

## Thomas Hardy

Hardy's scouring of the English language, his seeing all the words in the dictionary on one plane, entailed a deliberate restoration of good old English words, whether in dialect or in received literary usage, all testifying to his tireless quest for the right word. That this applies even more to his poetry than to his prose is easily explained by the requirements of metre and rhyme, for Hardy was a careful, if not fastidious, craftsman in verse, as his frequent revisions testify. But in prose, too, he was anxious not merely to display his word-hoard, as in the early novels, but to explore the resources of a millennium of English history to get his meaning across in the manner which best suited his aim and his ear. All parts of speech play their part in this. Hardy was as ready as Shakespeare was to play with grammatical categories, to turn the adjective dismal into 'the deepest fit of the dismals' in *The Hand of Ethelberta* (10), or to have horses called for 'by the brisk' in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (14). He turns nouns into verbal adjectives as in 'that abundantly daughtered woman' (PBE 14), and prepositions into adjectives in 'such old-fashioned and far-between people' in 'The Fiddler of the Reels' (LLI). Shifting of grammatical categories is not uncommon in English, which is largely devoid of inflections, but even more important in Hardy's lexical explorations was the revival of good words fallen into desuetude, like the rare word *inimic* in *The Dynasts* (2.4.5), or *armipotents* in 'I Met a Man; or *brumal* in *Two on a Tower* (23), where tropical climes are contrasted with 'the brumal rigours of Britain'-a word whose very sound conveys wintry chills, as it does in the 'frosty and brumall' passage in Gavin Douglas's 15th-century version of Virgil's *Aeneid*. In his poem 'He Abjures Love' Hardy follows Miles Coverdale and the King James Bible in using the word *daysman*, and in 'Rake-Hell Muses' occurs the word *intermell* (conflict).

An instructive example of Hardy's lexical eclecticism is his monody on the death of \*Swinburne, whose poems Hardy greatly admired. 'A Singer Asleep', first published in April 1910, echoes Shakespeare's 'orts of love' in *Troilus and Cressida* in Hardy's line 'Whose very orts are love incarnadine'. Although *incarnadine* is an adjective here it also carries Shakespearian echoes, while *orts* (fragments, scraps) dates from the 15th century, and *brabble* (carping, quarrel), also in this poem, dates from the 16th. In the second line of the poem, *sentry* is used as a verb, a rare Victorian innovation; of only three instances of this usage cited in the *Oxford English Dictionary* one is Hardy's. In referring to Swinburne's 'fulth of numbers freaked with musical closes, Hardy's *fulth* is a medieval English word which survives in dialect, along with such words as *greenth*, in 'The Tree and the Lady and *blooth* (bloom, blossoming) in several novels as well as in the compound *appleblooth* in 'The Dance at the Phoenix'.

Hardy's fondness for compound adjectives finds expression in the Swinburne monody in *fresh-fluted*, *love-anguished*, *unslumbering*, and *world-encircling*, while the final line of the same poem, 'Upon the capes and chines', harks back to the English of King Alfred the Great of Wessex in the late 9th century: a *chine* is a 'fissure or ravine' in Old English, and is used by Hardy in the poem 'A Woman Driving' and with reference to England's 'chalky chines' in *The Dynasts* (2.1.8).

That the dialect of Wessex should play a prominent part in Hardy's language is to be expected, although he took care not to puzzle his readers unduly, nor to turn his country folk into the uncouth 'Hodge' image berated in his essay 'The \*Dorsetshire Labourer'. For Hardy dialect words were yet another enrichment of his language, with their special meanings, sounds, and cadences-like the word *griff*, which is a dialect word denoting a small valley or cleft, but has the poetic sense of a grip or claw in Hardy's 'The Clock of the Years'. Dialect words largely confined to Dorset include many picturesque expressions, like *borus-snorus* (UGT 2.2), *hontish* (MC 37, TDU 12), *mollyhorning* (RN 3.1), and *teuny* (W 4).

Not content with adopting words from dialect and from earlier periods of the language, Hardy proved himself a deft coiner of words. Indeed, his verbal inventiveness is without doubt one of the most distinctive features of his language. The creation of compound words was a rich source of metaphorical language for Hardy, as it had been in Old English poetry, and many of Hardy's 'decisive ways of putting things', in Blunden's phrase, ensued, as in 'A Singer Asleep'. We also recall the verb *outskeleton*, mentioned earlier, one of several *out*-words Hardy coined, like *outheave* (D 3.3.3) and the memorable 'The Century's corpse outleant' in 'The Darkling Thrush', a poem further enriched by the sombre words *spectre-gray*, *fervourless*, and *blast-beruffled*. Among fruitful prefixes Hardy found *in*-, as in 'Where such inbe' in 'The Two Houses' and *inscroll* in 'A SignSeeker', which also includes the verb *subtrude* (to thrust or steal in stealthily), Hardy's being the only citation in the *OED*. Another prefix is *dis*-, as in *discompose* (HE 47) and in 'a long line of disillusioning centuries' (RN 3.1); both these usages are also cited in the *OED*, the latter as the only instance. Other coinages using common prefixes include *remutinied* (JO 1.3), *ensphered* (HE 34), *upclosing* ('Panthera'), and the noun *under-whistle* in the opening chapter of *Under the Greenwood Tree*. The most commonly used prefix for Hardy was *un*-, not uncharacteristic of his vision of things, as in *unhale*, *unhope*, *unworth*, and in the memorable line in 'Tess's Lament' 'I'd have my life unbe'.

Many of Hardy's compounds, especially nouns and adjectives, add a strongly visual or aural element to his language. One recognizes the pictorial quality in words like *frizzle-headed* in the description of that 'frizzle-headed brawny damsel' driving Durbeyfield's chaise in the second chapter of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, or in Tess's own 'lashshadowed eyes' (46), or in that telling epithet *mouldy-minded* in the reference by the Spirit of the Years to 'Europe's mouldy-minded oligarchs' in *The Dynasts* (2.6.7). One of Hardy's poems notably rich in such pictorial compounds is 'Afterwards, with words like *delicate-filmed*, 'the dewfall-hawk', 'the windwarped upland thorn', 'the full-starred heavens'. Hardy's tendency to coin words admittedly had its pitfalls. Even a young man as eager for classical learning as Jude is hardly likely ever to have said "'After all... it is not altogether an *erotolepsy* that is the matter with me, as at that first time"' (JO z.4), using a word which even Hardy found it necessary to italicize, having taken it straight from a Greek word meaning 'smitten with love. On the other hand, he did not italicize his neologism *dolorifuge*, which occurs early in *Tess* (6), where it fits in well: 'The children, who had made use of this idea of Tess being taken up by their wealthy kinsfolk ... as a species of *dolorifuge* after the death of the horse, began to cry at Tess's reluctance.' Unlike Jude's *erotolepsy*, *dolorifuge* possesses an English cadence despite its Latin elements, because the Latin *dolor* (pain) and the Latin *fugere* (to flee) have been active roots in the formation of

good English words like 'condolence' and 'refugee': Not surprisingly, Hardy's *dolorifuge* has found its place in major English dictionaries among other Hardy coinages.

As most of Hardy's central characters are women, his portrayal of attractive women demanded appropriate language, one word in particular recurring several times—*flexuous*. A Renaissance word, *flexuous* has the basic meaning 'being full of bends and curves, undulating; in which sense Hardy uses it in the poem 'The Sheep-Boy, where 'Flexuous and solid, clammy vapour-curled I Am rolling over Pokeswell Hills: The word is used of water in 'A Mere Interlude' (CM), and of massed humanity in the dumb show in *The Dynasts* (3.4.1) where armies are twice seen as 'flexuous and ribandshaped', marching 'in flexuous courses of varying direction: But already in *Far from the Madding Crowd* the word is applied to women, the haymakers consisting of 'gnarled and flexuous forms, the former being the men, the latter the women' (z5). Later in the novel the word describes Fanny Robin, whose 'general contours were flexuous and childlike' (40), and subsequently it is applied to Lucetta in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, to Charlotte in *A Laodicean*, to Tess Durbeyfield, and to Sophy the parlourmaid in 'The Son's Veto' (LLI). The word had served Hardy well. Hardy's language, albeit firmly rooted in his native Wessex, transcends the boundaries of both space and time. In his letters he

happily uses modern words like *flattites* (dwellers in flats), *sex-mania*, *romantical*, and even occasional Americanisms (although he deplores their growing infiltration into Standard English), and his dialect speakers use many words and expressions found also in other regions well beyond Wessex. But even within Wessex there were two distinct languages: 'the dialect at home, more or less; ordinary English abroad and to persons of quality' (TDU 3). Whereas Tess had passed 'the Sixth Standard in the National School, like Stephen Smith in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, Mrs Durbeyfield habitually spoke the dialect. The difference between mother and daughter is, as Hardy was well aware from his own family background, between Tess's mother's 'fast-perishing lumber of superstitions, folk-lore, dialect, and orally transmitted ballads, and the daughter 'with her trained National teachings and Standard knowledge under an infinitely Revised Code = 'a gap of two hundred years as ordinarily understood' (TDU 3). 'Persons of quality, the 'high company' of the comic poem 'The Ruined Maid, who speak ordinary English appear in all Hardy's fiction, even if 'modern developments have shaken up the classes like peas in a hopper, as Lord Mountclere rustically puts it (*HE* 38), and as Hardy himself was poignantly aware when as a budding writer he describes 'a wondrous man of the world talking of vast Schemes, radical Errors, and saying such words as the "Backbone of Society"; the "Tendency of Modern Thought"; and other things like that' (*An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress*, t.8).

In *The Hand of Ethelberta* Hardy deliberately set out to write a story contrasting the folk in the servants' hall with their masters in the drawing-room. Downstairs young Joey talks 'the Wessex way' (t8); upstairs, as Lady Petherwin avers, "'as regards some words, as well as some persons, the less you are acquainted with them the more it is to your credit'" (10). Both as novelist and as poet, Hardy

created a distinctive language which combined the old and the new, colourful local speech and Standard English, idiosyncratic grammar and syntax with accepted Victorian usage, into a unique blend, which may indeed cause an occasional grin, but which did enable him to arrive at numberless decisive ways of putting things.