

## INTRODUCTION

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), the famous English Poet-Novelist began to write verse when he was young. His earliest known poem, 'Domicilium', was begun when he was seventeen, and nearly forty dated poems survive from the decade of his twenties when he was working as an architect in London. But once he began his career as a novelist the flow of poems virtually stopped, to begin again only when his novel-writing years were coming to an end. And then, in the 1890's, the novel-writing ended, and the great flood of poems began to appear and continued for more than thirty years. He has some fourteen novels, some nine hundred and eighteen poems, few stories and the epic drama The Dynasts to his credit. Poetry was his first and last love. His later poetry is appreciated by all the well-known readers and critics. "But we can see Hardy best as a poet of love." <sup>1</sup> Henry Gifford in Hardy In His Later Poems says :

"There is no parallel that springs to mind for Hardy's late flowering." <sup>2</sup> This late flowering refers to his love-lyrics which he wrote immediately after his first wife's death. The love-poems are Hardy's finest achievement and rank Hardy amongst the world's greatest love poets. In some respects, these love poems rank Hardy ahead of Shakespeare and other love poets in English. But they had not been

better known by the general reader. The title of the series "Poems of 1912-13" carries no special appeal to reader as they are love poems. When these verses were first published, they were placed into the middle of a book called Satires of Circumstance, Lyrics and Reveries (1914). The satires in this book attracted much more attention than the reveries. Moreover, they were published in 1914 shortly after the outbreak of the World War during which English readers had other things to do besides reading love poetry. Most of his love poems are scattered through eight volumes which appeared during his life and after. For this study, one hundred and sixteen poems are selected from his eight volumes of poetry. Among them two are from Wessex Poems (1898), three are from Poems of the Past and the Present (1902), three are from Time's Laughingstocks (1909), thirty-two are from Satires of Circumstance, Lyrics, and Reveries (1914), thirty-three are from Moments of Vision (1917), twenty-five are from Late Lyrics and Earlier (1922) sixteen are from Human Shows Far Phantasies (1925) and two are from Winter Words (1928). In the collected poems all these poems appear in the same order in which they were published. But that order of original publication is meaningless. Moreover, the order or arrangement suggested by the date of composition is almost equally meaningless, partly because of Hardy's habit of often retaining his manuscripts for a long time before publishing them, and

partly because of his habit of revising at a later date a poem begun at a much earlier time. So the new arrangement and order of these poems made by Carl.J.Weber is preferred for this study. The poems are grouped so as to give us the real experience of the poet. They are ordered in the sequence of the first sight love, courtship, marriage, quarrel, staled familiarity, disillusion, bitterness, division, death, self-examination, remorse, expiation, and the rebirth of love. This bulk of Hardy's total poetic output has an immense importance in his poetic career and his greatness as a poet. Many have tried to justify the form, content, structure, diction, and the treatment of love in his poems.

The magnificence of Hardy's love poetry has been insisted upon the widely read critics and poets also. There is nothing to separate Mr.Hardy from the great poetic tradition in the fact that he sees man as a corpse temporarily permitted to walk upright on the surface of the earth. Other poets have meditated as darkly on death. Where Mr.Hardy differs from the mass of tragic poets is that he sees so little grandeur in the gloom. His men and women are helpless beings, and have scarcely anything in common with the Plutarchian Figures in the tragedies of Shakespeare. Mr.Hardy's lovers, again, are seldom happy lovers.

PLUTARCH : Greek biographer and author whose works strongly influenced the evolution of the essay, the biography, and historical writing in Europe from the 16th to the 19th century.

He dramatises their boredom and their unfaithfulness oftener than their joy. The history of love seems their joy. The history of love seems almost such as :

We were irked by the scene, by our  
own selves ; yes;<sup>3</sup>

J.Middleton Murry says, "The Mr.Hardy of the love poems of 1912-13 is not a man giving way to memory in poetry; he is a great poet uttering the cry of the universe. A vast range of acknowledged experience returns to weight each syllable; it is the quality of life that is vocal, gathered into a moment of time with a vista of years."<sup>4</sup> What is the secret of poetic power like this? We find answer in the title of one of his books of poems - Moments of Vision. Murry again says, "Mr.Hardy should have crowned his work as a poet in his old age by a series of love poems that are unique for power and passion in even the English language. This late and wonderful flowering has no tinge of miracle, it has sprung straight from the main stem of Mr.Hardy's poetic growth."<sup>5</sup> R.W.King says, "Hardy's love - lyrics - probably the largest group, and certainly including the majority of his finest and most carefully elaborated poems. To say that on the whole Hardy expresses more profoundly the griefs than the joys of love is to utter the obvious half-truth which misleads more than

falsehood. The same thing might be argued of almost any English love-poet."<sup>6</sup> Mr. J. I. M. Stewart, in English Studies (1948), has shown that the only words in that passage which correspond to the truth about its subject are 'the late Tomas Hardy. C. Day Lewis says, "Hardy's, 'Poems of 1912-13' are some of the finest love poems in our language; indeed, one may wonder if there is in any language a parallel to this winter-flowering of a poetry of sentiment which had lain dormant in the poet's heart throughout the summer of his age."<sup>7</sup>

It is very clear from the above quoted remarks that Hardy's greatness as a poet lies in his later poems. This study aims at exploring Hardy's greatness as a poet of love through the close study of his selected love poems. In Chapter-I of this dissertation Hardy's literary life is discussed. He had a flair for writing poetry. But why did he turn from poetry to novel writing and again return to poetry? These things are pointed out here to compare them with his later poems which are taken for this study. In Chapter-II, the analysis of all the selected love poems is given. Through this analysis an attempt has been made to throw a light on Hardy's life. His love poetry tells the love-story. The whole analysis of these poems provides, a complete summary of his adult life. In Chapter-III the autobio-graphical aspect of his love poems is pointed out. Further an attempt is made to reveal his philosophy of life through the experience of love. Many have regarded Hardy as

a "Pessimist" but Hardy's own defence against the charge of Pessimism is given from his own writings.

In the concluding part of this dissertation an attempt has been made to show Hardy's place among love poets. Very rare comparisons are made to distinguish Hardy's place among love poets. We have a galaxy of critical reviews and articles on Hardy's poetry. His poetry has been appreciated in his own country as well as abroad. First of all we must see that there are various books dealing wholly or in part with Hardy's poetry. We have Hardy's own individual volumes of poetry, selected poems and collected poems. There are also prefaces written by Hardy himself. There are autobiographical and general biographical works on Hardy. Much has been written about Wessex of Hardy's novels, Hardy's philosophy of life, Hardy's views on fate or Destiny, Hardy's pessimism, Hardy's views on God, on Death, on Society, on Marriage and Sex relations, on Nature, The art of Thomas Hardy, Hardy's characterization, Hardy's literary style, Hardy's humour, Hardy as a tragic artist, Hardy as a novelist, Hardy on poetry, Hardy's poetic certitude, Hardy as an explorer of reality, Hardy's elegiac power, Hardy's style, vocabulary, Truth and compassion in Hardy's poetry and The Hardy Mood etc. But Philip Larkin's magisterial complaint of 1966, 'Wanted : Good Hardy Critic', has yet not been answered.

The fact remains that there is still a streak of diffidence, a smack of apology, in the manner in which even his most fervent admirers assume to advance his claims. As for the limitations of study all the above cited approaches towards Hardy's poetry and novels are avoided as far as possible while referring to them in this dissertation.

Comparatively, Hardy is yet less reviewed and explicated as a poet of love. J.Middleton Murray was the first who wrote on Hardy's love poetry. The poems selected for this study deal directly with the theme. Even their titles suggest their theme. All these poems deal with Hardy's love for Emma. The first poem taken for this study is 'When I Set Out for Lyonesse' and the last poem is 'She Opened the Door'. These two poems are very significant. The former one indicates the beginning of Hardy's cornish romance and the later one indicates that she opened the door of romance for him and one more door also she opened for him - the door of her tomb. Hardy's Collected Poems, edited by Samuel Hynes, Thomas Hardy: The complete Poems"(1976) edited by James Gibson and Poems of Thomas Hardy: A New Selection (1977) edited by T.R.M. Creighton, Hardy's Love Poems edited by Carl J.Weber are used as the primary sources for this study. The references from his novels, letters and biography are given whenever they were needed. The theme of love is dominant in both his poetry

and fiction. But the love in poetry is deeply personal. It is the out-burst of his personal grief and experience after the death of his first wife Emma. The statements in this dissertation are made paying much attention towards love poems. The final attempt has been made to show Hardy's greatness as a poet of love not only among his contemporaries but also in all love poetry in English. So much minute comparison is deliberately avoided because of the limitations of study. Moreover, irrelevant approaches and critical opinions on Hardy are not considered. The study is leading to the conclusion which possibly may go parallel to some authentic statements made by the well-known critics in respect of only Hardy's love poems.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Arthur S. MacDowall (1928) - A Case book ed. by James Gibson and Trevor Johnson - P.115.
2. Henry Gifford - The New Pelican Guide To English Literature Ed. by Boris Ford - P.166.
3. Unsigned Review in 'The Athenaeum, January 1918, On Moments of Vision and Miscellaneous Verses, - No 4625, A Casebook ed. by James Gibson and Trevor Johnson - P.178.
4. J. Middleton Murray (1919), A Casebook ed. by James Gibson and Trevor Johnson - P.86.
5. Ibid. P.91.
6. R.W. King (1925) - A Casebook, ed. by James Gibson and Trevor Johnson, P.105.
7. C. Day Lewis : 'The Lyrical Poetry' (1951) - A Casebook ed. by James Gibson and Trevor Johnson - P.157

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