(I wrote this at age 19 in 1960/61, but I was a Schopenhauerian in high school, when I read an English version of *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* and before I discovered that Hardy was one as well. Having read various Hardy novels, my curiosity was aroused and here is the result, published in the 1961 *Scriptorium*, a publication of student creations at St. Benedict's College.)

THOMAS HARDY AND SCHOPENHAUER

BY THOMAS S. SHORES

FEW WILL DENY that Thomas Hardy was one of the great literary writers of the nineteenth century. His style has affected many writers to this day; however, I think that what made him great was not so much style as the value of the thought, that is, world-view, that he imparted to his readers. To my mind, there is an element of truth in his philosophy of life that commands the attention of anyone who seeks wisdom; for his works overflow with a practical knowledge of life.

But what is Hardy's philosophy? A notable feature, as reflected in his writings, is a pessimistic outlook. His novels, for example, abound with failures, shortcomings and tragedy. But to end the inquiry here is to scratch the surface. The core of Hardy's outlook is not simply pessimism; it is a philosophical pessimism, one of world denial. What is the source of this pessimism? The usual feature of Hardy's writings is that they are grounded in a philosophical doctrine, which enhances their value for the thoughtful reader. The philosopher in question is Arthur Schopenhauer, a nineteenth century philosopher. There is a continuity of thought between Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* and Hardy's works. To examine this continuity is, I believe, to find the essence of Hardy's thought, which is the purpose of this essay.

At this point, a few words about Schopenhauer are in order. The title of his main work, *The World as Will and Representation*, is the key to his philosophy. The world as representation means that Schopenhauer adhered to Kantian idealism; that is that the eternal world exists only insofar as it is posited by a knower; not that we "create" the external world (solipsism), but that a thing requires a knower to exist. Thus, man cannot know the nature of things, the "noumena," as opposed to the "phenomena" that man really knows. On this point Schopenhauer disagrees with Kant and said that the essence of all things is the will, a blind persisting force that strives for consciousness. This made the world a meaningless and monstrous creation, and formed the groundwork for Schopenhauer's pessimism. Hardy accepted the basic tenets of this philosophy.

To analyze all of Hardy's works is, of course, beyond the scope of this essay, so I have chosen four fairly representative novels and a few poems. The novels are *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *The Return of the Native*, *The Major of Castorbridge* and *Jude the Obscure*. These novels will be treated in chronological order to illustrate the development of Hardy's outlook.

Far from the Madding Crowd was written in 1874. Though one of Hardy's early novels, it bears the stamp of pessimism. The setting of this novel is the same as that of all of Hardy's novels, that is, Wessex, a ficticious name for a rural section of England. Wessex sometimes seems almost alive to the reader; at times it is sinister, as though it were plotting with the Immanent Will itself. Generally, it is indifferent to the futile efforts of the human beings who dwell on it. Aside from the local customs and dialect, one could identify Wessex with the rural areas of almost any country. This gives *Far from the Madding Crowd*, as well as the rest of Hardy's novels, a universal background.

Likewise, the characters of *Far from the Madding Crowd* are common people. The central character, Gabriel Oak, was a shepherd. He possessed a simple personality that revealed a profound wisdom (insofar as he did not give free rein to the will within him) in the living of a peaceful life. In contrast with the calmness of Oak is the turbulent personality of Boldwood, a

wealthy farmer, and Francis Troy, a carefree soldier. The fate of these three men revolved around Bathsheba Everdene, a wealthy young lady.

In fact, the main development of the plot of the novel is concerned with Bathsheba. One important exception to this is that early in the story Oak lost all that he owned in an accident. After that, he went to work for Bathsheba. The central development, stated briefly, goes thus: Farmer Boldwood fell in love with Bathsheba, who cared none for him. His love mounted to a violent passion. She, in turn, fell in love with Troy, who cared little for her. She and Troy were married, but Troy deserted her. He returned a year later, and Boldwood killed him. In the end, Bathsheba married Oak.

At first glance, there is little meaning to this series of events. Yet, a theme gives coherence and depth to this story. What is this theme? To answer this question, note that those characters who were most "with the world" suffered the most. Boldwood was a victim of passion; not "passion" in the everyday sense of the word, but in the light of Schopenhauerian philosophy, that is, that the will dominates the actions of an individual so completely that it gives him a distinctive mark. It is in this sense that I (and Hardy, for that matter) use the word. Troy was also a victim of passion in the form of greed. Bathsheba suffered from the effects of her passions. But Oak, who led an almost stoic life, won in the end. He would not be guided by his desires. As a result, he suffered the least. To put it in the Schopenhauerian terminology, the affirmation of the will must end in suffering. But, one might object, is not marriage an affirmation of the will? Thus the story ended! Even here, however, Oak did not give way to his passion. The bond between Bathsheba and Oak was one of mutual suffering; their companionship was richer, insofar as it was tempered by understanding. Bathsheba did not seek a lover in Oak, she sought a companion; therein lies the difference. Thus, one might say that the theme of Far from the Madding Crowd is that man's desires are frail and often time futile things; it is wiser to have few desires than to serve many.

In *The Return of the Native*, written in 1878, many of the elements of *Far from the Madding Crowd* are present. The setting is the same, that is, Wessex. In this novel, however, Wessex seems like a living thing. It is for this land that he loved, that Yeobright returned. Eustacia hated Wessex, for it kept her from the rest of the world.

The characters of *The Return of the Native* are, for the most part, common people who lived off the land. Clym Yeobright was a man of purpose; he wanted to use his knowledge to serve the people of Wessex. Eustacia Vye was a passionate woman who longed to escape her surroundings. One might say that she was a personification of desire. And her male counterpart was Wildeve, a man who was strongly attracted to her.

Just as in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, a woman becomes the center of the lives of the main male characters. Clym came home and later married Eustacia. Though Wildeve loved her, he married another woman. Clym's eyes were weakened by excessive reading and he had to work as a common laborer; this disillusioned Eustacia, who had hopes of leaving Wessex with him. Finally, Eustacia turned Clym's mother away from their home, and, as a result, she died. Clym, guilt-ridden, turned Eustacia out. Eustacia sought to run away with Wildeve and drowned, as did he, in a creek near where they agreed to meet. Clym then found his vocation as a wandering preacher in Wessex.

What meaning did Hardy wish to convey in this tragic series of events? Once again, passion is the source of tragedy. Eustacia Vye, more than any other character, was the source of the passion; she affirmed the will more strongly than any other. And those who yielded to her suffered themselves. One can see in her accidental death the blind activity of the will, as propounded by Schopenhauer; in her death the will turned upon itself.

The ending of the novel is one of realization for Clym. He learned to accept fate as a blind force, for "that he and his had been sarcastically and pitilessly handled in having such irons thrust upon their souls he did not long maintain." And when he went out and preached, "he left alone

creeds and systems of philosophy." In short, Clym gained the wisdom that is not allowed to those who are servants of the will.

From this viewpoint, the import of *The Return of the Native* becomes fairly obvious. Happiness does not lie in the pursuit of our desires; for men are helpless victims in the playful hands of a blind fate. And, as Schopenpauer says, the will's "desires are unlimited, its claims inexhaustible, and every satisfied desire gives birth to another one."

The *Major of Castorbridge*, written in 1886, contrasts with the two novels already discussed. The setting is, as usual, Wessex, and in particular, the town of Castorbridge. But the characters, especially the main character, Michael Henchard, are quite different from those of Hardy's other novels. Henchard was a strong man, possessing a firm personality. Lucetta was a weak woman who followed her desires, in contrast to the unselfish personality of Elizabeth-Jane, Henchard's step-daughter. Farfrae, an immediate cause of Henchard's downfall, was a goodhearted man who exhibited no fierce passions.

The development of the story reaches almost epic proportions in the tragedy of Henchard. Early in his life, in a moment of drunken despair, he sold his wife and children. When he recovered from the stupor, he traveled to Castorbridge, where he rose of wealth and influence. Many years later, his wife returned and he remarried her. She died and he fell in live with Lucetta, who turned him down and married Farfrae, a business associate of Henchard's. After a series of tragic events, Henchard died alone, penniless and unwanted. The story of Henchard is indeed one of retribution.

The point of interest for this essay is, retribution for what? Did Hardy mean to imply a Divine justice in action? Looking at his past beliefs, this is hardly a plausible explanation. And yet, the controlling idea of the novel is undoubtedly retribution. The great evil of Henchard's act, selling his wife, was that in the affirmation of himself, he did injustice to another. Incidentally, Schopenhauer bases the concept of wrong on this principle. In Henchard's drunken state, the reader sees humanity, with all the conventionalities removed. Henchard was concerned only with himself, deceived by the "veil of Maya." He was the personification of passion, self- affirmation. Throughout the story, Henchard's act haunted him. His guilt made him unconsciously wish for his destruction; only after his death was the debt paid in full. This guilt, interpreted on a philosophical level, means that Henchard recognized the will acting within him, which, according to Schopenhauer, men are only too eager to hide from themselves. This same lack of happiness is found in Lucetta, who was a slave to her desire; and fear of losing what she desired, the affection of Farfrae, brought about her death.

Elizebeth-Jane stands above these unfortunate characters as a model. She was modest in her wants, unselfish and patient. Thus, it was allotted to her, "whose youth had seemed to teach that happiness was but an occasional episode in a general drama of pain," that she should enjoy tranquillity in her later life. Tranquillity! Not that she should have a continual satisfaction of her desires, but that she should have peace. It is fitting that she married Farfrae, for in the same manner that she differed from Lucetta, he differed from Henchard. The evil of a wreckless will-affirmation is the meaning that Hardy wished to convey in *The Mayor of Castorbridge*.

The final novel that I wish to examine, *Jude the Obscure*, is of such significance that a few preliminary remarks are necessary. This was the last novel that Hardy wrote. It's subject matter was of such a controversial nature that Hardy, sensitive to criticism, vowed never to write a novel again. Justifying his novel, Hardy said:

> For a novel addressed by a man to men and women of full age, which attempts to deal unaffectedly with the fret and fever, derision and disaster, that may press in the wake of the strongest passion known to humanity, and to the point, without a mincing of words, the tragedy of unfulfilled aims, I am not aware that there is the handling to which exception

can be taken.

Hardy's philosophy reached maturity in *Jude the Obscure*, making that novel worth the most consideration. The setting of the novel is rural England, as in the others. But the characters in this novel, more so than in the others, have a philosophical significance when the story is viewed as a whole. Jude Fawley, the main character, is the personification of frustrated aims. Arabella, his first wife, is symbolic of the will-to-live in its deepest expression: the propagation of the species. She is one who is "dependent not upon strength, but upon craft." And Sue Bridehead, Jude's second wife, represents the tragedy of man, insofar as she fell from her once lofty state to the service of the will.

The development of the story centers around the frustration of Jude. He aspired to a position of learning, only to be rejected. Early in his life, he married Arabella, who more or less seduced him, only to see the failure of his marriage. He fell in love with Sue, and, after many events, married her (by common law). They bore children who, in a freak accident, killed themselves. Sue went back to her original husband and Jude was deceived into remarrying Arabella. He died a lonely and unknown man.

As has been said before, this novel is concerned with "frustrated aims." Indeed, the novel is almost a reproduction of *The World as Will and Representation*, that anthology of woe, in literary form. The controlling idea is despair.

In Jude's early life, he was full of ambition. Even continual disappointment would not discourage him for a time. He felt that the university officials at Christminister would accept him for his own merits; but he did not reckon with the narrow mindedness that is so characteristic of humanity. Likewise, he met with continual frustration in his love life with Sue; she did not want to be chained down by physical love. In other words, she did not wish to be a servant of the will. After she had finally given in, Jude found that he had "seduced" her. He had ruined that which was beautiful in her by affirming the will-to-live.

Even the event which precipitated this realization has a philosophical significance. Jude's family had just moved into a new town and conditions were bad, since the town was crowded and Jude was poor. Father Time (Jude's oldest son) talked with Sue:

> (Sue) "All is trouble, adversity, and suffering!"...
> (Fr. Time) "If children make so much trouble, why do people have 'em?"
> "Oh, because it is a law of nature."
> "But we don't ask to be born."

When Father Time finds out that Sue is expectant, he calls his mother wicked and cruel, for bringing more mouths into the world to feed. "If we children was gone, there'd be no trouble at all!" Later, the children, under the guidance of Father Time, hang themselves. Thus, bringing children into the world is looked on as evil; it is the most important service to the will that one can perform. Sue broke down and returned to her original husband, for whom she had no love. She became the guilt-ridden neurotic, determined to punish herself. After Jude's death, something that he himself longed for, Arabella said this of Sue: "She may swear that (that she found peace) on her knees to the holy cross on her necklace till she's hoarse, but it won't be true. She's never found peace since she left his arms, and never will again till she's as he is now."

This is the world-view that Jude the Obscure presents to us. It might be summed up in a few sentences: There is only pain in the service of the will. The only peace is in the will-less intellect or in death. According to Schopenhauer, there are two roads to the cessation of pain. One is death; the other is contemplation of the Platonic Ideas; this is what I mean by "will-less intellect."

In *Jude the Obscure*, Jude and Sue were happy when their highest interests in each other were of an intellectual nature. When they later payed homage to the will, they lost this happiness. Apparently Hardy agrees with Schopenhauer very much on this point. Schopenhauer's explanation gives the only reasonable answer to the nature of Jude and Sue's relationship.

May one conclude that Hardy was a strict follower of Schopenhauer? Is this the entirety of Hardy's thought? An examination of a few of Hardy's later poems will give the answer. In "*The Convergence of the Twain*," written on the loss of the "Titanic," Hardy emphasized the folly of human vanity. He said that "the Immanent will that stirs and urges everything" was responsible for the tragedy. Thus, it would seem that Hardy adhered to Schopenhauer even down to terminology. But consider these lines from "A Philosophical Phantasy," in which the cause of existence speaks:

> Call me 'blind force persisting,'
> I shall remain unlisting;
> (A few have done it lately,
> And, maybe, err not greatly.)...
> Aye, to human tribes nor kindlessness
> Nor love I've given, but mindlessness,
> Which state, though far from ending,
> May nevertheless be mending.

The last four lines imply that Hardy seemed to have held, along with von Hartmann, whom he admired, that it was possible that the will could redeem itself. Thus, he left room for optimism, though grounded in pessimism. Perhaps the will could redeem itself through man. In the preface to *Later Lyrics and Earlier*, he advocated evolutionary meliorism, which points to the hope for a resolution of the conflict of the Immanent Will.

The analysis of the preceding works, though they are a small part of the sum total of Hardy's writings, has, I believe, brought Hardy's world-view into focus. To consider Hardy's judgment of the nature of the world harsh, as compared to many other doctrines, is somewhat an understatement. To my knowledge, the only real hope that he offered mankind was that perhaps the struggle of the will for consciousness would resolve itself in the future, also his main variation from the Schopenhauerian philosophy, which did not even grant that much.

Yet, Hardy stands on his own merits. His novels reveal a profound wisdom. To the materialists he threw up a challenge: If living "with the world" was best for man, where was the so-called happiness? To the selfish, the self-assertive, he cast a warning: To live for the will within you is a fruitless life. And to a brash modern world, not knowing where it is going, Hardy presents the possibility of self-destruction.