

DELINEATION OF CHARACTERS IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF THOMAS HARDY

Dr. Naveen K Mehta

Associate Professor & Head
Communication Skills Department
MIT, Ujjain (MP)

Characterization is an essential factor in the workshop of any good novelist, with expansive knowledge and deep penetrating insight into human nature it is impossible for any novelist to attain any success in this task.

W.H. Hudson stated that, "And the first thing that we require of any novelist in his handling of character is that, whether he keeps close to common experience or boldly experiments with the fantastic and the abnormal, his men and women shall move through his pages like living beings and like and its details perhaps forgotten,"ⁱ

As it has been well said that the essentials of a novel of are, "First, character, second, character, third character." The novelist places before us certain typical or significant types of humanity and thus exhibits their nature under the stress of circumstances. Hardy's greatness in this direction is beyond question. He is the creator of a large number, larger than that of any other write outside Shakespeare of the undying figures of literature. The variety of his character is immense: his command over human personality is expensive. Angel Clare, Clym Yeobright, Gabriel Oak, Giles Winterborne, Henchard. The major of Casterbridge, Tess, Eustacia, Bathsheba, Elizabeth-Jane are only a few out of the many immortal personage of Hardy. It is all, "a gallery of everlasting delight."

Thomas Hardy is a "regional" novelist. He has chosen his own native region, the Wessex of his novels, to be the background. He knew this region, its history and culture, its topography, its people, the legend, the tradition and superstitions thoroughly. He was, in the literal sense of the term the son of the soil and he therefore employed his vast fund of knowledge and information in handling his themes and characters with admirable case and confidence. The characters, he chose are the people of his Wessex. His Wessex is a pure region. It is not contaminated by the corrupting influence of the growing industrialism. Its vices and weaknesses and are the vices and weaknesses of generations, not the infection of the modern life.

Hardy has made a very significant contribution to the field of characterization by drawing his characters, even heroes and heroines, from the common Wessex people. They are the simple farmers, shepherds, labourers, common shopkeepers all belonging to his native region. He himself shared their hopes and aspirations, participated in their joys and sorrows and so he had that rare insight which only a few possess. In the same way, he was less successful with those who did not belong to this region, who did not share the outlook and culture and the philosophy of life to the Wessex people.

In all the variety of his characters, Hardy has given matchless universal appeal on account of the large variety and immortal appeal. Walter Allen writes, ".....his characters like Scott's live in the additional dimension of history: peasant for the most part, they are close to an earth that has charged little over centuries." ⁱⁱ

Thomas Hardy's characters are real like. They are like ordinary human beings subject to ordinary joys and sorrows and common human passions. He does not have either angels or gods. They are all of the earth, earthly. Here and there we do find a character more perfect than others: Giles Winterborne in the Woodlanders and Gabriel Oak in the Far From the Madding Crowd nearly reach perfection. But such instances of perfection are few and far between.

Limitations of Hardy's Art of Characterization

No Successful Upper-Class people

Limitations of Hardy's art of characterization may now be noted. His imaginative range is extremely limited. Almost all his successful characters belong to Wessex and to the lower strata of the society. Whenever, he strays out of Wessex, he makes a sorry mess of it. Fitzpiers, Mrs. Charmand, Troy and other such characters are all wooden and lifeless. Great ladies and great men, people of the city and the others are all outside range of Thomas Hardy. However, it may be pointed out in Hardy's defense that he deliberately chooses characters from the lowest ranks of society because as he himself tells us, "the conduct of the upper class is screened by conventions and thus the real character is not seen." In the lower ranks of society, conduct or action is the real expression of character. He wanted to understand human nature and so he goes to the simplest specimen of it.

No Successful Intellectuals

Just as Thomas Hardy can not characterize men and women from the upper classes, so also he is not successful in the characterization of intellectuals. His intellectuals are selfish hearted despicable. There is no generous impulse in them: they show the evil effects of cold reason. Clym's treatment of his life and mother is unflinching in its hardness. Clare fails Tess at the greatest crisis of her life because of his, hard logical deposit: and Henry Knight is an egoist. Merryn Williams remarks: ".....in a moral and intellectual wilderness in which there are no fixed rules to guide him, only the promptings of his own soul." ⁱⁱⁱ

Repetition

Another limitation of Hardy results from the impact of his philosophy on his novels. His theme is, "Man's predicament in the universe." : in each one of his novels, he shows man ranged against a cruel, malevolent destiny. Therefore, his characters come to have a family likeness. Certain qualities strike him as significant and it is only these qualities that are developed.

No Psycho-analysis

It has been said that Thomas Hardy is successful only in painting simple nature: we do not get from his any complex characters. He is incapable of that subtle psycho-analysis,

that analysis of human motives which we get, say from Henry James. There is much truth in this statement but it must be said to his credit that though the very greatest of his heroes and heroines are drawn from the lowest strata of society, yet they have a soul which the novelist dissects and analyses in order to show to his readers its grandeur and beauty.

Conclusion

"Most of the characters of Hardy's novels are neither types nor more individuals, but 'universal': each comprehends within itself the whole of human nature, which is one and indivisible." ^{iv} Hardy's characterization is not only external, it is internal also.

Hardy goes down to the lowest ranks of society for his heroes and heroines and shows that, too, have souls and beautiful, as mysteriously interesting and as spiritually adventurous, as those of kings and queens. Tess has a beautiful soul, and the tragedy arises from the fact that this pure soul is crushed into impurity. Eustacia is also gifted with an equally able soul, and Hardy makes us see that soul despite her many faults of conduct. The deep anguish of Henchard is similarly revealed.

On the whole, Hardy has been regarded as a great creator of character. He is ranked with great novelists like Scott and Dickens. David Cecil while comparing him with Dickens and Scott writes in his book, *Hardy The Novelist*: - "Think of the heroines of Scott and Dickens, many of Hardy's are just the same types: Thomasin for instance, in the *Return of the Native* is tender and faithful and timid just like a heroine in the *Waverley* novels. But they are inspired and she not..... He can live the charm of a woman's appearance." ^v

END NOTES

- ⁱ W.H.Hudaon, *An Introduction to the study of Literature*, 1st ed. (1955; rpt., Ludiyana: Kalyani Publishers Ltd., 1988), p.145
- ⁱⁱ Walter Allen, *The English Novel* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1958), P.244.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Merryn Williams, *A Preface to Hardy* (London: Macmillan Publications, 1977), P.94
- ^{iv} H.C.Duffin, *Thomas Hardy*, 1st ed. (1916: rpt., Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1969), P.96.
- ^v David Cecil, *Hardy the Novelist* (London: Constable and Co. Ltd., 1963), P.P.88-89.

Work Cited

- Allen, Walter. The English Novel. Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1958.
- Cecil, David. Hardy the Novelist London: Constable and Co. Ltd., 1963.
- Compton- Rickett, Arthur. A History of English Literature London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1964.
- Duffin, H.C. Thomas Hardy, 1st ed. 1916: rpt., Bombay :Oxford University Press, 1963.
- Hudson, W.H. An Introduction to the study of Literature, 1st ed. 1955; rpt., Ludiyana: Kalyani Publishers Ltd., 1988.
- Williams, Merryn. A Preface to Hardy London: Macmillan Publications, 1977.