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Business and Trade Portrayed in Thomas Hardy's Work in English Literature

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Abstract

This article looks at Hardy's writings from a commerce and business perspective. Hardy focuses on agriculture as the intersection of these two pairings to examine the complex economic, political, and social networks created to determine more general principles, such as how to interact with the natural environment and how to use agriculture to control nature and society. We contend that the idea of labor as an enslaving habit first developed in modern literature as a result of the confusion brought about by the move from "rus to urbs," as demonstrated in Thomas Hardy's writings. Hardy keeps his cool, seeing agriculture as a business and labor as a commodity. The working families break his heart since they are in more danger because their cottages are only leased to them while they are employed. We are particularly interested in Hardy's portrayal of agriculture as a business for the sake of this study because, in Hardy's view, the interaction between the worker and their environment ultimately decides the farming industry's success. The genius loci, which emphasizes how much one's upbringing and way of life shape who they are, is frequently shown to be incompatible with the prevailing ethos of societal change.

Keywords: Thomas Hardy, Twentieth Century English Literature, Business and Trade, Agricultural Business

Introduction

Since every age is an "age of change," it is easy to identify a single reason for an age's traits. However, if one had to highlight just one feature of British culture in the Modern era, it would undoubtedly be the transformation from a mainly rural to an overwhelmingly urban civilization. By the middle of the nineteenth century, just 50% of people were living in cities; by the turn of the twentieth century, the contemporary metropolis was home to the majority of people:

"Of the forty-five million inhabitants of the United Kingdom in 1911 (an increase of fourteen million in forty years), nearly 80 percent lived in England and Wales; and, of these, again, roughly 80 percent came to live in urban districts."[1]

It is impossible to emphasize the social effects of this population change in the second half of the nineteenth century. A way of life that was distinct in its societal values and rural customs was lost. The ensuing urbanization changed the self-sufficient cottager into a consumer, and this had a big impact on how labor was defined in terms of money:

". . . what emerged was a new ethic, familiar enough by then in the towns but less known in the country, the ethic of competition. The effect of this was to reduce man to the level of economic man, one whose community relationships were at the mercy of the cash nexus and whose psychological motivations were thought of largely in terms of self interest."[2]

As a counterbalance to the complexity of urbanized society, writers like Thomas Hardy, D. H. Lawrence, and Joseph Conrad suggested simpler, more natural societies, such the pastoral community in Hardy's writings and the ship's crew in Conrad's novels. This evocation leaves little room for escape because every author approaches the reader's financial condition with a welcome level of dry eyed realism.

A Record of a Vanishing Way of Life

As the difference between rus and urbs is made conceivable by the creation of Wessex, Thomas Hardy's (1840–1928) works serve as a chronicle of a way of life swiftly vanishing. Wessex is used in many places of English literature to show how urbanization inevitably affects rural society: Beginning with Under the Greenwood Tree (1872), the rhythms and pastoral traditions of the Wessex landscape come to dominate works like Far from the Madding Crowd (1874); place itself takes on the significance of a significant character in The Return of the Native (1878) and The Woodlanders (1887), through the evocation of Egdon Heath and the Hintock Woods as respective presiding spirits; The Mayor of Casterbridge (1886), with its mainly urban setting, an urban setting; and The Woodlanders (1887).

Hardy's Interest in Business and Trade

In this study, Hardy's portrayal of agriculture as a business is of particular importance to us because, according to Hardy, the relationship between the employee and their environment ultimately determines the success of the farming industry. The genius loci, which illustrates how a person's identity is formed by his or her environment and way of life, is generally incompatible with the prevailing attitude of societal change. Hardy uses the environment and the terrain to advance human aspirations. It is implied in Hardy's works that man acquires civilization at the expense of his organic connections, virtues that Modern Man is at risk of forgetting. In The Woodlanders, Old John South's fate in this biologically created world depends on the vitality of an elm tree. Characters like Marty South, Diggory Venn, Giles Winterborne, and Gabriel Oak are defined by the landscapes that reflect their enduring nature and conventional methods of labor. In The Return of the Native's first chapter, we discover that -

"The sea changed, the fields changed, the rivers, the villages and the people changed, but Egdon remained."[3] Nature's immutability is underlined further by the fact that it reaches into the lives of people who are "in tune" with it:

"The citizen's *Then* is the rustic's *Now*. In London, twenty or thirty years ago are old times; in Paris ten years, or five; in Weatherbury three or four score years were included in the mere present, and nothing less than half a century set a mark on its face or tone."[4]

Comparison is made easier by drawing a line between local people who are "in tune" in their environment and outsiders who bring radical new attitudes and beliefs. The Stokeses and Durbeyfields, Diggory Venn and Damon Wildeve, Gabriel Oak and Sergeant Troy, and Edred Fitzpiers and Felice Charmond, as well as Giles Winterborne and Marty South, are just a few examples of how we might compare and contrast personalities. Every time, the latter's dislocation stands in stark contrast to the former's intrinsic stoicism. Similar to how the characters' pace of life is set, Far from the Madding Crowd's structure is set by the pastoral rhythms of lambing and shearing: the novel's development is dictated not by the rules of traditional narrative but rather by the rhythms of the seasons and the farming year. People appear to lose their distinct identities as they operate within this system, implying that they become a logical extension of their (natural) activitiesFor example, in the well-known shearing scene, the shearers "not require definition by name" (137), to suggest that the demands of the body and the needs of the soul are intertwined, the barn is compared to a church. The organic

unity here “the barn was natural to the shearers and the shearers were in harmony with the barn” (139). Gabriel Oak's sixth sense, which mixes the overtones of watchfulness and stolidity on which Bathsheba Everdene will come to rely, illustrates the innate understanding associated with a life in relationship with nature. By "reading" the behavior of rooks, lambs, horses, toads, and slugs as signs "from the Great Mother," (216), Oak can foretell the arrival of a storm. The comparison between Oak and Troy, who by this point has descended into a drunken stupor, highlights Oak's appraisal of the worth of Bathsheba's wheat and barley, which must be covered to protect it from the storm:

“5 × 30 = 150 quarters = 500l.

3 × 40 = 120 quarters = 250l.
Seven hundred and fifty pounds in the divinest form that money can wear—that of necessary food for man and beast.” (217–18)

Troy is a consumer, while Oak is a producer. Troy is a consumer, whereas Oak is a producer. This precise formulation not only distinguishes between Troy and Oak in terms of their respective financial attitudes—Troy is a consumer, whereas Oak is a producer—but it also carries a significant endorsement of a defining characteristic of rural "business": here, the workers are not kept separate from the end product of their labors. Tess and Angel quarrel in the Talbothays Dairy scene of Tess of the d'Urbervilles over who will consume the milk they just brought onto the train. They raise the following issue:

“Londoners will drink it at their breakfasts to-morrow, won’t they?” she asked. “Strange people that we have never seen.”

“Yes—I suppose they will. Though not as we send it. When its strength has been lowered, so that it may not get up into their heads.”

“Noble men and noble women, ambassadors and centurions, ladies and tradeswomen, and babies who have never seen a cow.”

“Well, yes; perhaps; particularly centurions.”

“Who don’t know anything of us, and where it comes from; or think how we two drove miles across the moor to-night in the rain that it might reach ’em in time.”[5]

The focus on the natural, social aspects of rural life may give readers the impression that Hardy's books portray rural life as a time capsule that is insulated from the pressures of the modern, changing world.

Hardy Endorses Values that Modern Man is Forgetting

Both the man-trap from The Woodlanders and the pastoral tragedy that determines Gabriel Oak's fate in Far from the Madding Crowd have a place in Hardy's natural world. Hardy supports morals that modern man has forgotten in his works. This is supported by the fact that Hardy's depiction of the businesses that make up the rural economy is anything but escapism. Jude, the protagonist, discovers to his detriment that sentiment has no place in a society where "Pigs must be killed" and "Poor folks must live."[6] Hardy increasingly stresses in his books how difficult, physically taxing, and usually exploitative agricultural labour is. Chapter 6 of Far from the Madding Crowd is a powerful illustration of both the nature of farming as a business and the nature of labor as a good that can be bought. Gabriel Oak, who is unemployed at the moment, is among the group of hopeful job seekers waiting to get hired at Casterbridge's annual hiring fair. Ten years after the publication of Far from the Madding Crowd, Hardy authored an article titled "The Dorsetshire Labourer" in which he discussed recruiting fairs in further detail. 7 His affection and compassion for the workers rapidly become apparent:

“To see the Dorset labourer at his worst and saddest time, he should be viewed when attending a wet hiring-fair at Candlemas, in search of a new master. His natural cheerfulness bravely struggles against the weather

and the incertitude; but as the day passes on, and his clothes get wet through, and he is still unhired, there does appear a factitiousness in the smile which, with a self-repressing mannerliness hardly to be found among any other class, he yet has ready when he encounters and talks with friends who have been more fortunate."(257)

Even though it is common to romanticize the way of life of people who work outdoors, Hardy's discontent with this method of securing labor is apparent in "The Dorsetshire Labourer." It is noteworthy that he is not advocating for its repeal. Instead, what worries Hardy seems to be the disappearance of the customary garb that once set apart shepherds, carters, thatchers, and others in the marketplace, where individuality gives way to uniformity:

"Formerly they came in smock-frocks and gaiters, the shepherds with their crooks, the carters with a zone of whipcord round their hats, thatchers with a straw tucked into the brim, and so on. Now, with the exception of the crook in the hands of an occasional old shepherd, there is no mark of speciality in the groups, who might be tailors or undertakers' men, for what they exhibit externally." (258)

The novels by Hardy, which depict a period of change on the farm and might be interpreted as a change from agriculture as an occupation that individuates to agriculture as an occupation that renders its people faceless, further deepen this idea. This demonstrates that, in contrast to Wells, Hardy is unwavering in his belief that agriculture must be run as a business and that the loss of "natural" qualities is his main cause for concern. Hardy laments the loss of a sense of connection to the land as a result of the "increasing nomadic habit of the laborer" (263). However, he also acknowledges that the rural workforce needs to adapt to the increase in demand for workers. Because their cottages are leased to them for the duration of their employment and can be taken away from them just as swiftly on Lady Day, working families are more at danger. Even though Hardy has sympathy for working families, he dramatizes the circumstances the Durbeyfield family finds themselves in after John's passing. He understands that change is inevitable and that it "is also a sort of education," though:

"Many advantages accrue to the labourers from the varied experience it brings, apart from the best market for their abilities. . . . It is only the old story that progress and picturesqueness do not harmonise. They are losing their individuality, but they are widening the range of their ideas, and gaining in freedom." (262)

Hardy's Sense of Realism

Because he can depict rural life and work as they are rather than as he would like them to be, Hardy is a realist. One of the best examples of this capacity to discern both the good and bad sides of rural employment is Tess of the d'Urbervilles. Tess Durbey Field located inside Talbothays Dairy, is a sign of her emotional state. Her connection to Angel Clare burgeons -

"at a season when the rush of juices could almost be heard below the hiss of fertilisation" (155), While the Flintcomb-Ash Farm's swede-field is described as "a complexion without features" (273) brilliantly captures the gloominess of her future in the wake of Angel's abandonment. The rise of automation, another key rural transitioning phase, is shown in miniature in Hardy's novels because they demonstrate how geography influences labor. In the harvest scene of Tess of the d'Urbervilles chapter 14, a mechanical reaper is described as creating a sound like "the love-making of a grasshopper," and the women who follow it are drawn to one another "like dancers in a quadrille" (102, 104). Using language that stresses dominance and subservience, describe how this differs from the threshing machine described in chapter 47:

"Close under the eaves of the stack, and as yet barely visible, was the red tyrant that the women had come to serve—a timber-framed construction, with straps and wheels appertaining—the threshing machine which, whilst it was going, kept up a despotic demand upon the endurance of their muscles and nerves." (309)

This personification of the nation's newfound might makes sexual references to the women who look after the machines. Tess, a woman and a worker, stands in for the fate of women under nineteenth-century patriarchy. Women's labor is "much in demand, for a lady who, like a lad, occupies the position of a man for half the

salary, may be more reckoned on for stability," according to Hardy in "The Dorsetshire Labourer" (267). Hardy's portrayal of Wessex in his novels serves as a metaphor for the changing nature of farming as a for-profit sector, as well as evidence of his ability as a novelist due to his daring admission that, despite his sympathies, this profession, like all others, must adapt to the times.

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