adds something to his earlier speculations as revealed in the Novels and poems.

In all these discussions we must not overlook the art of the artist. Hardy has achieved his results because he was a great artist. His instrument was the English language, and his playing has not only elevated him to the heights of the literary great but has added something to our language. A word then about Hardy's Art in the Use of Irony would seem necessary.

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The purpose then is not a discussion for discussion's sake; but a careful examining or re-examining of the use made of a great instrument by a great writer with the view of finding how he used it to interpret life and its problems to his readers.

THE NATURE OF IRONY

In modern usage the word 'irony' has been bandied about with such freedom that it seems necessary to examine its meaning closely in order to see exactly what it does mean. The meaning of the word has so expanded from its original rather simple meaning that it has given issue to a series of expressions which are derivatives of the mother term.

To avoid ambiguity we shall remain close to the interpretation of Fowler's Modern English Usage which says that "irony is a form of utterance that postulates a double audience consisting of one party that, hearing shall hear and understand and another party that, when more is said than meets the ear, is aware both of that more and of the outsiders' incomprehension." In shorter terms this word 'irony' has been interpreted by Spenser as 'layers of meaning'. It differs from lying and equivocation because in these the teller purposely strives to deceive whereas in irony the scheme is to get the hearer to understand what we mean by saying something akin to the opposite. If I tell my hunting companion who has just missed an easy target that he is a fine shot he understands immediately that I am not trying to deceive him but rather that I'm speaking ironically. The ironist is removed from the situation which he views objectively and on which he passes judgment.

From the simple Greek word 'eiro'-'I say', came the periphrastic construction 'eironeia'-'dissimulation' because the practice of saying one thing and meaning another was evidently common among the Greeks. It is from this latter word 'irony' is derived. From its earliest meaning therefore irony means 'speech involving dissimulation.'

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Leaving aside for the present such side-growths as satire and sardonicism we can distinguish three elementary types of irony: verbal, dramatic, philosophic. These differ from one another in range, importance and content. Verbal irony is that found in conversation when something different from what is meant is implied; usually some criticism is involved. Dramatic irony, as the name signifies is that type found in the conversation of the drama; three persons are involved, the speaking actor, the listening actor and the audience. One of the actors and the audience are the knowing persons and the speech means more to them than it does to the unknowing actor. One of the three persons is blinded providing two 'layers of meaning'. The third type of irony is usually called Irony of Fate, Tragic Irony, Cosmic Irony, or Philosophic Irony. The latter name seems to be more fitting because this type usually involves a theory of philosophy. It is the extension of dramatic irony to the larger stage of life; the knowing gods are the audience, we are the blindfolded actors. It is the cosmic view of the irony of life. The division between Dramatic Irony and Philosophic Irony is thin and often depends on our purpose in viewing the irony. Irony in the drama may be viewed merely as a technique of the playwright and then it is purely Dramatic Irony but if we view the dramatic set-up as an exposition of the author's views of life through his characters it passes into Philosophic Irony. In Scene VI Act I of Macbeth, Duncan approaches Macbeth's castle with the words

"This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air
Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
Unto our gentle senses."

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These words are a fine example of Dramatic Irony since the audience knows that Duncan is walking to his death; Duncan and Banquo are the blindfolded actors. Viewed as a means of increasing the dramatic effect it is excellent; but the reader or spectator may expand this and see into it Shakespeare's view of the innocent suffering a horrible murder and the degradation of Lady Macbeth who, a little later in the scene, extends her welcome to Duncan. This is not expanded by Shakespeare but we can see that he means it nevertheless. The irony has now passed into the Philosophic stage; it now deals with attitudes towards the great questions of life, good and evil, reward and punishment. The irony has passed from the stage of the drama to the larger stage of life.

It will also be noticed that the three types of irony work with one another to produce the general ironic effect. In the above example the word "pleasant" has the effect of verbal irony; the general effect of the background and the speech as a whole shows dramatic irony enhanced by the verbal irony; and when the dramatic significance is read into life through the characters and their actions, philosophic irony occurs. In dumb show or pure irony of events where conversation has been suppressed, verbal irony plays no part.

Dramatic and philosophic irony must be based on conflict; irony does not occur without some clash of forces; it reflects the checking of man, his striving to work his plan against that of the blind immortals; it shows the gulf between what is and what might be. We must not make the mistake that many moderns make of thinking that the ironic view is the same as the cynical

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or disillusioned. The cynical view is most often expressed by satire which is a form of extended irony with a tendency to ridicule. If the cynical or disillusioned view is intensified it results in sarcasm which is a form of irony " in which the speaker is actuated by enmity or scorn".(1) Derisive or bitterly sarcastic writing tending to become insincere is termed sardonicism. The word 'irony' is freely used to cover all these phases and has become a cliché to include all indirect or oblique attack of whatsoever nature. Krutch(2) thinks the modern poet uses it wrongly in describing the attitude resulting from modern scientific knowledge. This is simply the error of thinking that the ironic view is one which the cynical or disillusioned view; it subjugates the conflict so necessary in irony. Dr. Earle Birney (3) in his chapter on 'Irony' in his admirable work 'Irony in Chaucer' says

"Within the last hundred and fifty years the word irony has been so stretched and thinned by users of metaphor and of metaphysical lingo that the fate of the word lies now in the restless ocean of popular idiom, where many a better one has quietly drowned."

In our use of the word then we shall retain its original interpretation of 'layers of meaning'; if such terms as sarcasm, sardonicism are used they will be considered not as pure irony but as exaggerated genera of the word. We are particularly interested

(1) Funk and Wagnalls Dictionary vide 'Sarcasm'

(2) Krutch J. W. 'Irony' New York Nation Magazine (115) 1923

(3) Birney Earle 'Irony in Chaucer' Toronto 1936

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in philosophic irony here and in the other types only in so far as they modify philosophic irony. This must include or lead to a knowledge of the author's philosophy since it is through his use of that instrument that he reveals his outlook on life. This knowledge as revealed through his use of irony will bring us closer to the heart of the author in shorter time than will any amount of objective searching into its similarity or dissimilarity with the thought of the professional philosophers.

Various writers have interpreted a variety of themes on philosophic irony. Often this is bound up with the question of motive. George Eliot, for example, attributed the whole matter to human ignorance saying that "our ignorance makes irony out of a situation in itself a link in the logical chain of cause and effect"⁽¹⁾ With Renan it became involved with snobbishness and with Milton it seemed to be a stern justice. Part of our enquiry into Hardy's irony will therefore be concerned with his motive.

(1) Quoted by Mrs. Frances Russell in 'Satire and the Victorian Novel' page 157-8

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As I have tried to point out irony is an emphasis, usually critical on the difference between what is and what might have been; when the author realizes this difference and points it out from examples, it necessarily involves the author's forming standards. Or we might say that his standards were formed first and he is using his ironical matter to illustrate them. This does not necessarily involve a question of preaching but is in the nature of a revelation. This will be illustrated later in dealing with the poems and earlier novels.

On Dec. 31, 1901 Hardy wrote

"Let every man make a philosophy for himself out of his own experience. He will not be able to escape using terms and phraseology from earlier philosophers but let him avoid adopting their theories if he values his own mental life." (1)

In Hardy's case many tabulations of the more frequently recurring metaphysical ideas have been made but there has been very little attempt to relate them to the intellectual movements out of which they grew. W. R. Rutland⁽²⁾ has shown that many of his ideas which were thought to be derived from German philosophy are shown to have their source, more probably, much nearer home--in the English Scientists and Rationalists of his own day.

(1) Later years of Thos. Hardy--Mrs. Hardy p. 91

(2) Thomas Hardy, a Study of his Writings and their Background

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Hardy was brought up in the Anglican Faith towards which he always held respect. He was descended from ancestors who took prominent part in church affairs and Hardy taught Sunday-School in the family parish church. His mind, at once keenly sensitive and searching, began to examine the problems of man's existence and his role in the universe. There seems to be three important stages in Hardy's Philosophic development. The first is a stage of reaction from the tenets of the Established Church. Starting about the year 1860 Hardy came under the influence of the scientists and philosophic agnostics who were trying to overthrow traditional English thought based on scripture. Darwin's 'Origin of Species' was published in 1859 and Hardy read it early and acclaimed it. He searched it in the hope of finding an answer to the doubts which were already troubling him against the traditional faith in which he had been reared. It was in Darwin that he found many of the ideas that were to remain with him throughout life, an essential part of his philosophy. He read and admired Huxley, the press-agent of Darwinism. Herschell's discovery of fifteen hundred new universes showed plainly to Hardy the insignificance of our planet and the greater insignificance of man upon that planet. Thus science was impressing the young Victorians and with them the young Hardy that christianity had been dissolving into myths. Then too the English Philosophers, whose works he had been reading, re-enforced the scepticism of the scientists in Hardy's mind. Almost one Hundred years before the birth of Hardy, Hume

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had anticipated much of the fatalism, coincidence and chance found later in Hardy. Hume concludes

#that the original source of all things is entirely indifferent to all these principles and has no more regard to good above evil than to heat above cold.....There may be four hypotheses found concerning the first causes of the universe.

1. That they are endowed with perfect goodness.
2. That they are endowed with perfect malice.
3. That they are endowed with goodness and malice.
4. That they are endowed with neither goodness nor malice.

The fourth of these is by far the most probable." (1)

Hardy himself admits the influence of Hume when he says "My pages show harmony of view with Darwin, Huxley, Spencer Comte, Hume Mill and others, all of whom I used to read more than Schopenhauer". (2) It was reading like this by a young man with perception and sensibility that drove Hardy into deciding that life was tragical rather than comical; that the old theologies are dead and that the new religion would not be based on dogma but on altruism and **ethics**.

The second stage was the co-ordinating of his scattered impressions into a unified whole. Hardy continued his readings and his observations. He was still casting about for a solution, dipping into French and German philosophies for light. In the third stage he attempted to apply the principles and terms of the formal philosophers to his view of life. He did this

(1) Hume--Selections edited by Charles Hendel Jr. Scribners N. Y. 1927 pages 330-1

(2) Quoted in 'Hardy in Defense of his Art' Mr. D. Zabel Southern Review 1940, page 138

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particularly in the Dynasts. Even in The Dynasts he felt he was simply elaborating the ideas which he had adopted as long ago as his earliest poems and the more thoughtful and representative of his novels. Occasionally we see a glimmer of hope here and there among the poems and at the end of the Dynasts- but this is far from a complete explanation.

Hardy's thought was the natural outgrowth of the age in which he lived, of its Science, Criticism and Philosophy. He was driven to evolve a system of thought of his own and he did this out of the chance impressions and experiences that arose out of his daily life and readings. He had reached the third stage by 1880. Hardy has warned us against trying to derive a 'system' from a man's artistic productions and then proceeding to marshall all his ideas in accordance with this preconceived plan. To him the artist was to be, above all, 'the humble recorder' of all the events, feelings and fancies which, occurring in widely different moods, times and circumstances, go to make up the complicated pattern of life. He tells us that the way to a true philosophy of life seems to lie in humbly recording diverse 'humours' as they are forced upon us by chance and change. There will be a certain amount of subjectivity in all this, since the artist will inevitably select from the complex pattern of life the thread that appeals most strongly to his individual temperament and mood.

So we have in Hardy a sensitive soul trying to read life in all its chances and changes. He is possessed of a kind of melancholy which he never seems able to shake off. Combined with this he had a tender sympathy towards Nature which, coupled

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with his belief in it as an instrument of Fate, dominated life. We may call Hardy's view of life pessimistic but his was an intellectual and not just a temperamental pessimism.

"Pessimism, or rather what is called such is, in brief, playing the sure game. You cannot lose at it: you may gain. It is the only view of life in which you can never be disappointed. Having reckoned what to do in the worst possible circumstances, when better arise, as they may, life becomes child's play". (1)

In fact Hardy seems to have disliked the word philosophy as a rather professional word and preferred the word 'reading of life' for his conclusions on philosophic problems. He did not set out to found a philosophy but to read some conclusions on life for himself. Scarcely ever does he set out to give us a complete statement of his 'working Metaphysic' since he always considered himself a non-professional. In the remarkable apology to 'Late Lyrics and Earlier' he comes as close to a complete statement of his philosophy as we can hope for.

"And what is to-day, in allusions to the present author's pages, alleged to be 'pessimism' is, in truth, only such 'questionings' in the exploration of reality and is the first step towards the soul's betterment, and the body's also---by the explanation of reality, and its frank recognition stage by stage along the survey, with an eye to the best consummation possible." (2)

(1) Later years of T. Hardy, Mrs. F. Hardy.

(2) Apology--Late Lyrics and Earlier

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Hardy quotes his own words in explanation of his pessimism in the poem In Tenebris

"If way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst"

and tells us that it is not pessimism but 'evolutionary meliorism'.

We must not fall into the error of thinking that Hardy abandoned religion entirely, moving over to the side of 'agnostic science'. He did lose faith in dogmatic religion as he himself shows:

"The old theologies may or may not have worked for good in their time. But they will not bear stretching farther in epic or dramatic art. The Greeks used up theirs, the Jews used up theirs: so that one must make an independent plunge embodying the real if only temporary thought of the age". (1)

He regretted the fact that religion did not seem to have caught up with science, that as soon as the dogmatism of the churches was broken down to admit the free-thinkers, things would work more smoothly for all concerned. The stalemate of religion vs. science would disappear. But Hardy was disappointed when the English church did not broaden its tenets to include the advanced scientific mind. His wish was for

"a flank march which I at the time quite expected to witness," with the gathering of many millions of agnostics into its fold." (2)

(1) Later years of T. Hardy Mrs. F. Hardy

(2) Apology--Late Lyrics and Earlier

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But he still held hope for this broadening of religion and saw that religion was necessary for the preservation of the world. He has this to say of the new religion:

"It may be a forlorn hope, a mere dream, that of an alliance between religion, which must be retained unless the world is to perish, and complete rationality, which must come, unless also the world is to perish, by means of the interfusing effect of poetry-- 'the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; the impassioned expression of science', as it was defined by an English poet who was quite orthodox in his ideas. But if it be true, as Comte argued, that advance is never in a straight line, but in a looped orbit, we may, in the aforesaid ominous moving backward, be doing it 'pour mieux sauter', drawing back for a spring". (1)

This look at Hardy's Philosophy is necessary and important before any attempt is made to examine critically his irony. We must view his philosophy in light of his irony and then reverse the process by looking at his irony as a means of leading up to his philosophy.

(1) Apology--Later Lyrics and Earlier

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Irony does not lend itself well to preaching. It is not quite strong enough for this; satire is the method usually chosen as the best means of bringing about correction by ridicule. Irony has a lighter side which was used dexterously by Steele and Addison to ridicule gently the frivolities of their time. But the more serious use of Irony is that of tragedy. Hardy wrote a few works in the lighter vein but even in these there is if not a tragic irony at least a semi-tragic one.

In his first novel published Desperate Remedies there is a tone of sadness rather than of irony. There is a conformity to the established way of ending novels by having vice punished and virtue rewarded. The tragic aspect of Hardy's irony receives its first impetus in A Pair of Blue Eyes. In his earlier, lighter novels we have more examples of the irony which, while it has not the effect of comedy, still is not in a thoroughly serious vein. When Knight, Elfride's latest flame, looks through the telescope under Elfride's direction at the incoming boat he spies a young man standing on the deck. True to the course of irony, he knows nothing about Smith, but the young man on the boat really is Smith and Elfride really knows it is he. Taken in itself this would seem to be a rather harmless bit of irony about the conquests of a flirtatious girl but if viewed in light of the later ironies that seem to grow from this simple position, this ironic event really influences greatly three lives. Closely connected with it, and ^{an event} which might be considered the next step, is the ironic introduction by Knight of Elfride to Smith and after the engagement is

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learned of Knight's telling Smith that he hopes his love affair is going fine. Following the ironic train we later see that Knight's breaking his engagement was really caused by Mrs. Jethway revealing in a letter Elfride's ^{love} runaway with Smith. The climax of this train is the scene in which Smith and Knight are riding along on the train, both going to straighten matters out with Elfride, upbraiding one another for lack of candour in the whole affair, and both later finding that Elfride's coffin was on that train. A kind of anti-climax is provided when we see both these men visiting the vault and watching Luxellian grieving over her casket.

Here the results are tragic enough---Luxellian is added to the people affected by the flow of events which no one seems able to stem. The very first ironic situation in this novel is that in which Smith and Elfride are sitting on the grave of the only man that ever before said he loved her, namely Mrs. Jethway's son. Here the only victim was dead. From then on the ironic train claims one ^{more} ~~more~~ victim every time it strikes until in the anti-climactic scene five have been gathered. Elfride had desecrated the feelings by flirtation and the irony of fate becomes irony of justice for her. She had flirted with and rejected Jethway and after his death his mother in revenge thwarted Elfride's hopes by the revelation of the letter. Individuality had been brought sharply into conflict with the indifferent governing power through the love of man and woman. This, with Hardy, seems to be the most common reef against which the individuality dashes itself and we can trace it through almost every novel.

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In Far from the Madding Crowd the misfortunes of Fanny Robin are followed from afar. She mistakes All Souls Church for All Saints Church and is refused by Troy. Truly a victory of finesse for Irony. Her short and fateful life ended in death and after death in two ironic scenes--firstly- Joseph Poorgross gets drunk at the inn while Fanny's body rested outside in the wagon, which resulted in the necessity of having her brought indoors and finally in Bathsheba's discovery that Troy was her lover, and secondly Bathsheba's visit to the grave. Yet the pity aroused by Hardy for Fanny seems to be transferred to Bathsheba when, preparing to go to the party where her engagement to Boldwood was to be announced officially, she finds that the rap on her door is not the call ^{of} her coachman as she thinks, but her husband Troy who has returned. 'Heaven's irony' does better by Bathsheba than it did by Elfride although both acted in very much the same way; the latter is borne to her grave, much wept for, it is true, but a rather cold consolation in comparison with Bathsheba's comfortable if not very romantic marriage to Gabriel Oak. Here is a contrast that cannot be accounted for by Hardy. The only way we are expected to account for it is by the explanation of the unconscious Ironic Spirit. According to logic and justice it should have been the simple, true Fanny Robin who deserved to live rather than the flirtations scheming Bathsheba. We could attribute it to a change that took place in Bathsheba since, if she had not already learned her lesson she should have done so. There is no indication that Hardy would have us reach this conclusion; Fate was kind to her and rudely unkind to Fanny for no apparent reason.

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A fine example of Hardy's comic irony is his fifth novel The Hand of Ethelberta. After having struck the keynote of his tragic irony in A Pair of Blue Eyes and Far from the Madding Crowd it would seem that he lifted his pen somewhat and while still keeping it in the ironic groove, he does not press heavily on it with tragic results. In fact, I believe, this novel, The Hand of Ethelberta to be Hardy's best example of the lighter dramatic irony and it even resolves itself into a first class gentle satire on society much in the fashion of the great French 'vaudevilles' which were so popular at this time and which are gently satiric in content about each of the two lower classes of French society trying to reach the class next higher. Hardy's example might easily have been influenced by La Poudre aux Yeux.

There is a light ironic situation running through all this novel and it is heightened at intervals into drama which has very little of the serious philosophic irony in it. The scene in which Ethelberta attends dinner at Mrs. Duncastle's where her father is the butler is a fine example of Hardy's dramatic irony in the lighter vein in which nothing tragic or of tragic consequence results, not even the feelings of her father seem to be hurt. Here verbal irony is used to help the dramatic; the words help the irony of the movements and of the situation. Another high point of irony is the scene in which Ethelberta on being asked at Lord Mountclere's house to do some of her tale-telling, tells the story of her own life in the third person which is known to no others but herself. The irony is more pointed here because Ethelberta intends it as a means of

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informing Mountclere of her life story; it also seems to have gained its end since Mountclere afterwards tells her secretly that he knows it all.

Here then is a good example of Hardy's comic irony. The precarious position of Ethelberta, maintained by scheming, results in harm to no one and we feel that Christopher is fortunate in obtaining the hand of the younger and humbler sister Picotee rather than that of the scheming Ethelberta. Ethelberta does not even harm herself greatly as a result of her connivance. Contrast with this the sad effect of the ironic train of events on Elfride, or Tess. It is a sustained gentle satire on society rather than the deeper, more bitter showing of the working of philosophic irony.

Hardy resumes his tragic trend in The Return of the Native. If the greatest result of tragic irony on those that are left is suffering that comes from the acts of another, then the irony here is intense. Irony has caused the loss of Clym's mother and wife, two persons between whom he was torn in life; of Egdon Heath which has so often been interpreted as the embodiment of the unchanging irony of human events stands in the background of this novel throughout and seems to govern their desires.

The Trumpet-Major offers us comedy on a slightly ironic scene and with gay humour and no serious results. The ironic situations are those of a lighter dramatic type and contain no philosophic content. It is merely amusing, slightly startling and rather exasperating to see John Loveday falling in love with Matilda Johnson the actress, Bob's former fiancée, after he, John had sent her away as an undesirable girl for Bob to marry.

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The leading of the attack by Fess Derriman after he had found out that the report was false is comic irony of the lightest Falstaffian kind. If Hardy intended The Hand of Ethelberta as a gentle satire on society and on the fickleness of a woman's heart, he paralleled it in The Trumpet-Major with comically ironic depictions of soldiers and their changeableness of loves. The fact that Hardy could write this light comedy against the background of a subject that he was later to make into his most seriously and tragically ironic piece of writing proves conclusively that Hardy did see a lighter side of life; he was not always engaged in seeing how often man was frustrated by the gods. Here and in The Hand of Ethelberta he directly attributes frustration to character. It seems a bit far-fetched to pursue character back to the gods as is done by those trying to prove pessimism on every occasion in Hardy. He could write his As You Like It as well as his King Lear and Romeo and Juliet of the novels.

The Mayor of Casterbridge is a novel^{of} character in tragical irony. Events proved too much for Henchard's character. The book is sub-titled 'the story of a man of character' most appropriately.

"In deciding to present "The Life and Death" of Michael Henchard, Hardy was again breaking with his former practice. Most of his stories had emphasized the unpredictability of human fate, the inscrutability of the workings of the colossal Prince of the World. Character after character had echoed Henry Fray's opinion that 'your lot is your lot, and Scripture is nothing'. While lying in bed for six months in London, Hardy had had excellent opportunity for sounding the shallowness of this myopic sort of determinism; and in the novel ~~dictated~~

dedicated

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to Mrs. Hardy there is a revealing observation placed in the mouth of Sir William De Stancy: 'With a disposition to be happy, it is neither this place nor the other that can render us the reverse. In short, each man's happiness depends upon himself.' Hardy now decided to write an entire novel upon this theme, that 'Character is Fate'. (1)

Henchard's great character is broken by irony of circumstances, Here the train of ironic events beating successively against Henchard proves too much for him. Henchard was strong enough to keep his vow to avoid drink for twenty-one years but his downward path seems to start after finding the letter that his wife left and which was not to be opened till Elizabeth's wedding day, - he sees the seal imperfectly attached, opens it and finds that Elizabeth is not his daughter but Newson's. Fate's interference in the person of the furmity seller haled before him for being drunk, and who publicized the story of the selling of his wife helped scandal to turn the scale against him. These events lead in a more or less direct way to the death of Lucetta, now Farfrae's wife through the shame of the 'skimmity-ride'. The inevitable looms large and is too much for Henchard. It seems to have turned the knife in his heart, becoming more and more cruel. As the inevitable events move on and Elizabeth-Jane falls in love with his worst enemy Farfrae, and the whole is sealed by the

(1) Hardy of Wessex, Carl J. Weber p. 101

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return of Newson, Henchard wanders off to die on Egdon and be found by the happy lovers. "The fates were so much more practised in the ways of life, than this poor, passionate man, that we give him pity, he would not give himself"⁽¹⁾ It was the irony of circumstances which by their number and weight increasing over the head of Henchard struck him to earth in spite of his being one of the strongest characters in the history of novel writing.

The decade 1886-1895 saw Hardy produce five novels. With the exception of The Well-Beloved these seem to show an increasing intensity in the concentrated power of philosophic irony. We have seen how Hardy could vary from tragic irony in A Pair of Blue Eyes to comic irony in The Hand of Ethelberta. We find no such variation in his later group. The characteristic of this group seems to be strong characters, beginning with Henchard, for whom the irony of fate proves too much.

Hardy introduces the ironic results of social conventions into the Woodlanders. C. J. Weber has shown this transition:

"Hardy also attempted a third innovation in The Woodlanders. His earlier novels had expressed with ever-increasing frankness his revolt against the fundamental conditions of existence in a badly constituted world. From his youthful shaking of his fist at his creator he had progressed in The Mayor of Casterbridge to a consideration of the close relationship between defects, not in nature, but in

(1) The Art of Thos. Hardy--Lionel Johnson-pl89.

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human nature, and man's unhappiness on earth. And now in The Woodlanders he turned for the first time to question seriously how far the organization of society itself is responsible for man's unhappiness. When Grace Melbury's marriage proves a failure, Hardy makes her wonder 'whether God did really join them together'. What man alone had joined, man could put asunder. Hardy's increasingly bitter quarrel with society for its attitude towards sex relationships here makes its first appearance, and for the next twenty-five years the subject is never long absent from his writings, whether prose or verse. The Woodlanders sounds the initial challenge, and its characters are the first of Hardy's creations to blame neither God nor themselves but human conventions."⁽¹⁾

The irony here while not all directed towards the gods still remains irony bound up with philosophy. It is true that some of it is thus directed as when Mrs. Charmond's accident led to the renewed affair with her former lover which led in turn to Grace leaving and coming to Giles cottage, and Giles finally dying as a result of sleeping outside to save her honour. Here again is the train, but in this case, it seems to the reader that the ironic train could have been halted by the divorce of Fitzspiers and Grace. Perhaps we could consider the blind social ambition of old Melbury to have caused it. But the train was directed probably at both these human conventions and Fate must have been satisfied with the complicated love entanglements which form a Gordian knot.

Following The Woodlanders both in time sequence and in the newly-formed sequence of blaming human conventions, is Tess of the D'Urbervilles, the climax of his novels. But here again,

(1) Hardy of Wessex. Carl J. Weber p. 109-110.

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it is not just society that is blamed for the waste of Tess's life. Both Jude and Tess fail to fit their individuality into society and the irony of events seems to lead them farther away from a solution than nearer one. The social abandonment of Jude and Tess is explained by Harold Child.

"He who does not choose to live within a comfortable moral order must take his risks--for there is no malignant deity waiting to pounce upon him, there is no kindly omnipotence to come to the rescue when his own courage, or wisdom, or strength fall short." (1)

The train of irony in Tess of the D'Urbervilles seems to be much more closely woven than in Hardy's novels heretofore. All the tragic of Tess's life cannot be traced to the parson's greeting 'Good evening, Sir John'. A good deal of it Hardy traces to Tess's heredity. If Hardy had traced it directly to environment, which he does in part, then we might consider him to be blaming events purely and simply. But he insists on the fact that the D'Urberville qualities were strong in Tess. Nature had planted them there and the right combination of the qualities or defects of Tess with this particular train of ironic events led to the tragedy; but the social conventions made a tragedy out of the events.

(1) Thomas Hardy--by Harold Child p. 78-9.

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The ironic situation in which the man writing the texts on the stiles which apply to her, as he helps her carry her bundle home from the D'Urberville estate seems to indicate the higher irony of the All-seeing Being gazing down at future events that are to befall Tess. The ironic situation which results from the letter being slipped under the carpet is significant of the false security in which Tess finds herself. This false security is suddenly ended by a stroke of Hardy's hidden satire. When Clare tells her of his dissipation it gives her courage to tell him of her dealings with Alec D'Urberville. He is stunned by it and 'The pair were but ashes of their former selves.' The implication of this satire is that the double standard of morals is the whole cause of the tragedy which ultimately drives Tess back to Alec and thence to his murder. This convention of society morals is attacked in a most subtle way. In fact it seems to be the theme of the novel. It is supported in a most ingenious way by several ironic events; by the irony of the new turn-of-the-keeper's words in telling her that John Durberfield's daughter is married to a gentleman of high standing and of how he treated everybody in the parish; by the irony of Angel's father reading the chapter in Proverbs in praise of a virtuous wife as the grace at mealtime; the irony of Angel Clare's brother bringing in Tess's old boots that she had hid in the hedge, saying that no doubt some beggar had left them there to come into town the better to excite sympathy by begging barefoot; finally by that master stroke of dramatic irony when Tess, on the way back stops to hear a preacher in a barn who is no other than Alec D'Urberville. To the All-seeing Being this becomes a fine example of philosophic irony; it becomes the same to one who knows that Alec will return

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to his sin and complete the ruin of Tess.

In Tess of the D'Urbervilles then Hardy builds up the main satire of his novel, that of the double standard in morals, mainly through use of series of ironic events, dramatic by nature, philosophic in content.

"He brings definite charges against the collective judgment of society which, in the belief that it can so protect itself, destroys some of its finest and most sensitive material. The rough and ready judgment of society acting upon Tess through other people wasted her youth, beauty, motherhood, love, drove her to misery, crime and violent death" (1)

This novel contains the only example of the train of ironic events leading Hardy to conclude that the 'President of the Immortals' enjoyed torturing creatures as boys do captured flies. This may be but a stage through which he passed to his ultimate conclusions of the unconscious Immanent Will of the Dynasts. It makes the ironic train more bitter and this may have been part of the objection to 'Tess of the D'Urbervilles' as a novel.

The 'social convention' attacked by Hardy's satire was not the convention itself but the false view taken of Tess's fall by society. It should not have resulted in crushing, unendurable outcome that it did result in. He points out in his satire that society fails to read through outward actions into the spiritual principle behind them. Society fails to see that in Tess while she had lost physical chastity under extenuating circumstances, she still retained her spiritual inviolacy which society no longer

(1) 'Thomas Hardy' by Harold Child page 70

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recognizes as distinct from the physical. He is satirizing Victorian ideas of the double standard, the quickness of society to judge by purely external standards when it cannot get at the motives, and above all Victorian prudery, that relic of Puritan days that still lived in England. A few months away from insular English Victorian ideas seems to cure Angel Clare's narrow-mindedness on these questions.

We must be careful not to read more of Hardy's thoughts into Hardy's novels than he meant to put in them. That Jude was a victim of the irony of temperament is seen from Hardy's letter to a close friend:

"It is curious that some of the papers should look upon the novel as a manifesto on 'the marriage question' (although, of course, it involves it), seeing that it is concerned first with the labours of a poor student to get a University degree and secondly with the tragic issues of two bad marriages, owing in the main to a doom or curse of hereditary temperament peculiar to the family of the parties." (1)

But we may safely conclude from his preface to Jude the Obscure that "marriage should be dissolvable as soon as it becomes a cruelty to either of the parties."

In both these tragic novels then Hardy attacked not convention but the misuse of it. Society must not overlook the individual in its dealings. His method of attack is the satire of circumstances which, when played against the larger background of

(1) Letter quoted in the 'Later Years of T. Hardy' p. 40

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man's ultimate destiny includes his philosophy. His view of the proper place of convention is summed up in the following:

"Hardy saw convention mounting to a place in society to which it had no right: he saw it becoming master where it should have been a servant. Clare perceives when his eyes are opened, that his mistake has been in 'allowing himself to be influenced by general principles to the disregard of the particular instances.' The motto of Jude the Obscure, which applies as well to Tess of the D'Urbervilles, is 'The letter killeth'. Rules there must be, but proportion must be kept among them. The Woodlanders is, as to Giles's death, a tragedy of propriety-- Grace allowed the secondary laws of propriety to stand before the one of humanity. The misery of the two greater novels arises in both cases from narrow conventional views usurping the place of the one great law by which all others must be tested, the golden rule of love and happiness." (1)

This then was the point toward which the satire was directed and it was Hardy's love of humanity that prompted it.

(1) Thomas Hardy, by H. C. Duffin 3rd Edn. Page 249

IV

COINCIDENCE AND PHILOSOPHIC IRONY

The person reading Hardy's novels for the first time is struck almost immediately by the novelists use of coincidence. He has been roundly condemned for deliberately plotting the overthrow of his characters by going out of his way to call in coincidence to complete the 'kill'. It is our purpose in this section to examine this use of coincidence in the light of philosophic irony and to see how he works out his philosophy or 'reading of life' through philosophic irony with the help of coincidence.

In the tragedies a simple accident starts a whole series of events culminating in utter destruction--usually moral, often social as well. It is as if one leaned accidentally against an electric button connected with a series of explosive charges, which burst in succession before one can reach them in turn to quench the fuse and avert the catastrophe. Some prefer to call this chance; it seems better to keep the word Chance for an isolated action, whereas coincidence seems a better word to apply when two actions supposed to happen by chance come together or when one negatives the other. In many cases the succession of events in one of Hardy's novels depends on a first action that may be attributed to chance.

It is with the help of coincidence then that Hardy shows his philosophic irony. Here Irony is shown in events, not in words and with Hardy Irony of Circumstances seems to be the best way of showing his philosophy. In fact in Hardy Irony of Circumstances becomes Philosophic irony because it enters in such a way into the lives of the characters; it becomes the dominating force in

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them so often that we cannot help but see Hardy's reading of life in it.

"There are grander conceptions and profounder teachings in Hardy than this of the bitter farce of life, but it is so constantly before him, his mind is so thoroughly impregnated with the idea, that it must be recognised as the most characteristic feature of his philosophy. His whole novel is built, primarily, upon the doctrine of the Irony of Fate, as commonly understood." (1)

As has been pointed out before, Irony of Fate becomes Philosophic Irony when it is writ large, when it concerns events that loom large enough to affect life. The events must be of themselves or lead to events that are consequential enough to affect life in an important way before it becomes Philosophic Irony. When this happens often enough (as it surely does in Hardy's novels) it affects Philosophy. If by simplest definition we mean by Irony ^{layers of meaning} A, then in most of the coincidences in Hardy the reader acts the part of the knowing onlooker while the actors are the unknowing ones. If dramatized we would call this dramatic irony-it becomes philosophic dramatic irony if the event or its direct consequences is important enough to enter into the lives of the characters on a large enough scale of importance to enter the domain of philosophy. We have seen many examples of ironical situations where one of the actors was the knowing one, together with the reader or audience; Hardy uses coincidence as irony where neither of the characters is the knowing one and where usually the reader is, but sometimes even the reader's inside knowledge is withheld and only the Almighty is the knowing party.

(1) Thomas Hardy--H. C. Duffin p. 184

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For example Tess goes to visit the Vicar and he is out. This is coincidence of one kind which does not remedy Tess's situation. The reader feels, although he does not know that had the Vicar been in things might have and probably would have been different for Tess. The same is true of the letter slipped under the carpet.

A remarkable case of ironic coincidence where even the reader is not admitted to the special circle of the knowing audience till the same time as the actors are and the only knowing audience is God, is the case of Knight and Smith riding to Endelstow in the train that bears the body of Elfride. Not until the name-plate is read do they or the readers know the identity of the dead. A kind of negative coincidence is often seen; nobody appears to help young Jude or to advise him; the foolishness of Tess's mother's advice is as bad or worse than this. All these profoundly affect the destiny of the characters concerned and most certainly affect the reader's philosophy of life.

We find this in all Hardy's serious novels. They are multiplied and many of those that seem unimportant lead to consequences that seriously affect destiny. In A Pair of Blue Eyes a slight illness happened to prevent Vicar Somerset from receiving his guest Stephen Smith and the Vicar's daughter Elfride acted as hostess; this simple coincidence started a train of events resulting in two broken-hearted lovers, Knight and Smith meeting at her funeral, each blaming the other for causing unhappiness. In the Woodlanders it was Mrs. Charmond's accident that caused the renewal of her affair with her former lover that ended with such dire results. In the same story it happened to

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be raining when Giles Winterborne gave up his shelter to Mrs. Fitzspiers to preserve her honour which resulted in his death. If the marriage license that Stephen Smith had procured had been issued for London and not Plymouth, Elfrida probably would not have changed her mind and the story would perhaps never ^{have} been written. In the Mayor of Casterbridge ^{Henchard} first comes between ~~Richard~~ and Elizabeth-Jane, then marries Lucetta, Henchard's former lover and finally does him out of business settling in Henchard's former house. Not even Henchard's strong character could overcome grim machinations that seemed to be worked through Elizabeth-Jane. The 'persistence of the unforeseen' played on the larger stage of life with Henchard always as the unknowing character is ironic. The Return of the Native is an excellent example of coincidence lording it over the striving of man. Just when Mrs. Yeobright decides to take the step to put everything right coincidence begins working and does not stop till both Mrs. Yeobright and Austacia are dead. H. C. Duffin shows how irony as revealed in coincidence affects Hardy's philosophy.

"In the microcosm of Hardy's novels there is unquestionably a power--conscious or unconscious, personal or impersonal--that controls, influences, at least hampers and hinders the doings of man. The conception is so universally and consistently present that it is difficult not to see in it a main strain of Hardy's philosophy. He does indeed protest, over and over again, that that conception, like others, is to be regarded as the record of an impression not of a conviction, but the change of name alters nothing, for an artist's impressions are his convictions, and an impression that persists throughout a lifetime is likely to have hardened into a belief." (1)

(1) Thomas Hardy by H. C. Duffin page 193

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It would seem then that Hardy used coincidence because he saw it in life; he saw it as a third person, a knowing audience having its place in the dramatic irony of life. Hardy was sensitive to what affects man and he saw coincidence become personified acting in an ironic manner to influence man's destiny. His keen perception had not been long in showing him that life was tragical rather than comical. He makes out a case for the blind instinctive onrush of unintelligent forces which relentlessly drive men on to blind submission to circumstances over which they have and can have no control. This blind instinctive onrush is represented as revealing itself in life by coincidence. Tragedies are caused by the action of circumstance which is simply the expression of the indifferent power that rules the world--circumstance which reveals itself by coincidence and which becomes ironic when human events clash against the power that rules the world with man the victim blindfolded by time and place.

Hardy has been severely criticized for his so-called over-use of coincidence. In July 1881 Hardy wrote-

"The writer's problem is how to strike the balance between the uncommon and the ordinary, so as, on the one hand, to give interest, on the other to give reality.

In working out this problem, human nature must never be abnormal, which is introducing incredibility. The uncommonness must be in the events, not in the 'characters.'

That Hardy had 'uncommonness' in the events is evident to every reader, witness Michael Henchard's selling of his wife.

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That he did not have 'uncommonness in the characters' is likewise evident from a study of the characters of the novels which are a good cross section of humanity. But Hardy understood coincidence for its true worth; coincidence can be used merely to provide sensation but in A Laedicean Hardy says "--by a coincidence common enough in fact, though scarcely credited in chronicles--" which seems to go a long way in proving that Hardy recognized that his coincidence had its birth in the reality of life. Human life, as most of us realize, is crowded with it and much of it is of great importance in our lives. In other words we are still, like Hardy's characters, the victims of philosophical dramatic irony. Any biography will bear out the truth of this; two of these are related by Jacques Barzun: firstly that Hardy owed his life to the efforts of the family nurse who revived him after he had been laid aside as stillborn; secondly the letter that he received from Leslie Stephen asking him to write a novel for the Cornhill magazine at a time when such a commission incalculably advanced his prospects was entrusted to two children because there was no rural mail delivery and through carelessness they dropped it in the mud. A labourer passing by found it and it was duly delivered. Coincidence of this letter kind ^{can} be found in every life even the simplest. Looking backward we can see turning points in our lives which depended on very small things and which had great effects on our destiny and not only the destinies of those closely connected with us but even those with whom we remotely come in contact. Hardy realized this and to him then,

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"what we term coincidence or accidents are continually happening. When they are of slight moment they remain unnoticed, because we take an absurd pride in making our lives seem rational. We pretend that we are the captains of our fate. But the thoughtful observer must confess that these chances and mischances are not only common realities but also symbols of our powerlessness. During his novel-writing days Hardy took notes on many fatal or futile conjunctions of this sort, including instances of the gruesome and grotesque for which he had an equal respect as normal parts of life. Some of these notes can be read to-day in the two posthumous volumes--raw material from which he fashioned either directly or by analogy the 'unjustifiable' turning point of his major tales." (1)

In his 'reading of life' then Hardy saw much coincidence; he saw it working for man's destiny and therefore most certainly impinging on philosophic ground; he saw its ironic aspect working through the drama of life and reaching philosophy, through the fact that his characters were the uninformed audience and the All-seeing Eye, or the Immanent will or the spirit of the Ages or whatever he called it at the different stages of his writing was the ~~un~~informed audience. There seem to be two degrees to the irony of coincidence; firstly a lighter (only by comparison) irony of events that has often a dire result but often does not lead to the result directly but through the second; secondly a deeper irony of clashes of Ideals, wrong personalities thrown together which causes the events and coincidence to have a more far-reaching effect. The vicar was out when Tess called which was a coincidence which seemed to be an ironic mocking of Tess's good intention to straighten matters out. But Tess could have

(1) Truth and Poetry in Thomas Hardy-by Jacques Barzun-

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called back as another girl probably would have done; she didn't because she was Tess. Her grim determination not to go begging to the vicar's door together with the irony of coincidence mentioned worked together to help cause Tess's tragedy. Much of the irony of coincidence in Hardy must be interpreted in light of the character of the person or persons involved with a view of finding out how far their reactions on it further the tragedy. But the fact that the coincidence is there to affect the person or persons merely enhances the irony of character and one working with the other causes tragedy. If irony of circumstances is defined as 'a contrary result of events as though in mockery of what might have been looked for' then indeed coincidence in Hardy is of the stuff of irony. If human destiny is the matter of philosophy, then indeed coincidence in Hardy is philosophic irony.

THE FATALISTIC & PESSIMISTIC ASPECTS OF HARDY'S IRONY

Hardy's irony, dealing with the broad subject of man's destiny which is the domain of philosophy has brought down on his head these two appellations, Fatalist and Pessimist. Hardy used irony in his 'reading life' because he saw it there but his 'reading of life' is nothing more or less to him than his own philosophy whether or not he wanted to term it a system. We should, then, in fairness to Hardy, examine to what extent his use of irony in the novels, which he saw in life influenced him to a fatalistic or pessimistic outlook and of what nature this fatalism and pessimism is.

Hardy's tragic novels are a world wherein human individuality and desire are in conflict with the indifferent governing body, just as in Greek tragedy human individuality is ⁱⁿ conflict with fate. Hardy may have meant that the indifferent governing body was the same thing as fate, and it would seem from his novels that he did so. There is a fatalism amounting to Stoicism in the Wessex rustics. It is also true that the tragic characters wear themselves out in a vain effort to overcome fate. This fate was shown in many ways, often by coincidence as we have seen, often again by character. Irony is a pattern according to the personality of the author; he looks through the telescope and there is a sort of double filter over the lens of the telescope giving things an ironic fatalistic colouring. His art is shaped by ironic preconceptions with a fatalistic tinge.

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We have seen Hardy's coincidence at work; life abounds in it and Hardy as the tale-teller has used it abundantly. His own attitude towards life creeps in and shows the fatalistic tendency of coincidence. The 'Vicar of Wakefield' abounds in coincidence, but Goldsmith uses it merely to put action into the story and to make it interesting through the use of a plot. In fact most novel-writers use it for this purpose. Hardy uses it mainly to free human beings from responsibility; he does not blame Tess for being careless where she put the letter, nor does he blame her for the murder of Alec. He blames heredity and environment when he cannot blame chance. Often of course, he blames heredity and environment together as revealed through their outcropping ironic coincidence. In Henchard it is heredity working with coincidence; it is the same thing in the case of Elfrida and Eustacia. We may blame the individual for his or her stupidity or lack of control of passions or some other cause for the tragic outcome but Hardy does not. With him there is always an element of Fate working with other forces through irony to bring about the tragedy. There is a scientific determinism running through his writings. Speaking of Jude the Obscure Hardy says in a letter to a close friend Nov. 10, 1895

"One thing I did not answer. The 'grimy' features of the story go to show the contrast between the ideal life a man wished to lead, and the squalid real life he was fated to lead. The throwing of the pizzle, at the supreme moment of his young dream, is to sharply initiate this contrast. But I must have lamentably failed, as I feel I have, if this requires explanation and is not self-evident. The idea was meant to run all through the novel. It is, in fact, to be discovered in every body's life, though it lies less on the surface perhaps than it does in my poor puppet's" (1)

(1) Letter quoted in 'Later Years of T. Hardy' page 41

THE FATALISTIC & PESSIMISTIC ASPECTS OF HARDY'S ICONY

What did this admitted fatalism that Hardy showed working Jude's destiny through ironic coincidence have to do with pessimism? It was objective fatalism, causing subjective pessimism due mainly to Hardy's sensitiveness and his inherent love for Human Nature. In other words he had a temperamental bias to pessimism. The only thing left for him to do was to "show the grandeur underlying the sorriest things," and "The sorriness underlying the grandest of things." He aimed to present things that harmonized with his experience. It would seem that Hardy in his answers to the accusation of pessimism brought against him, showed much more insight into the realities of life than his accusers. He writes Jan. 16, 1918 in answer to the accusation of pessimism:

"As to pessimism. My motto is, first correctly diagnose the complaint--in this case human ills--and ascertain the cause: then set about finding a remedy if one exists. The motto or practice of the optimists is: Blind the eyes to the real malady, and use empirical panaceas to suppress the symptoms." (1)

He was not merely concerned with exhibiting the slice of life; he saw more deeply and felt more keenly than the superficial writers who employ this manner in their novels. If he saw life darkly he saw it clearly. To do away with pessimistic outlook would be tantamount to disclaiming the rightful place of tragic literature in life.

(1) Later Life page 183.

We may ask the question why Hardy dwells in the main, not on the happiness of love but upon the unhappiness. He chose love between man and woman as the best means of showing mankind in struggle with ironic fate and coincidence; he might have chosen other things such as the economic struggles. Only on two occasions does he bring his lovers to enjoy happiness, Gabriel Oak and Bathsheba, Elizabeth-Jane and Farfrae. And in each of these cases the happiness is depicted still in the overhanging shadow of recent death. Hardy does not dwell on the happiness, he brings his lovers to that state and leaves them. Much more often does he deny this lot to them by ironic coincidence. This is his art, to dwell on happiness lies outside it. Perhaps this is the ground for the accusation of pessimist; but it does not seem fair to call a man a pessimist because he brings his novels to a tragic end. Nor must we call Hardy a pessimist because he chose to depict in the main the sinister workings of ironic Fate. Still more foolish would it be to try to show that Hardy copied his pessimism from Schopenhauer and the French pessimists and developed a set of emotions to harness on his characters as R. P. Blackmur would have us believe. (1) From his elevation of mind he sees the futility of the struggle but at closer range he sees the heroic grandeur of it. "In the double vision of man's greatness and man's futility lies the secret of Hardy's tragedy, of his irony in its various degrees." (2)

(1) See 'Shorter Poems' in Southern Review. R. P. Blackmur.

(2) Thomas Hardy by Harold Child.

THE FATALISTIC & PESSIMISTIC ASPECTS OF HARDY'S IRONY

While the tragic novels seem to grow more despairing ending in the black pages of the close of Tess of the D'Urbenvilles and Jude the Obscure the struggle seems to grow grander and the nobility of soul more elevated. Tess is a much greater soul than Elfride or Bathsheba or Eustacia. If he was pessimistic he believed in life; the true pessimist gives up the struggle whereas in Hardy the greater the struggle the greater the soul even when it is overcome. One of the best refutations of the charge of pessimism on the grounds of Hardy's respect for humanity is found in H. C. Duffin's criticism:

"Indeed, no writer who presents human-kind so worthily can be a thorough-going pessimist. Your true pessimist is he who, like Swift, depicts man himself as degraded, contemptible. From Hardy's dark canvas there stand out the heroic forms of a mighty Adam and a beautiful Eve. With him man is far from god-like, but still a moral being, rich in interest and of high capacity. Negatively, Hardy has few low types among his people, and no scoundrels of the Dickens and Thackeray order." (1)

As has already been pointed out Hardy's was an intellectual and not just a temperamental pessimism which had its basis in a metaphysically reasoned conception of the universe. His metaphysics underwent many changes resulting from his impressions but it always implied a growth of civilization. His observations and recordings of the ironies of coincidence and fate as they affected man's destiny never brought him a solution, but his sensitiveness of soul, and love of humanity compelled him to try to solve them.

(1) Thomas Hardy by H. C. Duffin page 255.

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"He saw so much pain and anguish in the world about him that he was continually pressed with the desire to know why they are there. He tried to solve the riddle and failed. Millions of men have made the same attempt and failed likewise, but Hardy found it impossible to accept either Fitzgerald's bland resignation or Browning's illogical faith." (1)

But his faith in mankind is ~~is~~ ultimately seemed to grow in spite of the multiplication of ironic fate and coincidences affecting man's destiny adversely and finally worked its way through to the gleam of hope recorded at the end of The Dynasts.

(1) Hardy of Wessex---Carl. J. Weber page 230-231.

VI

IRONY IN THE POEMS

Hardy's earliest writings were poems, many of which were published in magazines and papers but most of which were kept till later. During his novel-writing Hardy continued to write poetry and when the storm of Tess of the D'Urbervilles and Jude the Obscure was over he calmly decided to turn to poetry and to write no more novels because

"to cry out in a passionate poem that the Supreme Power must be either limited in power, or unknowing, or cruel would cause merely a shake of the head; whereas he knew from his own experience that to put the same idea into argumentative prose would make his foes sneer or foam at the mouth and would set them all 'jumping upon me, a harmless agnostic'" (1)

Then in 1898 appeared his first volume Wessex Poems with illustrations from his own hand. This volume was composed mostly of poems written during the novel writing. In fact all eight of his volumes of poetry contained poems of this period.

If Hardy's short stories are foreshortened novels, his poems in many cases may be said to be foreshortened short stories.

"In some few cases the verses were turned into prose and printed as such, it having been unanticipated at that time that they might see the light" says Hardy in his Preface to the "Wessex Poems."

The content of the dramatic poems and the short stories then can be expected to be of the same fibre as the novels. We can expect to see coincidence abound, bidding man's destiny. We must look into the content of this class of poems particularly to examine the irony and compare it with that of the novels.

(1) Hardy of Wessex--Carl J. Weber. page 186.

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Moreover the poems give us the advantage of observing Hardy's views over a wider range of life than was afforded in the novels. In the fourteen novels the influences of 'coincidence, ironic situations can be traced on only a limited number of persons within a limited time and place, and only on a fraction of these can they be followed with intensity; in the poems Hardy multiplies his vignettes of life affected by these and can show us, not so intensively, it is true, but in more numerous cases, in more situations, more places, more walks of life. In the foreword of the volume 'Poems of the Past and Present' he says:

"Of the subject-matter of this volume--even that which is in other than narrative form--much is dramatic or impersonative even where not explicitly so. Moreover, that portion which may be regarded as individual comprise a series of feelings and fancies written down in widely differing moods and circumstances, and at various dates. It will probably be found, therefore, to possess little cohesion of thought or harmony of colouring. I do not greatly regret this. Unadjusted impressions have their value, and the road to a true philosophy of life seems to lie in humbly recording diverse readings of its phenomena as they are forced upon us by chance and change."

We can therefore expect a wider range of incident and impression of life in the poems than in the novels. It remains to be seen whether or not this changes his outlook.

As early as 1865 when Hardy was but twenty-five years of age we find him writing that, Fate ruled at least some of our lives

IRONY IN THE POEMS

"and weep
That Time the tyrant fell
Ruled Anabel!

In the poem 'Hap' a year later not only has he reached the conclusion that 'Crass Casualty' rules all, but he wishes that man's suffering were at least amusing some 'vengeful god' because then it would at least be profiting someone; whereas as it is man's suffering goes for nought.

"But not so. How arrives it joy lies slain,
And why unblooms the best hope ever sown?
--Crass Casualty abstracts the sun and rain,
And dicing time for gladness casts a moan.....
These purblind Doomsters had as readily strown
Blisses about my pilgrimage as pain" (1)

It is interesting, at the same time, to note that one of his earliest poems is at the same time one of his most bitter and satiric.

On the same level as the tragic irony of the novels is A Trampwoman's Tragedy. The Trampwoman's teasing words caused the jealous murder and the lonely Trampwoman remains 'Hunting The Western Moor.' Similar ironic tragedy is depicted in A Sunday Morning Tragedy. It was indeed an ironic Fate that chose the Sunday morning the banns were published to be the death day of the young lover "Ay, Fortune worked thus wantonly." Love, which irony has turned to tragedy, shows Hardy's strong contrast of the irony of Fate appearing in life in strong contrast to the

"hoar, chancel
Where all's the same."

in She Revisits alone the church of Her marriage.

(1) Hap 1866.

IRONY IN THE POEMS

Likewise The Church Builder contains a bitter jest of Fate in which the man after ruining himself to build a church finds it unwanted and goes by night and hangs himself in it. The irony of finding the Builder's body in the church is shown in the soliloquy:-

"Well: Here at moon they'll light on me
Dangling in mockery
Of what he spent his substance on
Blindly and uselessly!
"He might," they'll say,
"Have built, some way,
"A cheaper gallows—tree."

The tragedy of Fate seems especially more significant because of the good intention and heroic sacrifice of the builder. His religious purpose helps to intensify the difference between what the tragic outcome is and what we would expect it to be. It is one of Hardy's deepest ironic poems. All these are merely examples of a series of his tragic poems which show man's destiny affected by the fates in an ironic humour.

Not all Hardy's poems show this deeper philosophic irony; some contain a more playful or lighter kind. Four Footprints is ironic but not tragically so. In this and The End of the Episode the victims of the playfulness of the Fates show stoicism rather than surrender:-

'Ache deep,' but make no moans:
Smile out; but still suffer;
The paths of love are rougher
Than thoroughfares of stones."

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Hardy can write irony in a half-humorous way even though the subject be grave; in these cases his irony does not reach the serious philosophic side of life, but stops short and expends itself on the humour of the situation. The poor befooled wife of The Homecoming is not overcome by the ironic outcome of her expectations into running back to her 'dear daddie' and resolves to stay. But the irony which is purely dramatic in this case is handled playfully by Hardy depicting the severe life to come in contrast with the apparently high expectations of the bride. The wind gruffly howling in the interposed two line stanza between the verses of the narrative acts as a reminder of the sterner aspects of married life to come. The irony in The Three Tall Men is presented with a dramatic chuckle though it deals with death. The tall man's coffin which he made for himself was used for his brother, and a second one for his son, and a third lay unused because he died at sea. Hardy represents the Fates in a playful mood about man's destiny--one of the rare occasions on which he does so. The Curate's Kindness bearing the sub-title A Workhouse Irony found Hardy in a merry ironical mood. The gradual working up to the humorous climax is heightened by dialect. The poor old man wants to jump out of the waggon on hearing that his wife is coming to the workhouse too. Just as he consoles himself by the fact that she will be in the women's section the curate informs him that this 'harsh' order has been rescinded by the Board. The curate's kindness has indeed become an irony. But the good humour of the reader is not marred by any tragical outcome because we feel sure that the threat of the old man

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"Let me jump out of the waggon and go back and drown me
At Fummary or Ten-Hatches Weir"

was not carried out.

The tragic and the comic objects of Hardy's irony are reflected in his poems as well as in the novels. It is probably true that Hardy was more bitter in the poems, this may be partly due to the fact that the poems are more curt and subtle. Hardy seems to give more attention in his poems to the more bitter aspect of irony called satire.

The bitterness of illusion is powerfully shown in the poem A Beauty's soliloquy during her Honeymoon. When she realizes her marriage mistake too late, the fatal mistake seems ironically enough to be attributed to her dwelling too much on duty and not enough on her beauty before her marriage. The pride and vanity of life have rarely come in for such scornful words as these from 'Lady Vi'

"Religion is good for all who are meek;
It stays in the Bible through the week,
And floats about the house on Sundays
But does not linger on till Mondays.
The ten Commandments in one's prime
Are matter for another time,
While griefs and graves and things allied
In well-bred talk one keeps outside."

Contrasted with this is his gentle irony of A Leader of Fashion in which he quietly shows the woman to be lacking in reality. Hardy was capable of strong invective and gentle satire and it is probably true that his gentlest is his greatest. Though he felt strongly, he seems to achieve the end of satire better when he avoids bitterness. In The Torn Letter there is satire on the quick temper which results in losing the sender's address after saner thoughts have cooled rage; The Telegram contains the circumstances of a marriage of the sorry kind and An East-end Curate depicts the conditions in the London slums where Mr. Dowle the clergyman seems to fare no better than his neighbour. This latter has all the gentleness of Addison's humour. In these poems the gentle irony of circumstances does not pass into the philosophic stage but remains within the borders of dramatic irony; they are some of Hardy's best examples of this kind.

There is ample philosophic material in Hardy's poetry, and he presents it under the cloak of irony. But in the poems we find him speaking more directly to us than he did in his novels. They permit of a closer examination into Hardy's mind as it was affected by his impressions of life. There is, of course, no possibility of tracing the poet's progress of thought since the poems were not written in order. He is straightforward enough in The Impercipient showing himself outside the faith of those who cling to dogmatic religion:-

"That with this bright believing band
 I have no claim to be,
 That faiths by which my comrades stand
 Seem fantasies to me,
 And mirage-mists their Shining Land
 Is a strange destiny"

The heedlessness of God is shown in The Bedridden Peasant to an unknowing God leads him to the belief that something has gone wrong with the plan:-

"That some disaster cleft Thy scheme
 And tore us wide apart"

but that this is not God's fault; therefore the peasant believes that through Fate, God cannot hear him but

"I'll praise Thee as were shown to me
 The mercies Thou wouldst show!"

This seems to be a rather satirical faith but Hardy's frank trying to hope that "it might be so" is also expressed in The Oxen and indicates more than the half-way position. In A Dream Question God impatiently dismisses the suggestion that he cares about the criticism of his creatures; and in New Year's Eve he confesses his inability to explain his logicless labours.

There is a kind of metaphysical fatalism in the irony of The Subalterns wherein the Sky, the North, Sickness and Death show that they in their turn are servants of a higher being and must serve. The fatalism helps him bear the burdens of life--

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"We smiled upon each other then,
 And life to me had less
 Of that fell look it wore ere when
 They owned their passiveness."

It is armchair philosophy ironically presented. Nature's Questioning most powerfully represents the question of Fate expressed through Hardy's ignorance of man's origin:-

"Oh come we of an Automaton
 Unconscious of our pains?
 Or are we live remains

Of Godhead dying downwards, brain and eye now gone?"

This is one of his bitterest indictments of the Supreme Being's order of the universe--a satire on the universe as a whole--Nature and Man. Here is represented the irony of our position affecting our destiny with the super-added irony of the Godhead not knowing or being able to guide our destiny. Life goes on, perhaps as an ironic jest of the Godhead. Sometimes, and this is a good example of it, Hardy goes beyond the irony that works man's destiny and shows it working the destiny of the universe or even the Cosmos. But even this Cosmic irony gives way to a gleam of hope in the blackness of night occasioned by the death of God;

"Still, how to bear such loss I deemed
 The insistent question for each animate mind,
 And gazing, to my growing sight there seemed
 A pale yet positive gleam low down behind."

This appears in God's Funeral written a year or so after "The Dynasts."

Irony at its best is depicted in the fifteen Satires of Circumstance--

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those fifteen vignettes of life at bitterly ironic moments. Many of them touch on Hardy's oft-recurring subject of ironic themes-- love and marriage. In these we have the typical ironic situation, usually of the lighter dramatic type, although we fear as we read them that some of the situations will touch on the tragic if the ironic situation reaches its dénouement later in the lives of the characters. Hardy's subtleness here adds to his poem, because if the subject is expanded the short ironic cut loses its curl. The happy young wife in At Tea is blissfully ignorant of the position of the visitor sipping her tea and is likewise ignorant of the husband's 'stray glance yearningly.' By her Aunt's Grave is a slight satire on the theme 'out of sight out of mind' when the headstone money goes to pay admission to the dance. The irony of In the Cemetery has a touch of satire in the close when the mothers squabbling over the graves of their children, are told ironically enough that it is the grave of neither but that is merely a drain:

"And as well cry over a new-laid drain

As anything else, to ease your pain!"

The irony of In the Study is two-edged; firstly the gayness of the lady satirizes the shortness and superficiality of the mourning period, just as in the previously quoted poem and secondly the eagerness to sell the books "some score of the works of eminent divines" is merely "to make my rooms a little smart" and not for need.

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Several of these are on the theme of the wrong people getting married; In the Nuptial Chamber, At a Watering-Place, In the Room of the Bride-Elect. The question of Death claims the last four of this series. The last two of them Over the Coffin and In the Moonlight have a melancholy note. It will be noticed that the theme of these Satires of Circumstance is the theme of many of the novels compressed into a few lines. Thus we have seen how Hardy saw irony in life, in our actions serious and light, and under various circumstances.

Hardy showed his so-called Pessimism or rather his serious reading of life in many of his poems. In the first stanza of To Life he seems to be saying that, in the main, life is sad and the pleasant or the amusing is the exception rather than the usual:-

"O Life with the sad seared face,
I weary of seeing Thee,
And thy draggled cloak, and thy hobbling pace,
And thy too-forced pleasantry."

In the second stanza he goes on to tell that he knows it "Tells of Death, Time, Destiny-." Many of his narratives with a bitter, cruel ironic end show the impression of pessimism. The Brother is a tale of rape, murder and suicide; The Vampirine Fair is one of gloom and depravity; The Fifteen Satires of Circumstance mentioned above seem to berate the nobility of life. With him at times life gets so bad that he sighs for the end as In Tenebris l, ll, lll or at least personal unconsciousness as in De Profundis.

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"Black is night's cope;
But death will not appal
One who, past doubtings all,
Waits in unhope."

But if Hardy was sometimes weighted down by life's misfortunes he could also sing of it in an optimistic vein. Some of his poems, On a Fine Morning, The Darkling Through have a zest for life, a love of living. Particularly noteworthy in this respect is The Song of Hope

"O sweet to-morrow:-
After to-day
There will away
This sense of sorrow.
Then let us borrow
Hope, for a gleaming
Soon will be streaming,
Dimmed by no gray"

Browning in one of his ecstatic flights of optimism could not have been more enthusiastic. Moreover not all his narrative poems have tragic or even sad endings-- The Husband's View, A Wife and Another and A Question of Marriage show that irony of events does not always turn out to the detriment of the race and that people, reacting sensibly to Fate can do something to make the outcome happy. His interest in life is shown in many of the poems showing that while his outlook on life may have been darkened in many cases when he viewed man's destiny controlled

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by an ironic fate, he could also be interested in the things that surround man on this earth; interest like that found in the Blinded Bird, his dog Messex and Old Furniture. He seemed, in this last mentioned and a few other similar poems to be tracing the history of some ironic sequence as spoken to him by these articles-viewing them as the witness of man's destiny in the making. This is true only on a larger scale of the poems on Roman ruins. Of the Roman Road he says--

"And thoughtful men
Contrast its days of Now and Then,
And delve, and measure, and compare."

In the poem At a Lunar Eclipse he sees the smallness and unimportance of man; yet this did not lead Hardy to cynicism. Some of the satiric poems and a few epitaphs have a tinge of cynicism in them, but usually Hardy is interested in showing how important man's life is to each individual here and now in spite of the fact that Fate has left him little control over its destiny and that ironic events seem always to be working for his ruin. The man in Roman Gravemounds is not interested in the greatness of the legions that lie buried about him as he walks along to bury his pet; the important thing to him is not how life treated them but that he has been deprived of this creature

Even after the most cruel dealing of Fate we see Hardy's tenderness in the poems; in fact the more cruel the stroke the more tenderness he breathes into his poem.

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In the Dream of the City Shopwoman he expresses sympathy for those whose destiny must be worked out in the city; On the Portrait of a Woman about to be Hanged he blames 'this riot of passion' on the 'It' of the Dynasts who has implanted this germ in her. This is not merely putting the blame on heredity, as in Tess of the D'Urbervilles; it is more than that. The woman is a victim of an ironic fate since she had nothing to do with the implanting of the germ, and Hardy shows her every sympathy; he expresses not only feeling for her the victim but sadness because her Causer had ironically

 "and with a purblind vision
 Sowed a tare
 In a field so fair
And a thing of symmetry, seemed to view
 Brought to derision."

Hardy's 'It' has, ironically enough, implanted this deadly germ in a fair creature thus making the offence more odious. He expresses the same tenderness To an Unborn Pauper Child and would try to shield it from a destiny dictated by Fate which destiny augurs ill for the happiness of the innocent victim. Hardy's tenderness and feeling for the victim of ironic circumstances seems to grow in direct proportion to the victim's inability to help himself; he is particularly touched when the ironic circumstances are of the metaphysical order.

The Great War 1914-18 gave Hardy's "pale gleam of hope" to

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a jar from which he never seems to have recovered and added to his pessimism. In it he seems to see the workings of malevolent Fate particularly on the poor and lowly, a multiplicity of events on irony directing human destiny. This jar was all the worse because Hardy in 1902 had sounded the death-knell of the Battle-God:-

"Let men rejoice, let men deplore
The lurid Deity of heretofore
Succumbs to one of saner nod;
The Battle-god is god no more."

The war won from Hardy perhaps his most scathing satire on religion and Christianity. Christmas 1924 is one of his most pessimistic poems; that the war put the faint gleam of hope much farther ahead is seen from these lines from this poem:-

"Peace upon earth!" was said. We sing it,
And pay a million priests to bring it.
After two thousand years of mass
We've got as far as poison-gas."

The poetry then is on the theme of the novels: the same intermingling of much tragedy with a little comedy, most of which is shown through ironic happenings. If his theme in the novels and short stories had been to "show the grandeur underlying the sorriest things and the sorriness underlying the grandest of things," he held to it in the poems. He was pre-eminently occupied with man's condition of being blind-folded by Time, Chance and Space; he saw man's inability to control his destiny to any great extent.

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His heart goes out to those victims of ironic events who could not have foreseen the outcome. The range of the poems is wider than that of the novels; it contains more direct reference to his philosophy and shows in a more direct way his own reaction to the effects of ironic events particularly on the middle and lower classes. He saw human endeavour thwarted and human happiness destroyed by the action of circumstance and coincidence as the indifferent power ruling the actions of man, their outcome and hence their destiny. He expressed more satire in the poems, some of which was of the bitterest; if he sometimes seems to sneer at human weakness and stupid human conventions, more often is he resentful of the little control man has over his destiny. This is the sense in which it may be said that the novels only lead up to the poems and that the poems are a more intense, more diversified, more personal and a wider "reading of life" through observations, impressions and opinion.

"It was thought proper to introduce, as supplementary specimens of the logical system, certain imperceptible abstractions, or intelligences, called Spirits. They are intended to be taken by the reader for what they may be worth as the contrivances of the fancy merely. Their doctrines are but tentative, and are advanced with little care to a systematized philosophy warranted to life 'the burden of the mystery' of this wretched world."

But just as his readings of life in the novels resulted in a vision of life so does this machinery express more explicitly the same vision of life. Hardy has simply given names and a kind of abstract personality to his intelligences

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If the poems may, in a sense, be said to be the continuation of the novels, there is a sense also in which the "Dynasts" may be said to be a continuation and summation of the poems. Here the impressions and ideas stored up over the course of a lifetime were given under the symbolism and terminology of the Philosophy of the Will. He shows here systematically that especially in war is man's free will of very circumscribed limits—man from the 'greatest' to the meanest. He could show this by choosing a period of war rather than peace because evidently in war, especially war on a great scale like that of the Napoleonic era, man is more obviously the creature of fate. Even the title implies a fatalistic touch in that this is all a game of kings and rulers who seem to be at the mercy of fate and therefore much more so are the multitudes whom they rule and whose destinies they guide.

In the preface Hardy says:-

"It was thought proper to introduce, as supernatural spectators of the terrestrial action, certain impersonated abstractions, or Intelligences, called Spirits. They are intended to be taken by the reader for what they may be worth as the contrivances of the fancy merely. Their doctrines are but tentative, and are advanced with little eye to a systematized philosophy warranted to lift 'the burthen of the mystery' of this unintelligible world."

But just as his recordings of life in the novels resulted in a vision of life so does this machinery express more explicitly the same vision of life. Hardy has simply given names and a kind of abstract personality to his Intelligences

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and Spirits which allows them to see, converse, ask questions as part of the drama instead of us doing it in our own mind. In the novels and poems we could merely hear the tick of the clock of the Universe and read the time from the dial, in The Dynasts the back has been removed and while we do not understand from this what makes it go we can see all the works depending on the action of the mainspring, the Immanent Will.

In the very first words of the fore-scene the Shade of the Earth asks "What of the Immanent Will and Its design?" and the Spirit of the Years makes answer:-

"It works unconsciously, as heretofore,
Eternal artistries in Circumstance."

In fact the role of each of the celestial spirits is clearly shown in the Fore Scene. The Immanent Will appears as the impulsion and condition under which the destiny of man is worked out. The ancient Spirit of the Years together with the chorus explains what the Will is and how it works. It is unfeeling, all the feeling being left to the Spirit and chorus of the Pities--they plead and protest. They show Hardy's reactions resulting from his observation, sensitive nature and resulting reaction, his innate love of human nature as the result of the Immanent Will. The rebuffs that their pleadings receive merely go to drive home the unconsciousness of the Immanent Will resulting in man's little control over his destiny. It is Irony of Circumstance expressed in poetry.

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The Spirits Sinister and Ironic are diametrically opposed to the Spirit of the Pities. The Spirit Ironic is always on hand to point out the irony of the situation. He does not need to say much--in the Fore Scene he utters only two words--when the Spirit of the Pities says "Let this terrestrial tragedy--" then the Spirit Ironic breaks in with "Nay, comedy--" it is enough to fix his place. The Spirit Sinister seems to be working for the downfall of man and to be ever trying to turn his destiny to a tragic end. His reply, the first introduction we have to him, on learning that the unconscious "It" is performing as usual is

"Good, as before.

My little engines, then, will still have play."

It is interesting to note that the Ironic Spirit and the Spirit Sinister are different persons, each with a different role. It is the Spirit Sinister that enjoys the misery of man and is the representative of Calibanism. Irony's task is simply to point out the incongruities and chuckle over them. This, as a sidelight, would seem to uphold the theories of those who believe that Hardy's only utterance of Calibanism, the famous "President of the Immortals" passage in Tess of the D'Urbervilles was wrung from Hardy's soul in the bitterness of his feeling for Tess and her tragic end. The victim of all these spirits in conjunction with the Immanent Will is the Spirit of Earth, representing man the victim of their machinations. The purpose of the introduction of these Phantom Intelligences is well

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illustrated by Harold Child in his book 'Thomas Hardy'--
 "These Phantom Intelligences, affected by the action, commenting on it and sometimes interfering in it are Hardy's answer to the great 'Why'. Without these The Dynasts would be an epic of nations and men; with them it is an epic of the universe and of human life." When man's will is in agreement with the Immanent Will no suffering results but when man's will is in disagreement trouble arises. The part of this that shows Hardy's fatalism is that the 'It' is unconscious and man can do nothing about it; he is the silent victim of an unconscious power--The Spirit of the Fities asks

"Why doth It so and so, and ever so

This viewless, voiceless Turner of the Wheel?"

Hardy's reply to those who criticized his philosophy and his use of celestial machinery to show his philosophy is given in his own words:-

"What the reviewers really assert is, not 'This is an untrue and inartistic view of life,' but 'This is not the view of life that we people who thrive on conventions can permit to be painted.' If, instead of the machinery I adopted, I had constructed a theory of a world directed by fairies, nobody would have objected, and the critics would probably have said 'What a charming fancy of Mr. Hardy's!' But having chosen a scheme which may or may not be a valid one, but is presumably much nearer reality than the fancy of a world ordered by fairies would be, they straightway lift their brows." (1)

The last part tends to show that Hardy seriously set about showing plainly and in a sense accounting for, as far as is possible, all the ironic sequences of events, play of fate, coincidence that

(1) Quoted in 'Later Years' page 104

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he pictured objectively in the novels and poems. Events seemed to point out to him that a fancy he had often held and expressed that the never-ending push of the Universe was an unpurposeive groping in the line of least resistance might possibly be the real truth. He reserved one of the most trying times in man's history for exhibiting his system. It was not something new that he was trying out; he was simply using the formal terminology of Schopenhauer to elaborate his ideas which he had adopted as long ago as his earliest poems and the more tragic of his novels.

Even in the relation of the historical facts Hardy does not refrain from using irony. Maria Louisa tells of the many important prophecies in the Apocalypse concerning Napoleon's death, one of which is that he is to die this year. While she says she does ~~not~~ not attach overmuch importance to these, she exclaims "but O, how glad I should be to see them come true." The knowing audience is aware that Maria Louisa herself is to be his next wife and the dramatic irony is heightened when, discussing Napoleon's forthcoming divorce she says:-

"I am sure that the Empress her mother will never allow one of the house of Romanoff to marry with a bourgeois Corsican. I wouldn't if I were she." As the coach bearing Maria Louise approaches, Napoleon and Murat rush up to it and look in the window--Marie Louise shrinking back inside exclaims

"Ah Heaven! Two highway men are upon us."

but after the Equerry announces the Emperor she says ironically

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enough "You are so much better looking than your portraits that I hardly knew you--" This amid the blushing and confusion of the Archduchess. These are examples of lesser dramatic irony; but the reader who is expected to know the outcome of history sees a grimer^m dramatic irony extending as far as destiny in the scene which represents the Old Guard and other regiments honouring the picture of the young king of Rome playing at cup-and-ball, the ball being represented by a globe. The irony of fate had destined other ends for the son than it had for the father.

The whole epic-drama may be considered to be a satire on war but the satire boils up and comes through in words from the mouth of Napoleon when through his glasses he views the Russian ecclesiastics passing through the regiments bearing the iccn and other religious insignia while the Russian soldiers kneel before it--he says

"Ay! Not content to stand on their own strength,
They try to hire the enginry of Heaven.
I am no theologian, but I laugh
That men can be so grossly logicless,
When war, defensive or aggressive either,
Is in its essence Fagan, and opposed
To the whole gist of Christianity."

This would also seem to be a satire on Christianity and the remark of Bessières provides a kind of anti-climax to both satires when he says.

" 'Tis to fanaticize their courage sire."

In announcing his intention of "gilding the dome of the Invalides in the best gold leaf" to make the people forget the fateful

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Russian campaign, Napoleon is unconsciously uttering another satire on war. The horrible scenes of human degradation pictured among the deserters of Sir John Moore's army speak for themselves and are stronger than any invective. Point is added to the picture by the curt utterance of the Spirit Ironic.

"Quaint poesy, and real romance of war!"

His evident intention is to expose war as forced upon reluctant and suffering peoples by ambitious despots. In the scene after Waterloo the Chorus of the Years is in awe at the havoc wreaked by the ironic events as it views and bespeaks the destruction of earth creatures, snails, moles etc. by the trampling armies of Waterloo. Hardy was not content with having the leaders of war and the actual combatants viewed as sufferers through the Immanent Will; he shows us the country folk of his own Wessex, the poor of Paris, the rabble of Spain affected by it. Not content with this he extends the picture to the dumb smaller creatures and shows that they in their turn are, as a consequence, victims of the same unseeing Force that claims Man higher up in the scale. The satire against war is extended throughout the whole drama; the Spirit of the Fities is continually drawing the reader's attention to the pitilessness of the débâcle or rather seems to be voicing the reader's silent opinion. The same spirit is continually bringing the irony of the situation before our eyes; in his asking 'why' and receiving nothing but rebuffs or a curt reply from the Spirits Ironic or Sinister he proves conclusively that man is indeed the victim of ironic circumstance in the events of war.

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At times Napoleon admits that he is the victim of circumstances and on these occasions Hardy had him take his place as the puppet of the Immanent Will, acting through it on other men. After Moscow Napoleon exclaims to Maria Louise who has been questioning him on the loss of the army-

"Napoleon (with a twitch of displeasure)

You scarcely understand.

I meant the enterprise and not its stuff....

I had no wish to fight, nor Alexander,

But circumstance impaled us each on each;

But Genius who outshapes my destinies

Did all the rest!"

He replies this to the Queen of Prussia-

"Some force within me, baffling my interest,

Harries me onward, whether I will or no.

My star, my star, is what's to blame--not I.

It is unswervable."

In his troubled sleep he murmurs

"Why hold me my own master, if I be

Ruled by the pitiless Planet of Destiny."

Thus does Napoleon act when in his decline. While on the upward path to success he makes no mention of 'his star' or the 'Planet of Destiny'; his successes even fool the Spirit Ironic into remarking "The Will itself is Slave to him!" but the Spirit Ironic has become used to seeing man adversely affected by the Will much oftener than he is used to seeing success brought about by the will of man and the Immanent Will coinciding. But throughout

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Napoleon is the puppet of the Will and when his usefulness is over he is cast aside and forgotten and the "pale pathetic peoples still plod on."

The Pities represent Hope and keep it alive throughout the play. The Spirit Ironic is sceptical and seems to rebuff the Spirit of the Pities when the latter decides to pray to 'It' to "take away this evil day" by implying that 'It' has no heart. The tragedy lies in conscious man being forced to be the puppet of a blind Will. There is irony in the fact that man the conscious must be directed by the 'It' the unconscious; the Spirit Ironic points out the hopelessness that results, the Spirit Sinister points out the resulting chaos. Man the conscious is blinded by time and place and must be at the mercy of the unconscious Immanent Will.

The aftermath results in a discussion among the Spirits and Choruses in the After Scene, the result of their observations of the action of the drama. The Spirit of the Pities immediately wonders if "blankness be for aye?"

"Men gained cognition with the flux of time

And wherefore not the Force informing them?"

An evident result of Hardy's belief in evolution is seen here in his hoping that eventually the governing Force will attain as high a standard of consciousness as the governed, man. The incongruity of the thing presents the whole action of the drama and its set-up as flooded with an ironic light. The Spirit

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Ironic in his only utterance in the After Scene is still sceptical even about the reality of the spectacle and wonders if it is just some grand illusion of the Will. But Hardy does not identify himself with the Spirit Ironic in its scepticism or with the Spirit Sinister in its sardonicism; he has identified himself throughout the drama with the Spirit of the Pities. True to his conviction he shows the 'It' becoming more tender, "must not 'Its' heart awake," and the drama ends on that note of hope of the Chorus that the Will will evidently become conscious:-

"Consciousness the Will enforcing, till It fashion all things fair." Hardy in his own words said this was his own idea solely and expressed the hope that consciousness would also render the Will sympathetic. (1)

Much of the irony that is serious enough to affect man's destiny which we have called "philosophic irony" has been caused by the unconscious 'It' decreeing things and not being able to foresee their serious consequences on the destiny of man. The reason then for this irony is the 'Its' unconsciousness and therefore callousness. With the growth of consciousness evolving in the 'It' Hardy sees some practical grounds for his "evolutionary meliorism" and it is in The Dynasts that he sets this forth in definite terms. The all important question of consciousness may be summed up:-

"In the Dynasts we have not only been shown with great poetic justice a full perspective of life as seen through the various elements of human personality, but reason itself has fully faced reality and not ended on a note of scepticism,

(1) Later Years Page 125

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despair, or fatalism, but on an attempt to face the problem of consciousness, which runs through all existence."(1)

born of the same process, reason is the same without but differing in gifts of consciousness. The first of these could tell us plainly what he saw, felt and thought the second could write plain articles for a philosophical magazine the third could put his visions and concepts into prose, novels, poetry, and drama. The difference between the first and second would not be as great as between the second and third. In a word the third is an artist, as well as one who thinks and feels, the first two merely think and feel. Hardy could not only feel and think but write creatively of what he felt and thought. We must be careful when considering the thought and output of an artist not to overlook the artistic side of his production. No apology therefore need be made for inserting a section on Hardy's art, for if his irony is to mean anything it can mean something only through its presentation in artistic form. We must therefore make a brief study of Hardy's art in the use of irony in his three types of literary production, prose, poetry and drama.

It is in his treatment of life that we must look for Hardy's art in the use of irony. All of us are ironists with

(1) The Dynasts and the Post-War Age in Poetry Amiga Chakravarty—Oxford University-Press 1938 page 74

word philosophic irony in the life of our own time.

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Let us suppose three men each having the same outlook, concepts, visions, sensitiveness and power of observation, born of the same parents, raised in the same 'milieu' but differing in gifts of communication. The first of these could tell us plainly what he saw, felt and thought; the second could write plain articles for a philosophic magazine the third could put his visions and concepts into fine novels, poetry, and drama. The difference between the first and second would not be as great as between the second and third. In a word the third is an artist, as well as one who thinks and feels, the first two merely think and feel. Hardy could not only feel and think but write creatively of what he felt and thought. We must be careful when considering the thought and outlook of an artist not to overlook the artistic side of his production. No apology therefore need be made for inserting a section on Hardy's art, for if his irony is to mean anything it can mean something only through its presentation in artistic form. We must therefore make a brief study of Hardy's art in the use of Irony in his three types of literary production, prose, poetry and drama.

It is in his treatment of life that we must look for Hardy's art in the use of irony. All of us are ironists with varying degrees--we all use verbal irony, we experience dramatic irony and we feel the effect of this dramatic irony on our destiny when it involves the things of destiny, in a word philosophic irony in the facts of our own life.

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But to reproduce the facts of these various phases of irony in the life of another or to be able to record the passing impressions of life in light of this irony or what is more difficult to record a whole series of united historical events as it affects a great portion of the world, all this requires the work of an artist who can think and feel deeply.

What strikes us greatly throughout all of Hardy's work is his sense as an observer who is both impassioned and analytical; if he were not impassioned his works would be unfeeling and we would have only an impressionist. It is his sensitiveness, then, that gives his work soul. He is analytical, and his power of analysis forces him to look into the sufferings and problems of mankind and seek an answer to the eternal 'why'. Because he was analytical and analyzed the problem of suffering he came to see irony of fate affecting man's destiny more than anything else; hence Hardy's preoccupation with the ironies of life. What goaded him on in the analysis of these ironies was his great feeling for mankind. The novels therefore are rich in details that are subordinate to but help formulate his design. He does not allow himself to be deceived by sentimentality and to be sidetracked from the natural outcome of the sequence. His seriousness of conception will not allow it. His irony and satire were aided by observation to make the whole realistic.

It has been pointed out before in this study that his use of coincidence seems justifiable on the grounds of realism. Hardy has often been accused of 'loading the dice' to have the

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result appear as he wants it so that he can stand and rail at fate and the evidently unseeing First Cause. But readers of Hardy agree that even if such be the case, the coincidence is so cleverly planned as almost to beguile us into believing it is realistic. Some events in the novels, of course, put a strain on our credulity; it is difficult to understand Henchard's selling of his wife which event had such serious consequences on his destiny and we might argue that she should have appealed for justice, but it must be remembered that Hardy is writing about Wessex, perhaps the most backward part of England. But thousands of things happen around us in the course of a year that we cannot understand. The fact that a few things are depicted that are not understandable merely adds to the realism of the ironies of life.

Because Hardy is a realist he took the attitude he did. It was not because he was ill-disposed towards life that he decided to concern himself with its ironies; it was because he was a realist. We have found that Hardy has given examples in his novels of how this irony does turn out to be of comedy--'The Hand of Ethelberta' and 'Far from the Madding Crowd' are the best of these. But even here he realistically painted the happy outcome of the ironic train only after it had led up to events of a semi-tragic strain. Bathsheba's marriage to Troy must have had serious results for Gabriel Oak at the time--so likewise did Ethelberta's lack of attention to Christopher. But if Hardy's ironic sequence usually leads to tragedy in his novels it was so represented because Hardy saw it usually leading to tragedy in real life. He was not using the irony that he saw in life to lull or soothe events

to the usual 'happy ending'. That a novelist can do this and still maintain a reputation for realism speaks highly of his art. He was not writing fiction, he was writing facts; he took his art too seriously to make of it a light entertainment, an escape; he knew that people prefer to be charmed into an illusion of happiness but he did not choose to degenerate his art into pandering to public amusement. An artist can make beauty out of all things glad or sad and Hardy did so. Why did Hardy not listen to the pleas of some of his readers and have Tess welcome back Angel Clare from Brazil? Not simply because he had a theme to prove but because he saw the tragic effect on Tess's character of the ironic sequence of events as realistic. A lesser artist would easily have descended to open invective against unjust society and descended to preaching. The same thing could have happened à la the Obscure in which case the preaching would have taken the form of a long tirade against education only for the rich.

The action of ironic events on the great characters (by this I do not mean necessarily the important personages but those who have depth of character like Clym Yeobright and Gabriel Oak) in the hands of a great artist serves but to ennoble them. They could easily become weak in the hands of a lesser artist. Gabriel Oak might in such a case have dwindled into the 'martyr' type. Similarly but in opposite direction the characters of Troy, Fitzpiers and Wildeve could have descended into the 'villain' Type. Henchard's character is built up to show the effects of a benevolent fate

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and then of a malevolent fate upon it but it still retains the grandeur even in the will found after his death by Farfrae and Elizabeth-Jone. The buffetings of a malevolent irony have not led him into a pose of heroism.

Hardy seems to have achieved this fortunate result of true artistry objectively by skilful handling of his story, by elaborating as few novelists have done the part played by landscape in daily life and skill in showing its symbolism and significance, and by his style.

By the skilful handling of his story we mean the patient elaboration of events towards their end. That even critics of his philosophy admit his art in tale-telling is seen from this passage:

"Line upon line, as characters unfold, and passions wake, and motives meet or cross, the reader's mind falls into step with the writer's: to vary the figure, I might say that the reader answers the writer's call, as one instrument another, by sympathy. But so quietly do the fine actors perform their allotted parts, without strut and blare and fustian, but in the plain beauty of all natures, faithful to themselves; that when they have done, we seem to have assisted at the progress of a story within our actual experience: romance? we ask ourselves: psychology? or what is the name for this spirit of simple truth? After all-----this rich play of passions and emotions, with its ancient elements in their modern combinations, deserves no poorer name than truth." (1)

This is why coincidence seems not stranger than truth; why the ironic events seem to act so naturally upon a character moulding it

(1) The Art of Thomas Hardy--Lionel Johnson Page 66

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to its destiny; why the dramatic irony does not jar the reader into disbelief and revolt against the realism of the story.

In his use of descriptive background Hardy becomes symbolic and philosophic. Nature description is not used merely to pad his pages or to add a few 'purple patches' to an otherwise sad tale. He loves to paint the seasons in their varied circle of changes and this symbolizes the continual play of change in the life of man as well as the passage of time; they show his instructive sensibility to man and all things that affect his destiny; they are the symbol of the irrevocable fate that man is powerless to change; Egdon Heath with its background of human history is a fitting place for his characters to experience the doings and undoings of a fate that reveals itself through ironic events. Hardy's description of it quickens our thoughts in serious matters affecting mankind. The changes wrought in Egdon are slow but they are indeed sure; in writing of Wessex Hardy had ample place, time and peace to meditate on the effects of fate on man's destiny. Hardy had melancholy and it was here that he could read the grandness and sadness of nature; here he could see Egdon as the symbol of the long unchanging history of mankind. Here he could meditate and probably draw some melancholy consolation from the view that the irony of events must have held at least as much tragedy for the ancient Romans buried hereabout as it has for the present living characters of his stories. The curtain against which the tragedies of his stories were acted must be in harmony with the action and outcome and no place suited the artistry of Hardy better. So closely has he combined background with the

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irony of circumstance that it is difficult for us to imagine a more fitting background for Hardy's narratives.

The patient elaboration of Hardy's stories of course of itself pays tribute to his prose style. The description of Egdon at the beginning of The Return of the Native as well as all descriptions of seasons that contribute in an indescribable way to the background of the ironic events would fall short of their goal if Hardy were not a master of prose style. To put it shortly we may say his form is proper to his subject; in it he put forethought and scholarly workmanship. Whether we examine the heightened passages or open the novels at random we note his style is sure, graceful, natural. It does not detract from the events but adds to them. There is no posing. His happy delineation of the speech of the Wessex rustics adds to the background of simplicity against which the train of ironic events shines in greater contrast than if this were the speech of sophisticated society. His style of writing reminds us of Egdon Heath. He shows familiarity with his subject that does not distract the reader; his art was the art of creation of spirit and background so important in depicting ironic events and their results. His description of nature add greatly to the spirit of fate running through his novels. Old things call up to Hardy the struggles with ironic events of those connected with them; with him nothing is dull that treats of human life even indirectly; he can read in it all if not an instrument at least a witness of irony working out man's destiny.

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Hardy seems to have made very little distinction between his poetry and his prose; he had no set of stereotyped phraseology to adorn the pages of his poems in an artificial manner. What has been said of his prose style may likewise be said of his poems; they are the poems of a novelist. His poems are of the substance of his novels, giving us the reaction of his thoughts to events, the moving realisation of his metaphysics in respect to man's destiny directed by an unknown First Cause--these form the subject of his lyric philosophy. In this his art was great because he was true to his own temperament. We examine the hundreds of short, compact narratives, events, reactions to a given set of circumstances and we conclude from their sincerity that he felt or experienced every one of them. His poetry then is subjective and he viewed objective events subjectively. He saw ironic events affecting man's destiny and he seems to have put himself in the place of humanity so affected which gives to his poetry the sterling quality of truth. This increased by his feeling for drama; he can condense a whole important experience or series of events and this succinctness increases the startling effect of the ironic event or the dart of fate. The Satin Shoes could easily be expanded into a short story, but in the poem the suddenness of the madness and of the bride being hurried away to the madhouse and, of the swift dexterity with which the ruse works to get her to the madhouse, all have an effect of suddenness which enhances the effect of the ironic train of events making their swiftness symbolic of man's helplessness. This story in prose, even Hardy's prose, would not produce this ^{nice} effect that is produced by the poetry.

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This power of concentration has made Hardy one of the great epigrammatists; it is the essence of the qualities of description found in his prose writings. It is true that his intensified description has in some cases led to cacaphony but the harshness does not destroy the power. To offset this he has added remarkable variety to his line, and while not a slave to rhyme, even a superficial reading of his poems reveals remarkable music in many of them and in most cases fine adaptation of stanza form to content. When quick action is desired as in The Phantom Horsewoman the short line in Hardy's hand is eloquent; the long conversational lines of In the Servants' Quarters are well adapted to the argument of the poem. The short cut of the sarcastic verses Satires of Circumstance finds counterpart in the short line and the abrupt, subtle ending of all fifteen poems. The stories in poetry that have tragic irony also show the curtness--for example Lady Vi, The Flirt's Tragedy; Lengthening of these would dilute the effect. In his satiric poems he has a certain element of quietness that deepens the effect; even when he feels strongly and wants to cut deeply he never becomes boisterous but maintains this quietness that adds a firm touch to his points.

No doubt Hardy was nearer to life in his poetry where he did not feel himself bound to hold to his story but could wander off into a philosophic bit of explanation without apology and could present a bit of irony of life and then leave it. In verse he could give his experience of life better. Moreover as he himself admits he was not limited in scope in his verse by the

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question of public opinion as he felt he was in his prose. He put his own thought into verse and his own thoughts were the impressions of people and events insofar as they touched man's destiny; he showed the beauty and sadness of life, the greatness of man striving to overcome the ironic events of his own destiny as Hardy always pictured him.

What has been said of Hardy's art in the use of irony in respect of both the prose and the poems can be applied to The Dynasts ! The subject of war was especially fitting to Hardy's view of the irony of fate; it gave him unlimited scope for his powerful satire on War. The play is skilful as a drama; well-managed as to sequence of events affecting those of low and high degree in all parts of Europe. The very extent of the dramatic action, belligerent, diplomatic and social would put to the test the greatest dramatic powers to confine it to the written page. It was success in achieving the dramatization together with the absorbing vividness of the description that made the satire of war so striking. If Hardy's powers had failed him in bringing love to us the the terrors of the Napoleonic period, the strength of the satire would have been sapped. For example the utter misery and social and moral degradation of the scenes depicting Sir John Moore's deserters, and of the flight from Moscow need no elaboration to show their effect on the reader. They are the best example of that satire sharpened by grimness. In these representations vivid prose has well served Hardy's purpose. In The Dynasts Hardy has used

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numerous metric mosaics varied skilfully to avoid monotony and adapted to the nature of the narrative.

The Dynasts is not only an imposing historical drama-- it is a drama of the delineation of fate and ironic events working on the destiny of men of all ranks and stations in life. As the historical drama is unfolded the philosophic drama between the Phantom Intelligences started in the Fore-Scene moves along as an accompaniment to and commentary on the historical part and reaches a climax and conclusion in the discussions of the After-Scene. Hardy has not left us a vague picture of an inconclusive cosmic commentary but has systematized for us his conclusions and put them clearly into the mouths of the Phantom Intelligences. The vast human tragedy has not been aimless; it has at least shown us where we stand in the scheme of things and having found out why ironic events do play such an important part in man's destiny we feel much less resentful.

The cosmic view of the events which represents armies moving as "caterpillars crawling," soldiers working on the Lisbon fortifications as appearing like "cheese-mites" and ships ploughing the oceans "like preened duck-feathers across a pond" helps us view things through the eyes of the Phantom Intelligences as well as helping us to view the insignificance of man. It shows us how helpless man is before ironic events and bring us to Hardy's side with the Spirit of the Pities.

So then in The Dynasts we are given the core of Hardy's views on ironic fate affecting man's destiny. We have the

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strongest of satire side by side with the greatest appeals of the Spirit of the Pities. Through the series of catastrophes resulting from irony of events affecting man's destiny Hardy has moved to a kind of better resignation, crowned by the glimmer of hope.

"The force of an inner glow of ironical and pathetic ardour, which heats, animates, and raises such a mass, though it fails to melt it into one pure and coherent alloy, awakes a respectful and serious admiration in the reader." (1)

Hardy was adapted by Nature to write of Irony and Fate in respect to man's destiny. He was not an artist who bent his gift arbitrarily to this end. Because he was adapted to it by Nature he did it with such success and such art. His sincerity caused him to deny himself the beliefs and hopes not acceptable to his reason. Perhaps the greatest thing that can be said about his preoccupation with irony is that it exalts and purifies. He turned his art to the good of humanity. On this ground therefore serious objection can be taken to the theme expanded by R. P. Blackmur in his article "The Shorter Poems of Thomas Hardy" in the Southern Review 1940 wherein he accuses Hardy of putting ready-made emotions into life. Nothing was farther from Hardy's sincerity; this would be tantamount to making him the most insincere of writers whereas he is by nature sincere. It would likewise be equivalent to reducing his great characters to caricatures and annulling the personal experience of his poems. As mentioned above the high point of his art in the use of irony is that it exalts and purifies; it could not do this

(1) History of English Literature--Legouis and Cazamian p 1290

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on any other basis than that of absolute sincerity.

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CONCLUSION

What then are we to conclude from Thomas Hardy and his preoccupation with the ironies of life? From his biography we find very few unfortunate circumstances in his life, some unhappiness from his first marriage being perhaps the greatest; he led a sheltered, academic life, free from financial difficulties. Fate seemingly dealt kindly with him, yet he devotes half a century to a demonstration of "the sorrow underlying the grandest things and the grandeur underlying the sorriest things." In his attempt to explain to himself the riddle of the universe and his inability to reconcile the evil and pain around him with the idea of a merciful God, he rejects dogmatic religion and even the Deity and sets up in his place a blind-unconscious will. Here is a firm believer in Evolution, in the progress of the Arts and Sciences saying that the consciousness to which man has evolved does not seem to be a blessing, that man has evolved too fast and must suffer as a result of the tardy evolution of the First Cause. It was in this ill-timing of progress that the irony of man's position lies. This was what he saw, this was his reason for granting to man only a very limited free-will. The result of his irony often seems to be that man in his more advanced consciousness is, ironically enough at the mercy of the Unconscious Will which usually affects his destiny with tragic results.

He was not content to sit back comfortably and accept the preferred explanation of good and evil, kindness and suffering but urged on by Evolution he saw a new altruistic religion. Here is his own view of this new type of religion:

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"Religion is to be used in the article in its modern sense entirely, as being expressive of nobler feelings towards humanity and emotional goodness and greatness, the old meaning of the word-ceremony, or ritual--having perished, or nearly." (1)

m This seems to be the answer to the enigma of Hardy; he rejected Christianity and to a great extent its philosophy and his extreme limitation of Free Will seemed to offer him no middle course; he had to follow the swing of the pendulum over to the Immanent Will of The Dynasts. This naturally led to his view of life as composed to a large extent of a series of events ironic controlling man's destiny and usually leading to tragedy because man was blindfolded by time and place. This is the core of philosophic irony in Thomas Hardy. To this can be traced his Fatalism and Pessimism. It is a direct result of the reaction of his nature against a self-satisfied philosophy.

A. Chakravarty points out that Hardy launched the modern age in poetry by his attempt to trace

"a coherent principle running through the whole of history through, good and evil, through different levels of being, in a manner that would satisfy the rational imagination. "He clearly shows us that tragedy arises because we think we are, as human beings, applying our consciousness to control, direct and even help the emergent principle of Nature, we are most often merely acting as blind instruments of a blind Will" (2)

(1) Notes written January 1907 quoted in Later Years P. 121

(2) The Dynasts and the Post-War age in Poetry by

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This is why Hardy saw so much irony in life; he could not write of life either in prose or poetry and write truly of it as he saw it, without depicting this irony. His irony therefore is not a pose or a decadency or a result of a jaundiced "fin de siècle"--it was life to Hardy. His evolution leads him to see the time when the 'Will' will become conscious and guide our lives with much more reason and less seemingly malevolent coincidence.

Yet in all the seeming uselessness of life that Hardy paints he does not say that life is therefore unimportant. He never tires of showing us the supreme importance of life to each individual, never tires of depicting the sadness and splendour of the actions of common humankind.

"St. John Ervine expressed what many would have liked to say to Hardy: 'We have learned from you that the proud heart can subdue the hardest fate. In all that you have written you have shown the spirit of man persisting through defeat'. For Man was Hardy's great theme". (1)

Therefore was philosophic irony, so potent in directing man's destiny so important to his eyes; therefore was his pessimism not despair.

Even though Hardy claimed that he would not have ended The Dynasts on the note of 'the faint hope' if he had known in 1908 of the Great War, this does not prove his pessimism much less his despair. It would merely show his view that evolution of the consciousness of the 'Will' was farther off than he imagined it to be in the last part of The Dynasts. It would prove more conclusively that his heart was with The Spirit of the Pities.

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The Dynasts has become much more significant to us than it was in 1908 or in 1914. Perhaps the best cure for those so anxious to attribute pessimism to Hardy would be for them to take a look at facts in this year of 1941. Indeed we feel that Hardy was justified in giving the 'Will' an eternity in which to evolve to consciousness. If there is underlying sorrow, pessimism, fatalism and blind unconsciousness of the 'Will' in the works of Thomas Hardy, as we reflect on them we must conclude that there is also an overbalancing emphasis on human loyalty, hope for humanity, a sense of man's dignity and importance and ultimate evolution which Dobrée has set forth in the following admirable paragraph:

"But beyond these there is something that is implicit in all Hardy's work, something that is profounder than, and lies beyond, his sense of irony, itself a product of love and pity. This is a sense of the dignity of man. Whether or not he is the chance outcome of the Inadvertent Mind, he yet has his consciousness and his courage, his pity and his patience, his divine capacity for sensation. He may be only a speck in the Universe, but still he is there, providing a meaning for himself, which even if unrelated to 'the burden and mystery' of creation, is in itself worth while. And when all the pageantry has faded, when the welter and the carnage are over, when the blood has mouldered into dust and there is left 'only a man harrowing clods, in a slow silent walk' in him still there will be the potencies of good and evil, all the ingredients for establishing a scale of values without which it is impossible for man, as man, to live" (1)

(1) 'The Dynasts'--Bonamy Dobrée--In Southern Review 1940

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