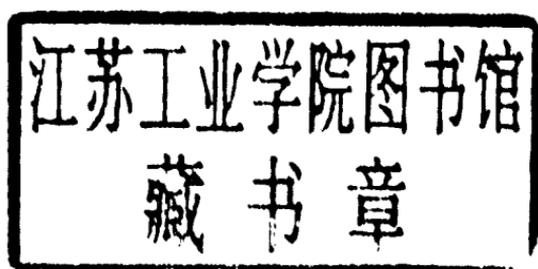


THE
LANGUAGE
OF
THOMAS HARDY

—
RAYMOND CHAPMAN

THE LANGUAGE OF LITERATURE
General Editor: N. F. Blake



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Note on Texts

Hardy revised his work a great deal, particularly between the periodical and volume publication of some of the novels. Unless a variant is specifically noted, all quotations from his novels are taken from the New Wessex paperback edition, published by Macmillan, London (1974, reissued 1985). The following abbreviations are used for references in parentheses after quotations, followed by the page number.

<i>AL</i>	<i>A Laodicean</i> 1881
<i>DR</i>	<i>Desperate Remedies</i> 1871
<i>FFM</i>	<i>Far from the Madding Crowd</i> 1874
<i>HE</i>	<i>The Hand of Ethelberta</i> 1876
<i>JO</i>	<i>Jude the Obscure</i> 1896
<i>MC</i>	<i>The Mayor of Casterbridge</i> 1886
<i>PBE</i>	<i>A Pair of Blue Eyes</i> 1873
<i>RN</i>	<i>The Return of the Native</i> 1878
<i>TD</i>	<i>Tess of the D'Urbervilles</i> 1891
<i>TM</i>	<i>The Trumpet Major</i> 1880
<i>TT</i>	<i>Two on a Tower</i> 1882
<i>UG</i>	<i>Under the Greenwood Tree</i> 1872
<i>W</i>	<i>The Woodlanders</i> 1887
<i>WB</i>	<i>The Well-Beloved</i> 1897
<i>D</i>	<i>The Dynasts</i> 1904–8 followed by part, act and scene.

Poems are cited as *P*, followed by page number in *Thomas Hardy: the Complete Poems*, edited by James Gibson (Macmillan, London, 1976, reprinted 1983).

Other sources frequently quoted are:

<i>CL</i>	<i>The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy</i> , edited by R.L. Purdy and M. Millgate (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 7 volumes, 1982–8).
<i>PW</i>	<i>Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings</i> , edited by Harold Orel (Macmillan, London, 1967).

- EL* *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy 1840–1891* by Florence Emily Hardy (Macmillan, London, 1928).
- LY* *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy 1892–1928* by Florence Emily Hardy (Macmillan, London, 1930).

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1 Thomas Hardy: Life and Work

If Thomas Hardy could have chosen the period of history during which to live his long life, he could hardly have found one which would see greater changes in every aspect of British society. He was born three years after Victoria became Queen and died ten years after the end of the Great War. Melbourne was Prime Minister when he was born, Baldwin when he died. He was born when Dickens was beginning to make a name with his early novels and before the Brontë sisters, George Eliot or Trollope had published. When he died the leading writers in English were Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot, E. M. Forster and James Joyce. Shaw and Wilde, who brought the English theatre back to a degree of literary and intellectual quality, were born when he was in his adolescence. He was born when few men, and no women, had a parliamentary vote; he died in the year in which women eventually got the vote on full equality with men. He saw the railways spread all over the British Isles, followed by the motor car and then the aeroplane. He lived through the intellectual revolutions created in their respective spheres by Darwin, Marx and Freud.

It is not surprising to find in what he wrote a strong nostalgia for the past, a sense of both personal and national history which extends to find kinship even with the vanished worlds of Saxon, Roman and prehistoric humanity. He regretted many of the changes through which he lived, particularly the disappearance of the rural way of life which had continued almost unbroken for centuries in his native county. Yet he was also a true Victorian in accepting new developments and acknowledging that in some ways conditions of life were better. Although he cared deeply for the past, he never minimised its discomforts and cruelties, never

looked for the golden age which many contemporaries found in favoured periods of history. He could feel oppressed by the 'ache of modernism' which afflicts his own Tess, but he could also recognise and partly welcome the challenge of a new age.

He was born on 12 June 1840 in the hamlet of Higher Bockhampton in Dorset, three miles from the county town of Dorchester. His father, also named Thomas, was in a small way of business as a mason and builder, an employer of other men and thus raised socially a little above the labourers who worked for wages. The family was poor enough, but Hardy grew up with the sense of hierarchy which was strong in the rural community. The distinction between the 'workfolk' and those who had any kind of property or trade of their own would often have been scarcely visible to an observer from the outside world, but it was real enough for those whom it concerned and was to play its part in the relationships in Hardy's novels. His mother was more conscious of status than his father and was anxious that her son should do well in life. There is a recollection of her with Mrs Dewy in *Under the Greenwood Tree*, who objects to her husband saying 'taties' for potatoes, 'in such a work-folk way'. Thomas was the first child, to be followed by a brother and two sisters.

When he was eight, Hardy was sent to the National School which had been built at Bockhampton with money from Mrs Julia Martin. Purchase of the Kingston Maurward estate in 1844 had made the Martin family the principal landowner in the cluster of hamlets which Hardy later called 'Mellstock'. Young Thomas was a favourite of the childless Mrs Martin, who admitted him to the great house and showed him much affection. The relationship had a lasting effect on him and he retained a somewhat romantic feeling for her over many years. Love which is checked by difference of birth and wealth, usually the love of a man for a woman socially above him, is a theme in several of his novels. Mrs Martin's approval ended abruptly when his parents sent him to the British School in Dorchester. It was a reasonable move for a boy showing capacity for more than a village school could provide, but it offended the Martins and led to the elder Thomas Hardy losing the estate business.

For the next eight years Hardy took the daily walk into Dorchester. When the headmaster, Isaac Last, set up a more advanced school of his own in 1853, Hardy transferred to it. While

his formal education was being thus developed, his mind was being formed in many other ways. The family attended regularly the little church at Stinsford, where he became familiar with the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer, which are often quoted or echoed in his writing. In later years the country church became an image of the stability and tradition which were already disappearing, and he put his love for it into many fictional scenes and into poems like 'Afternoon Service at Mellstock' and 'A Church Romance'. The latter poem commemorates the first love of his parents, when his father played the fiddle in the church band before the coming of an organ. Musical talent was inherited by the son, who sometimes played the fiddle for country dances and came to know the old secular tunes as well as the psalm settings. The recreations of dances, harvest suppers and parties to celebrate family events kept up a tradition of many centuries. The young Hardy watched it all, listened to the stories around the fire on winter evenings, and came to know intimately the notable characters of the community.

On leaving school in 1856, he was articled to John Hicks, a Dorchester architect. The study and practice of architecture was to occupy him for many years; his novels and poetry would have much to say of church design and restoration. Architects and stonemasons appear among his characters, together with the older country craftsmen that he knew so well. His work with Hicks brought him into contact with young men of his own age, including the son of the local Baptist Minister, with whom he argued about deep theological matters like baptismal regeneration. He was also befriended by an older man, Horace Moule, one of the sons of the vicar of Fordington on the outskirts of Dorchester. The elder Moule was well known locally as a campaigner for sanitary reform, a champion of the poor and a hero in the cholera epidemic of 1854. His son, Horace, took an interest in Hardy, helped him in his study, advised him on reading and raised his aspirations above the limits of a small country town. Hardy began to dream of a university education and perhaps the status of holy orders. At about this time he wrote some of his first poems; it was a love which continued long after he eventually abandoned fiction. Sadly, Moule did better for his young friend than for himself. He was unable to settle to a career, began to drink heavily, and in 1873 he took his own life. The news was a deep shock to Hardy, with a sadness which remained.

Hardy's decision to leave Dorchester in 1862 seems to have been taken quickly and for no clear reason. It has been suggested that there was an unhappy love affair with an older woman employed in one of the local shops. Whatever the motive, Hardy went to London, armed only with two letters of introduction. It was a big decision for a young man who, like most of his class at that time, had seldom moved more than a few miles away from his home. However, London did not devour him as it did so many country folk in both the fiction and the reality of the period. He found a place in the office of Arthur Blomfield, son of a former Bishop of London, a leading architect who was particularly concerned with the restoration of old churches and the building of new ones in the Gothic style. Hardy showed promise in his profession; he won competitive prizes, he executed commissions for Blomfield and was entrusted with a little original work.

Like all young men then and later, he found more in life than work. Despite the restriction of a meagre salary and lodgings some distance from the centre, he made the most of London. The capital was changing rapidly in those years, notably in the expansion of public transport, which both followed and hastened its growth into the suburbs. From Blomfield's new office in Adelphi Terrace, Hardy could see Charing Cross station being built. The new underground railway made it easier to move between lodgings, work and pleasure. Hardy exchanged rural life for metropolitan, Stinsford church for St Stephen's, Westbourne Park, country dances in the barn for dancing at Willis's Rooms. He went to the theatre, the opera, and especially to art galleries. He began to keep a notebook on painters and paintings; his gift of visual observation, begun in the countryside and trained in architecture, now developed into a love of art. Yet though he found so much to interest him in London, and returned many times in later years, it was never home for him. His major novels are set almost entirely in Wessex. The London scenes which he wrote seldom contain his best work: there is a sense of unreality in the life and the people. London gave him much in the formative years of his early manhood, but it did not win him away from the past.

In 1867 he returned to work with Hicks in Dorchester. Now he was often sent out to deal with the restoration of country churches, a labour which he regretted later when 'restoration' came to seem

an interference with natural development and often a destruction of living tradition. He is scathing about such work in several novels, particularly *Jude the Obscure*, and in poems like 'The Levelled Churchyard'. Yet, as a writer, he gained much from those years, as he added to his knowledge of Dorset and the neighbouring counties. The area which would become 'Wessex' was growing familiar to him, and his stock of country lore and characters was increasing.

He was at work in another way as well. In 1868 he submitted to the publishing firm of Macmillan a novel called *The Poor Man and the Lady*. It was read by John Morley, who found promise but advised against publication. There was a similar response from George Meredith, reading for Chapman and Hall. Meredith, already famous as a novelist, met Hardy and advised him to try again 'with a stronger plot and an artistic rather than a social purpose'. Hardy then offered the manuscript to Tinsley, who offered to publish it at the author's expense – an offer which Hardy wisely, though probably rather from lack of money, refused. He used sections of the manuscript in later books, and published part of it in 1878 as a novella entitled *An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress*. Set largely in London, this tells of how a country schoolmaster tries to break into fashionable society for the love of a rich young woman. It develops one of Hardy's favourite themes but is not greatly successful in either character or setting and suggests that Morley and Meredith judged the original book rightly. Hardy was to have many more disagreements with critics. The inauspicious start was lost in later success, but he never ceased to be sensitive to the opinions of reviewers.

He was now working for Hicks on a more casual basis, while he took time for writing. When Hicks died in 1869, Hardy accepted an offer of architectural work from Crickmay in Weymouth. In 1870 he was given an assignment which extended the borders of his fictional Wessex and changed his personal life. Crickmay sent him to St Juliot in Cornwall, to advise on the restoration of the village church. There he met the sister-in-law of the Rector, Emma Lavinia Gifford, a meeting which he described in the ecstatic poem 'When I set out for Lyonesse'. He came back to Dorset convinced that he had met his ideal. It was not the first of his attachments; he was always easily attracted by women and would often make up a romantic fantasy about a pretty girl seen

in passing or encountered for a moment. In London he had been fond of a girl called Eliza Nicholls, and later of her sister, Jane. Back in Dorchester he seems to have been drawn to thoughts of marriage with his cousin Tryphena Sparks. This affair came to nothing, and there may be a memory of it in the comments on the marriage of cousins in *Jude the Obscure*.

Hardy was accepted by Emma Gifford and began one of those long engagements common in the Victorian age. Meanwhile he continued his attempts to become a novelist. In 1871 *Desperate Remedies* was published by Tinsley, with a subsidy from the author. It shows the effect of Meredith's advice that he should create a 'stronger plot'. A melodramatic story, with a heavy villain, scandalous secrets and a spectacular fire, it is an attempt on the sensational novel which Reade and Collins had made popular. Too dependent on a tortuous plot and a number of stock characters, it is yet given distinction by the heroine, Cytherea Graye, who maintains her interest throughout the book and is the first of Hardy's memorable women. There are some fine dramatic scenes and the pleasure of rustic characters who comment on the action, but it is more valuable as the pioneer of Hardy's greatness than in its own right.

A year later *Under the Greenwood Tree* was published, the copyright being sold to Tinsley for thirty pounds. It was Hardy's first true presentation of his region of Wessex, based largely on his native Dorset but extending as far north as Berkshire and as far west as Cornwall. Although much was still to be developed, the new novel showed where his best work would lie. Set in the area of his childhood, with his parents and acquaintances as originals for some of the characters, it evokes a world which was already passing away. Alone among Hardy's novels, it is an entirely happy story, with only the temporary clouding of problems in young love, and ending, like many Victorian novels, with a suitable marriage. For the modern reader its delight is largely in the sayings of the country people and the response of the village choir dispossessed by a new organ. While some have criticised Hardy's class-sense and rural snobbery in his portrayal of the 'workfolk', most readers are content with the delight of the story, the vivid descriptions of natural and domestic scenes and the rendering of speech in the Dorset dialect. All these things became characteristic of Hardy's later and more profound fiction.

In 1873 a new novel began serial publication in the *Cornhill Magazine*. With *Far from the Madding Crowd* Hardy showed himself to be a writer of importance. He brings into the peaceful Dorset setting a story of unhappy marriage, betrayal and violent death, ending in calm and reconciliation. In *Bathsheba Everdene* he created a type that recurs in later books: a woman of some standing in her neighbourhood, efficient and decisive in managing the business side of her life but easily swayed in her emotions. Bathsheba makes two mistaken choices before settling down with the shepherd Gabriel Oak who has loved her through all her troubles. The fate of Fanny Robin, dying in the workhouse with her illegitimate child, reflects the stories of humble sorrows which Hardy had often heard. Sergeant Troy, who forsakes Fanny and proves a bad husband to Bathsheba, rises above the villain of melodrama but lacks the subtlety of Hardy's later creations. The workfolk again provide a commentary on the action, and give a sense of peace and country routine to counterpoint the tragic main plot.

Although the critics were not universally favourable, *Far from the Madding Crowd* brought Hardy much praise and gave him status as a novelist. The serial publication had another consequence. The editor of the *Cornhill*, Thackeray's successor in the post, was Leslie Stephen who was later the father of Virginia Woolf. Stephen liked his new contributor and a friendship grew up which did something to fill the gap left by the death of Moule. Stephen helped to widen Hardy's reading, and also acted as a catalyst in the movement away from the simple faith of his early years. Hardy was attending church less often, and was feeling less satisfied with orthodox Christian dogma. When Stephen renounced the holy orders which he had taken many years before, he asked Hardy to witness the formal document.

The development of Hardy's religious position was never uncomplicated. Chesterton's description of him as the 'village atheist' was grossly unfair, and he himself in old age denied the name and described himself as an agnostic. He certainly kept a strong attachment to the Church of England as a link with tradition and as the vehicle of the public worship which he loved. He continued to attend church services from time to time throughout his life, and seldom missed the chance of a cathedral

evensong. He was prepared after many years to describe himself as a believing and practising member of the Church of England, and he stood as godfather for a baptism as late as 1922. He never ceased to care about the spiritual dimension of life, but he could find no easy comfort in orthodox belief and was sometimes sharply critical of those who did. Perhaps, like his own Jude Fawley, 'he might go on believing as before, but he professed nothing'. If he had remained totally convinced, or had become militantly atheist, his work might have been less profound than it is.

While his spiritual doubts were as yet kept to himself, personal experience played a large part in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, published in 1873. The story of his visit to St Juliot and his love for Emma lies beneath the tale of the young architect, Stephen Smith, who goes on a similar errand. Stephen and Elfride, here made the rector's daughter, have a course of troubled love which comes to a sad conclusion. Elfride proves to be what the Victorians called a flirt, and becomes involved with Stephen's older friend, Henry Knight – based partly on Horace Moule. In the end she marries neither of them, but the young Lord Luxellian. After some years, Stephen and Knight travel back to Cornwall together, in the train which is carrying Elfride's coffin. It is not one of Hardy's great novels, too personal to make a deep human statement but too concealed and inconclusive to be a successful autobiographical novel. It probably helped to release some of Hardy's own tensions and to free him for better things. Other writers have done as much and more with their own stories. Some, like Dickens, Lawrence and Joyce, have also created great novels in so doing.

Despite the forebodings which this novel might have suggested, the engagement ended with marriage in 1874. Hardy took his bride to France for the honeymoon; it was perhaps characteristic rather than suitable that he included a visit to the Paris morgue. Emma was not entirely happy with foreign ways and was quite thankful to return and start making a home at Surbiton on the Surrey side of London. Hardy was now confident enough of his success as a writer to have given up architecture and devoted himself to writing. In the following year he published *The Hand of Ethelberta*, a story which moves between Dorset and London following the fortunes of a young widow who gains fame as a professional storyteller. Her deception to conceal her humble origin is complicated by her father and brother being employed in London. The tearing

of Dorset men from the Dorset scene never worked very well for Hardy. We tend to lose patience with Ethelberta as she weighs up her London suitors and eventually marries a rich old lord. Her crises of conscience are not very convincing, and the marriage of her former admirer to her unsophisticated sister seems patched. There are some good moments, like the dinner party where Ethelberta is a guest and her father the butler, and her discovery that the fashionable suitor, Neigh, is really a horse-knacker. The novel as a whole leaves most readers neither uplifted nor greatly entertained.

Hardy and Emma did not stay very long in London. They returned to Dorset, first to Swanage and then to the little town of Sturminster Newton. Here Hardy worked at the first of his really great novels, which appeared in volume form in 1878 after serialisation in both a British and an American magazine. After *The Return of the Native*, no one could doubt that here was a major writer of fiction. The world of Egdon Heath is at once wholly local and yet a stage for human drama not limited by space or time. The 'rustic chorus' of workfolk provides a continuity of normal life accompanying the tortured central action. Eustacia marries Clym Yeobright in the false glamour of his having returned from Paris, deserts him when he becomes almost blind and is drowned when running away with her new lover, Damon Wildeve. The marriage of Wildeve's widow to her faithful suitor, Diggory Venn, the itinerant reddleman who travels selling colouring for marking sheep, ends the book on a peaceful note. Clym, whom Hardy once described as 'the nicest of my heroes', finds his vocation as a sort of humanist preacher. The conclusion may be tame, but what we remember about the book is vivid and tragic – the conflicts of character in the impersonal loneliness of the heath, with a sense of human weakness and nobility mingled in people whose fate can move us though their way of life is remote.

Hardy produced nothing so fine over the next few years but he continued to establish his position as a novelist and to do work which is far from negligible. In 1878 he and Emma moved back to London and took a house in Tooting. His fame was spreading and he came back not as an architect's assistant but as a distinguished man of letters. He joined the Savile Club and was a luminary in the literary world. Dickens and Thackeray were dead; George Eliot died in 1880 and Trollope in 1882. For the rest of the century only

Meredith could claim comparable status, and time has treated him less well than Hardy.

His next novel, *The Trumpet Major*, appeared in 1880. It is unique among his full-length stories in being set in a period much earlier than his own. He had always been fascinated by the time of the Napoleonic Wars, and liked to claim kinship with the Thomas Hardy who had been Nelson's flag-captain and later an admiral. Memories of the time lingered into his own childhood; the poem 'One We Knew' recalls how his grandmother heard the news of the execution of Louis XVI. Captain Hardy makes a brief appearance in the novel, but the main plot revolves around the love for one woman of two brothers, one a sailor and the other a trumpet major. It is a gentle book, with no villain more fierce than the boastful and cowardly Festus Derriman who tries to win Anne Garland from the brothers. There is much humour, notably from the brothers' father, Miller Loveday, and the country people for whom Napoleon is as feared and as remote as the devil. There are no early deaths, no serious violence, no disastrous marriages, and the darkness falls only in prospect as John Loveday goes 'to blow his trumpet until silenced for ever upon one of the bloody battle-fields of Spain'.

London never served Hardy well for long. He fell ill at Tooting and *A Laodicean* was largely dictated from his bed. By the time it appeared Hardy and Emma were back in Dorset living at Wimborne Minster. This novel tells of another of Hardy's influential but indecisive women. Paula Power is enabled by her father's industrial wealth to buy the ancient Stancy castle and establish herself as a lady of quality. She is the Laodicean – lukewarm in faith and in love; the book begins with her refusing the adult baptism to which she had committed herself, the Baptist minister being reminiscent of the father of Hardy's friend in Hicks's office. It ends with her acceptance of George Somerset, the impoverished young architect who came to redesign her castle and fell in love with her. In the meantime, others have schemed to secure her wealth through marriage and been thwarted. It is a story of an architect's successful suit in an ambience more exalted than that of St Juliot.

The love of the poor man and the lady appears again with *Two on a Tower* in 1882. The poor lover is now a village boy who has become an astronomer and is allowed to use a tower in the

squire's estate for his observations. In the absence of the squire, his unhappy wife Viviette falls in love with Swithin the astronomer and marries him after a false report of her husband's death abroad. When the husband really is dead and Swithin returns to claim his wife, she dies suddenly in his arms. It is all rather unconvincing, but the real Hardy comes through with Swithin's old grandmother, and the satirical portrayal of the Bishop of Melchester who woos and for a time is married to Viviette. The irony of Swithin's first sight of his wife after several years, when he realises how much older she is, may possibly be a recollection of Hardy's meeting in adult life with Julia Martin.

Hardy moved to Dorchester in 1883 and lived near the centre of the town while a house was being built for him on the outskirts. He personally designed and supervised his new home and called it Max Gate, a more elegant rendering of Mack's Gate after the keeper of a tollgate formerly on the spot. Hardy and Emma moved into the house in 1885 and remained there until their deaths. Their lives moved on with few outward events; Dorset was their home but there were frequent stays in London where Hardy was now an honoured guest at fashionable houses. He met most of the leading literary figures of the day and in time received honorary degrees and, an honour precious to him, the freedom of Dorchester. There were several visits to the Continent, but Hardy never travelled a great distance and, unlike many Victorian men of letters, did not go to America.

Although few ripples showed on the surface, all was not calm in the depths of the marriage. Emma was strict and had developed a strong Evangelical faith which was affronted by Hardy's growing scepticism. She herself had aspirations to authorship and tended to be jealous of his success. She had written but not published a novel which gave Hardy ideas for some scenes in his own work. In *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, Elfrida produces a short novel which is unfavourably reviewed by Henry Knight. Emma did, however, give a great deal of time and care to helping her husband and copying his manuscripts. Their brief courtship and the long engagement with infrequent meetings had not given them time to know one another properly, and Hardy the successful author had changed in many ways from the young architect's assistant. The marriage was childless; they remained loyal, but ill at ease.

Art is often created out of tension. Hardy was entering