Diversity and Unity in Thomas Hardy's Short Stories

by

William F. Browne

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1978

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

16 October 1978	Wendell Stacy Johnson
date	Chairman, Examining Committee
	Allen Mandelbaum
date	Executive Officer
	Irving Howe
	Wendell Stacy Johnson
	Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

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Introduction

Scholars and critics of Thomas Hardy's work have, in the main, focused their attention on his novels and poetry, and on his dramatic saga, The Dynasts. But recently his minor fiction, specifically his short stories, has come under critical scrutiny by several well-known critics, among whom are A. Guerard, C. J. Weber, George Wing, Irving Howe and John Wain. Hardy's collected short stories total forty-seven, and a few of them have appeared periodically in anthologies over the years. One or two, such as "The Three Strangers" and "The Fiddler of the Reels," are considered masterpieces, but this designation depends on the taste of the particular critic. Nevertheless, there is still reluctance to approach the stories as an important body of work.

Some reasons given for this critical neglect of Hardy's short fiction are indicated by John Wain, who sees the stories as fluctuating between "anecdotes" and complex plots, and Richard Carpenter, who feels that Hardy is not "scrupulous about the construction of the story, but lets it meander about where it will." [1] Carpenter also dislikes the "thematic sameness" of the stories, while other critics feel that the stories are "decoration" or "novels in miniature." [2] In general,

critical opinion seems to be that Hardy's stories are technically deficient and lack the necessary balance or uniformity of effect to be taken seriously as true short stories.

If we were to subscribe to such reasons for dismissing the minor works of an author of Hardy's stature, we would be neglecting important aspects of his total output as an artist. Hardy's short stories, especially after such an illustrious and controversial career, should inspire more interest and scholarly concern. The continued interest in his novels and poetry by readers is illustrative of his popularity. These same readers, I believe, may want to know as much as possible about the man who wrote Jude the Obscure, Tess of the d'Urbervilles, The Return of the Native and Far From the Madding Crowd. Consequently, it is not enough to pass Hardy's stories off as sketches only, "shavings," "chips" or "stop gaps" discarded from his novels and poems.[3]

In this study of Hardy's stories, I find that the labels usually attached to him, including such terms as pessimist, determinist and misanthrope, are quite inadequate. They do not really apply when one understands the cultural milieu in which Hardy's characters live. What is more important is the realization that a unifying principle governs these stories: the world of Wessex itself.

Wessex is a localized environment with unique customs, beliefs and social interdependencies. This spirit of community shows how Wessex functions as a source for Hardy's major works and presents a key to his views on issues divorced from the demands of the larger themes dealt with in the novels. In the stories Wessex effectively represents Hardy's belief in the stability of the folk element without the heavy narrative voice which dictates the way our perceptions should go in order to advance the fortunes of his characters.

Edmund Gosse, in an 1890 article on Hardy, comments that Wessex contains an "interesting and wholly unexhausted population," which has a "Shakespearean richness of humor" that "has never, perhaps, been fully appreciated." [4] While critical opinion today has accorded Wessex a meaningful role in the series of works bearing the title "Wessex Novels," this interest in Wessex does not extend to the group of stories which has Hardy's quasi-mythical world as its focal point. [5] Norman Page, for instance, understands this fact about the stories by arguing for a closer study of them and just how they stand in relation to the major novels. He also stresses their technical importance, in that they show in "miniature some of the complex problems of composition and revision" that give them unity. [6] This observation is not unique to Page, but it shows that many writers on Hardy have disregard-

ed the stories and the integral part they play in what Donald Davidson calls Hardy's "habit of mind." [7] Davidson means that Hardy's artistic personality shows a man who thinks and lives in a kind of spiritual limbo, wherein the "fictions that result" from such a mind "resemble traditional or nonliterary types of narrative."

There is, nevertheless, a comparative difference in how we view Wessex in the novels, poems and stories. But the distinction is less great between the poems and stories than between the stories and novels. For example, Hardy's use of nature as an extended metaphor for fate is greater in the novels than it is in the stories. This means that the incidents determining the outcome of the characters' fate in the novels tend to depend more on external circumstances than on the inherent personality traits of the characters themselves. This difference in perspective causes Hardy to resort to author interpolations in order to set the tone for his characters. Wessex therefore becomes a large cosmos or world that takes on supernatural powers in which the inhabitants exercise little control over events affecting them.

This is not quite the case with the stories. In them outside or natural forces are less dominant in the lives of the characters. They contain within themselves the ingredients of their fate. This does not mean that the supernatural is

not operating in their lives. But the problems the characters meet in the stories are contained within their personalities. For example, the personalities of Car'line Aspent in "The Fiddler of the Reels," Selina Paddock in "Enter a Dragoon," and Rhoda Brook in "The Withered Arm" are self-motivating enough to make them susceptible to the various follies they confront in their lives. On the other hand, Bathsheba Everdene, Sue Bridehead, and Eustacia Vye have strong personalities and are heroic in conception, but their particular situations within the Wessex environment prevent them through the agency of external influences from fulfilling their ambitions.

The poems, however, show a more intense and personal view of Wessex. Their closeness to the stories is reflected in the style, subject-matter and presentation. Several critics have noted how much Hardy was influenced by the traditional ballad.[8] A comparison between the poems and the stories will reveal this linkage. In both, the implied narrator receives his "tale" from the lips of another, usually an old inhabitant, and is, therefore, "set" down or recorded by the writer. Yet the difference is that the verse, obviously, exhibits a point of view decidedly condensed and comes to the reader direct from the speaker; whereas, the stories, while objective, come to the reader essentially through a secondary source.

In the following chapters, characteristic threads are presented in the stories which project a holistic view of Wessex. The dominant themes not only reflect Hardy's major interests but also demonstrate how his microcosmic world is self-containing and alive. In order to see this, we have to recognize that Hardy makes Wessex his laboratory, his testing ground for the study of human conduct. For example, we see how personal losses brought about by weaknesses of character, by detractors and by the untutored hopes of youth are handled with humor, compassion and insight. There are episodes that tend to perpetuate myths of historical personages, and episodes that have suggestions of mystery and the supernatural. But these characteristics are tempered with humor and compassion.

While the main thrust of this study concentrates on the collected stories in the three volumes, Wessex Tales, Life's Little Ironies, and A Changed Man, an effort has been made to include several tales ("The Romantic Adventures of a Milkmaid" excepted) that have never been collected. These tales were originally meant for children. Evidently Hardy thought so little of them that he had rather they remain forgotten. Their inclusion in this study shows how broad his range is.

There is, however, a volume of Hardy's stories not included here. A Group of Noble Dames is a collection of tales set in the eighteenth century for the most part, and comprise the personal histories of ten interesting ladies of the Wessex gentry. These tales, all romantic encounters, are outside the intention of this study. Noble Dames, framed in the Chaucerian-Boccaccian manner, uses Wessex as setting primarily, and the characters are not particularly guided by or necessarily restricted in their actions by the aura of Wessex. What Hardy does in them is worthy of more attention. They are well written, but their atmosphere and tone seem to link them with another kind of story, the ghost or gothic tale. Moreover, credibility in them relies on personal knowledge of the families involved, rather than on a universal acquaintance with ordinary people. The reader knows that he is being told a tale strictly for the benefit of the telling. There is an artificial feeling about these tales; one does not share a real or living experience common to all human beings. They are far removed from the "Hodge" peasantry who make up the backbone of Hardy's real Wessex.

Finally, the stories in this study cover a broad spectrum of types. All are controlled, however, by the pervasive pres-

ence of Wessex and represent the men and women Hardy believed in most.

Notes

[1] John Wain, Introd., Selected Stories of Thomas Hardy (London: Papermac, MacMillan London, Ltd., 1966), says that "some of [Hardy's] stories are frankly anecdotes. Others are sufficiently complex in plot to have been written at length as full-scale novels.... Even his anecdotes, ten pages long, read like incidental episodes from long novels." Hardy, he adds, "regarded his short stories as shavings from his workshop" (pp. xiv-xv).

Richard Carpenter, Thomas Hardy (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1964), says that Hardy is "clearly not scrupulous about the construction of the story, but lets it meander about where it will; character is not developed; he seems unaware of any need for unity of effect; and his purpose is seldom thematic beyond indicating the irony of existence.... The primary difficulty in reading Hardy's briefer fiction is its thematic sameness" (pp. 69;79).

[2] Evelyn Hardy, Thomas Hardy: A Critical Biography (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1955), says, among other things, that Hardy "does not readily lend [himself] "to the short story form, "which requires a style more incisive and a form more highly compressed." She adds that Hardy "regarded his short stories as novels in miniature.... He evidently did not regard them as independent literary forms" (pp. 183-84).

Lascelles Abercrombie, Thomas Hardy: A Critical Study (London: Martin Secker, 1935), comments that Hardy's stories "decorate" rather than "add to the general significance of [his] artistic stature" (p. 42).

[3] Irving Howe, Thomas Hardy (New York: MacMillan Co., 1968), believes that Hardy apparently regarded short story writing as "mere journeyman's work by which to earn a living, and to have dashed them off with the casualness of purpose and desire to please a large audience." He adds that Hardy fits a mold for most novelists whose stories "are fragments chipped off his larger work, or developments of major themes in modest scope, or exercises

at sketching the figures and locale of his more ambitious books" (p. 76).

Thomas Hardy, One Rare Fair Woman: Thomas Hardy's Letters to Florence Henniker, 1893-1927, ed. by F. P. Pinion and E. Hardy (Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Miami Press, 1972). Hardy writes to Mrs. Henniker in a letter dated 11/2/1913, that she was not to "expect much" from his collection of tales in A Changed Man. "Most of the stories," he adds, "were written so very long ago, as mere stop gaps, that I did not particularly care to reprint them. Readers seems to be pleased with them, however" (p. 156); see also Wain, note 1.

4 Edmund W. Gosse, "The Speaker's Gallery: Thomas Hardy," Speaker, II (Sep. '90), 295-96.

5 Wain says that Hardy's novels and stories, taken in their entirety, constitute the last full-scale picture of "rural life and tradition" of old England (p. xviii).

F. E. Halliday, Thomas Hardy (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), asserts that, "The basic quality of Hardy's genius as a novelist is his poet's ability to recreate his environment in words, the sights and sounds of the Wessex countryside in description and vivid imagery" (p. 147).

Carpenter says that Wessex is "one of the great fictional settings of literature." It is a "symbolic microcosm" which "breathes the essence of the tales that take place in it" (pp. 28; 30).

Lord David Cecil, Hardy The Novelist (1943; rpt. London: Constable and Co., Ltd., 1956), says that Hardy's "picture of Wessex is the most elaborate study of landscape in English letters" (p. 69).

6 Norman Page, "Hardy's Short Stories: A Reconsideration," Studies in Short Fiction, Vol. XI, No. 1 (Winter, 1974), gives two more reasons why Hardy's stories are important: 1-for showing the "range of his art and his exceptional capacity for mingling disparate types of fictional conventions"; 2-how they "stand significantly" in relationship to the major novels written during the stories' composition." He adds that these reasons are what make Hardy's text a territory full of interest and

still not yet exhaustively charted" (p. 77).

Douglas Brown, Thomas Hardy (1954; rpt. London: Longmans, 1961), also notes that "the best of Hardy's stories belong to the period of his maturity and fame as a novelist... their potent images connect them immediately with the later works" (p. 115).

[7] Donald Davidson, "The Traditional Basis of Thomas Hardy's Ficton," The Southern Review, 6 (Summer, 1940-Spring, 1941), believes that Hardy's intentions are not necessarily based on a conscious desire to please the "old-fashioned" just out of a liking for things of the past, but that the "old-fashioned quality in Hardy... lies deeper. It is in the habit of Hardy's mind rather than in 'folklore' or the phenomena of language and style.... He thought, or artistically conceived, like a man of another century--indeed of a century that we should be hard put to name" (pp. 48; 164).

[8] Howe says that Hardy's stories have an affinity to the English ballad; that Hardy "was aware of this, and rather proud of the traditional sources and characteristics of his story telling" (p. 83).

Davidson says that Hardy's writing is "an extension in the form of a modern prose fiction, of a traditional ballad or an oral tale--a tale of the kind which Hardy reproduces with great skill in A Few Crusted Characters and less successfully in A Group of Noble Dames." This is a part of Hardy's "habit of mind...a rather unconscious element" (p. 69).

Brown says that "the pervasive irony [in the tales] has its origin in balladry...the striking things about Hardy's art as a story-teller fall naturally into place as functions of balladry" (p. 110).

Chapter I - Hardy's Story-Telling

Both the Boccaccian and Chaucerian framing devices influenced Hardy's story-telling method. All of his short stories make use of an itinerant narrative amanuensis, who records (or tells) what secondary persons tell him. In the process of recording the experiences of these Wessex folk, their trials, tribulations, their joys and sorrows, loves, marriages, hopes and disillusionments, their moving away from and back to the Wessex world, Hardy has created a collection of persons whose virtues and imperfections overlay one another and are representative of us all.

In our own time these stories transmit memories of people with whom many of us can identify. It is not so much that they exhibit extreme behavior patterns, but in their idiosyncrasies we witness a condition as varied as the so-called norms to which we ourselves are subject. These idiosyncrasies in Hardy's characters, and his method of presenting them to us, are not unlike what Boccaccio and Chaucer revealed centuries ago: love, hate, shennanigans, intrigue, exaggeration, honesty, frustration, and all the characteristics we recognize now under varying

psychological terms are well represented in Hardy's stories. They are as lasting as is human nature. The overall characteristic that Hardy shows with his greater predecessors in tale-telling is one that depicts how men and women seek to cope with their existence--how some succeed, some fail; how most do neither completely.

Hardy's work, whether in the novel, short fiction or in his poetry, remains centered in that part of England from which he comes, Dorset. While he is not unique in this regard, he was unlike many writers of his time and many more who have come after him--those writers who felt it incumbent upon them to roam the world in search of materials and situations for their work.

Despite the criticism of parochialism manifested in his work, Hardy's Wessex remains immortal.[1] In Wessex, however, the sense of place and time remembered is central to his work and life, and ultimately to his art. As he developed his imaginative life, transforming experiential reality into creative actuality as an artist, he transposed his memories into the fictional reality of Wessex.

The great writer knows that, to him, the future and the past are linked intrinsically, and that the basis of human continuity, bound by the present, must not allow memory to be obliterated. Culture, history, science, and

human experience are predicated on memory for self-fulfillment, for spiritual or material advancement. Hardy's Wessex, too, is a world of linkages between people and customs, but amidst conditions where social interaction prevails.

This is one of the reasons that the Wessex world lives as recorded memory, frozen in time, as one man's dedication to the continuity of the human spirit. This is not parochialism; this is understanding mankind at its most elemental, therefore universal, level. And Wessex universalizes the broad scheme of the artist in a way that the use of the real Dorset places, names, and people never could achieve for him.

The novels, for instance, contain characters and situations that vie for comparison with other novels of the time such as one finds in George Eliot, or Dickens, or Meredith. That is, Hardy's novels necessarily develop ideas concentrated in a series of characters in a variety of situations which move toward a destiny that encompasses a significant or particular moral or philosophical view of a fictional macrocosm. The poems, while particular and mood assessing, are reflective often of the individual writing them. Wessex proper therefore becomes subordinate to the singular and necessary character of the poetic forms

themselves.

But Hardy's short stories, his occasional writings, his chippings from other works, and so on, do reflect his view of Wessex as much if not more objectively than either his novels or poems. It may be true that themes and situations tend to repeat themselves from story to story. But when one pictures the gallery of tales as a whole, one notices how intertwined they become with aspects of a pervasive world-view. And the characters in each story take part in, no matter how displaced or dissociated, some customary activity bound to the Wessex society. This is what makes Hardy's stories an important concomitant to his novels and poems. They are all tales of Wessex from which his major works evolve.

The three volumes of Hardy's short stories concerned in this study, Wessex Tales, Life's Little Ironies and A Changed Man, contain the works he had submitted over a period of twenty years to periodicals both in England and America. His stories are collected in the authoritative edition of the works, The Wessex Edition of 1912, under the umbrella title, The Wessex Novels. Hardy separates all of his fiction into three descriptive categories, classifying them as "Novels of Character, and Environment," "Romances and Fantasies," and "Novels of Ingenuity." [2]

It is not quite clear how his stories, *in toto*, are assigned. Two of the three volumes tend to come under the first classification, that is, stories of "Character, and Environment." The third volume of stories, *A Changed Man*, appears singularly under a nondescript title, "Mixed Novels." [3]

The supplementary titles of his fiction are, at best, descriptive only, and at worst, misleading when one considers the themes and subjects that his fiction treats. Notwithstanding Hardy's own seeming lackadaisical attitude toward the labelling of his fiction, one has but to read it all to know how inadequate these general titles are.

For the purposes of this study, and to show how the stories function within the Wessex environs, I have made a distinction in them, which crosses the volumes. The stories are arranged under the following major themes: macabre or inscrutable plots and characters; romantic triangles; conscience and love versus pride and independence; concerning intruders and returning natives; the use of the military for historical background and dramatic effect; and the use of the clerical profession. Chapter Eight contains two descriptive tales, or sketches, that exemplify the essence of Hardy's feelings about his Wessex world. They give Wessex its historical perspective

and its aura of reality and wholeness. In addition, Chapter Nine includes those few stories apparently written specifically with children in mind. With the exception of "The Romantic Adventures of a Milkmaid," they have never been collected.

Notes

[1] "General Preface to the Novels and Poems," in Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings, ed. Harold Orel (Lawrence, Kans: University of Kansas Press, 1966). Hardy, in the "General Preface," addresses himself, more or less, to the issue of parochialism in his works, and likens his Wessex world to that found in Greek dramaturgy. He says: "I considered that our magnificent heritage from the Greeks in dramatic literature found sufficient room for a large proportion of its action in an extent of their country not much larger than the half-dozen counties here reunited under the old name of Wessex, that the domestic emotions have throbbed in Wessex nooks with as much intensity as in the palaces of Europe, and that, anyhow, there was quite enough human nature in Wessex for one man's literary purpose.... Thus, though the people in most of the novels (and in much of the shorter verse) are dwellers in a province bounded on the north by the Thames, on the south by the English Channel, on the east by a line from Hayling Island to Windsor Forest, and on the west by the Cornish coast, they were meant to be typically and essentially those of any and every place where...beings in whose hearts and minds that which is apparently local should be really universal" (pp. 45-6).

[2] "General Preface," Personal Writings, pp. 44-5.

[3] Orel, Preface, Personal Writings, p. xi.

Chapter II - Macabre or Inscrutable Plots and Characters

I have identified thirteen stories which treat of the macabre and inscrutable. These thirteen choices are not meant to suggest that other stories in the three volumes do not in any way deal with similar situations. We shall see that many do. These choices, however, show the interconnectedness each story has with Wessex customs and attitudes, and how Hardy's own predilection for certain themes, situations and conditions helps to answer criticisms about the repetitive nature of the stories themselves. Ultimately, they show that Hardy continually saw and portrayed his people from a variety of vantage points, in order to present his conception of holism in human nature.

In "The Withered Arm" (WT), the elemental trait on which the story turns is the spell or curse Rhoda Brook casts upon her rival, Gertrude Lodge, the young wife of her former lover. [11] The curse itself is depicted indirectly, that is, through Rhoda's dream or nightmare, wherein she is visited by a succubus in the shape of Gertrude, whom she subconsciously wrestles by the arm, leaving an imprint which is mysteriously transmitted, in fact, to the

ingenuous young wife. This dream and its subsequent effect is followed by Rhoda's remorse and her visit with Mrs. Lodge to the local conjuror, Trendle. He prepares a concoction composed of the white of an egg in a glass of water, and tells Gertrude to look at it. Gertrude "sees" an image forming in the milky substance but fails to make out its features. Trendle's diagnosis of Gertrude's arm shrinkage compounds her growing hysteria.

This first visit to Trendle does no more for Gertrude than determine that her illness lies outside the province of medicine. He tells her only that it is the result of an "enemy's" curse. Even though Gertrude does not positively identify the "image" seemingly formed in the glass, the suggestive hint given by Trendle enables her to begin to comprehend Rhoda's part in her affliction:

> When Mrs. Lodge came out [of Trendle's house], and her face was met by the light, it appeared exceedingly pale--as pale as Rhoda's.... Rhoda perceived that her companion had quite changed....
>
> "And what did you see?" inquired Rhoda.
>
> "Nothing I--care to speak of." The constraint in her [Gertrude's] manner was remarkable; her face was so rigid as to wear an oldened aspect, faintly suggestive of the face in Rhoda's bed-chamber.
>
> "Was it you who first proposed coming here?" Mrs. Lodge suddenly inquired,

> after a long pause. "How very odd, if you did!" (p. 85)

The credibility of the story is kept strong by the hesitancy in which Trendle, Rhoda and Gertrude approach the spell-casting. Notwithstanding the fact that Trendle himself alludes to no specific powers of the supernatural, and that the villagers themselves openly denigrate such hidden powers, the mystery surrounding Gertrude's afflicted arm needs explaining. [2]

The strength of this tale comes to us on levels that affect our own powers of suspended disbelief. We <u>know</u> what has happened to Gertrude; yet we are intrigued by the controlled struggle going on inside of Rhoda herself. She is cause <u>and</u> catalyst in the tale, since we know the origin of her hatred for Gertrude; this makes her personal conflict a sympathetic one. The wonder is how she exercises the strength of Will to subdue her bitterness. She fights against pettiness, not being inherently mean nor vindictive--even though she has been grossly wronged. Yet the external features of the story, the spell, the diabolical and subconscious wish for revenge, give credence to the macabre aspects of the tale--in addition to the circumstance that nobody acknowledges a supernatural agency.

As the story progresses we find that its macabre

elements are further supported by the routine of the marriage state itself. Mr. and Mrs. Lodge's marriage grows dull in time, and this dullness accentuates the negative aspects of their relationship. Lodge's original rapture with youth, beauty and accomplishments in his young bride suggests his own innate self-centeredness, and, like Hawthorne's Aylmer, in "The Birthmark," but without the latter's idealism and natural abilities, Lodge resents his wife's physical disability.

Gertrude's efforts to regain her husband's affection by having recourse to an array of medicines are to no avail. Desperate, she once again turns to the arcane Conjuror Trendle. She knows about Rhoda's connection with her husband, including their bastard son. She also knows that the indistinct image she had seen in the conjuror's glass was, indeed, a picture of Rhoda.

The reader now comprehends everything about the principals, except their fate. One accepts the lugubrious atmosphere from which the spell originates. This is because the specifics of the macabre events affecting the principals are interrelated with the characters' personalities. The fundamental problem for all is basically one of guilt, with variant forms of neglect, jealousy, sexual and physical inadequacies. The spell and the

events accompanying it, such as superstition, ignorance and prejudice, become sociologically part of the social world of Wessex and its customs. Too often, however, critics have tended to concentrate on those parts that strike them as incredible and bizarre, without looking, instead, at the characters whose lives are the source for the elements of what is viewed as supernatural. [3]

One might say, further, that Rhoda and Gertrude, and to some extent Lodge himself, are people whose problems are so deep that, for want of a competent physician or psychologist, their pride and their independence of spirit force them to seek out remedies for which no usual prescription is available. [4]

In an effort to balance the story, and to divert attention away from Rhoda's mental and psychological derangement, Hardy takes up Gertrude's tale midway. Despite the obvious fact that she is the afflicted person, Gertrude, being more than an object of contempt, has a personality of her own as complex as that exhibited by Rhoda and Lodge. Hence, she <u>believes</u> in her affliction and the mystery it entails. And Trendle, master lay psychologist that he is, tells her that her affliction is "of the nature of a <u>blight</u>, not of the nature of a <u>wound</u>" (Itals.

mine; p. 89). A wound, while frequently mortal, can nevertheless be cured, or, at least, alleviated in some way, since it has a fixed location. But a "blight" signifies a kind of pervasive pestilence, a disease not necessarily of known origin, similar, in a way, to the many forms of fungi that arise from some unclean situation or condition. Trendle, therefore, tells her simply that "if you ever do throw it off, it will be at once." This is a preparatory remark for a cure to Gertrude's physical affliction, on the one hand, but also it contains a veiled warning from the conjuror-sage, that a greater price will have to be exacted for the cure.

The hysterical Gertrude is willing to do anything to mitigate her suffering, and Trendle, in a surreptitious way, begs off attempting such a cure himself, by telling her of "only one chance of doing it.... It has never failed in <u>kindred</u> afflictions--<u>that I can declare.</u> But it is hard to carry out, and especially for a woman" (Itals. mine; p. 89). Trendle, a man of Wessex, directs her to "touch with the limb the neck of a man who's been hanged." The declaimer demonstrates Trendle's contempt for the weakness of such women as Gertrude. His advice is a kind of cynical rebuff enabling him to placate her, while, at

the same time, preserving his status as resident soothsayer.

Hardy presents the story not as if there was any actual truth in Trendle's advice, but he shows that the remedy works in conjunction with the state of mind of the characters involved--particularly Gertrude. It matters little whether or not the reader goes along with the remedy. Looking at Gertrude, understanding the particular predicament she is in, one can but hope that this remedy works. She has done nothing to warrant her affliction, except to marry an arrogant man who has neglected her. She is caught in a crossfire of secrets through which she has become an unwitting victim.

By "turning the blood," which will change her "constitution," Gertrude undergoes the cure.[5] The narrator's opening comment in the following section conveys her state of mind:

> The communication sank deep into Gertrude's mind. Her nature was rather a timid one; and probably of all remedies that the white wizard could have suggested there was not one which would have filled her with so much aversion as this, not to speak of the immense obstacles in the way of its adoption. (Itals. mine; p. 91)

Doubts, fears, aversions, loneliness, lost affections, and other elements of "her woman's nature," plagued Gertrude during the succeeding months. Finally, she acquiesces, and

after considerable difficulties, she succeeds in getting the hesitant but amused hangman, for a fee, to go along with her plan to touch her withered arm to the neck of a still warm corpse.

The climactic moment arrives and Gertrude succeeds in touching the warm corpse with her afflicted arm. The "turn of the blood" takes place; but along with her hysterical screams at the "miracle," another was heard. It was that of Rhoda Brook. And there with Rhoda is Lodge himself. Gertrude, in shock, is castigated by both her husband and Rhoda, who accuse her of coming between them and their son. It appears that all along Rhoda and Lodge have been writing letters to one another about their son.

Shortly thereafter Gertrude, not having regained consciousness, succumbs to her "double shock."

The resolution of the story is one of chastisement, isolation and repentance on the part of Lodge, who dies within two years of his young wife. And Rhoda remains in solitary bitterness for many years after.

The value of this fine tale rests in its suggestive power: it is by no means a story of the supernatural, but one of deceit, jealousy, neglect, and weakness.[6] The hint of retribution implied in the end is misleading, since all persons involved suffer beyond mending. The unfortunate

son (as a result of his parents' lust), Rhoda, Lodge and Gertrude pay the price of unwarranted deceit. It therefore is not the "turning of the blood" which causes the fatal outcome, but the suggestive force of the mental strain and guilt under which each principal labored.

Hardy's insight into the motives of the characters in this story shows a masterly handling of technique. Undoubtedly the gist of the story depends on making the obvious associations between Rhoda's dream and Gertrude's affliction, and this association makes the story strange. Its strangeness, furthermore, consists in the coincidental connection between a subconscious wish and the subsequent fulfillment of the wish. Yet, contrary to the criticism that concentration on "character psychology" might harm the effects of the story, the "boldness of narrative" is strengthened by concentration on the characters rather than on Hardy's devices.[7] It is character, therefore, that makes the story live as a human testament of maligned and misunderstood affections, rather than as a grostesque experiment in the one-dimensional horror story.

"An Imaginative Woman" (WT) is more bizarre than it is macabre. Again, the two principals in it are divided, but differently from those in "The Withered Arm." Ella and William Marchmill are married. He is a cold

businessman, a manufacturer in military hardware. She is of a sensitive and poetic disposition. Neglected by her husband, and occupied with reading, caring for their children and filling her bored hours with sundry fantasies, Ella soon begins to live in a twilight world where the real and the unreal converge.

As he did in the previous story, Hardy supplies us with careful details which lead up to the fantasized romance with a little known poet, "Robert Trewe," whose soul melds with the idealized and starved spirit of Mrs. Marchmill--Ella herself a poete manquée.

The situation in this story, like the previous one, also concerns the power of suggestion and the part it plays in the lives of those affected by varying circumstances. Ella Marchmill's obsession with the unhappy and suicidal "Robert Trewe," whom she never meets, although she attempts deceptive means to bring such a meeting about, eventually leads to her death in childbirth.

The most significant incidents of the story, giving it the strange turn that it takes, have to do with "Trewe's" suicide, a lock of his hair, and the birth of Ella's last child.

Ella, in an effort to secure some reminders of her

deceased phantom lover, gains possession of a lock of his hair. Along with the hair she retrieves a photograph of the dead poet that had previously caused her such rapture. A kind of necrophilia ensues, wherein she caresses these items, making love to them. On the day of the funeral she slips off to attend it. Her husband finds her lying prostrate at the dead poet's grave. All this time Ella is pregnant with her fourth child.

So obsessed has she become that her health suffers, and she has lost her will to live. Her heart, mind and body have undergone such a change that she experiences a kind of symbiotic merging with the soul of the deceased poet. This identification affects her to such an extent that the newborn child strangely takes on physical characteristics of the dead poet.[8] Shortly thereafter she dies.

What makes the story effective is its presentation. Hardy does not openly relate the tale as a gothic phenomenon. He leaves room for rational explanations for events that affect Ella's behavior. And yet he wants the reader to make associations. One must allow for the possibility of the "spiritual turn" in Ella's sensitive soul to transfer itself to the newborn child. The hints of Ella's disorientation are made obvious enough: her boredom as a

commonplace housewife, the matter-of-fact, unimaginative husband, the plain-looking children; the verses of Trewe, which affect her own sentiments; the suicide note, where Trewe expresses his loneliness, his need for a sympathetic soul; the picture and hair of the dead man, and the grave-side consecration; finally, the birth of her child, and her dying to join, symbolically, her "lover's" spirit.

The story has two points, especially, from which it can be viewed--the spiritual emptiness of the life Ella leads as an ordinary housewife, and the productive, realistic world of Marchmill that makes Ella appear silly and childish in her rebellious obsession. But Hardy commits himself in the dénouement on the side of Ella. The mundane Marchmill doubts his wife's idealized relationship to the unknown lover when he accidentally comes across the poet's lock of hair some two years following his wife's death. He feels outraged, and sees his last son the result of an illicit liaison and rejects him.

Marchmill's rejection of his son is prepared for by having Ella die without fully explaining herself. At the point of death a note of lucidity comes to her. She is about to tell her husband everything surrounding her odd behavior. But she succumbs before completing her confession.

Hardy's moving this story from Wessex Tales in earlier editions to Life's Little Ironies in the definitive 1912 edition is appropriate.[9] But despite its seeming estrangement from the stories with a distinct Wessex flavor, it still belongs within the territory of Wessex because of its physical surroundings. Set in the Solent Sea (or Southsea) resort area, the story's atmosphere helps to nurture Ella's loneliness and her imagination.[10] From a different point of view, and on a larger scale, Hardy employs a similar scheme in his fantasized romantic novel, The Well-Beloved.[11] Nevertheless, "An Imaginative Woman," with its objective discernment and narrative economy, is well told.

The story of Joshua and Cornelius Halborough, in "A Tragedy of Two Ambitions" (LLI), has the ingredients of tragic drama and the turns of circumstance for which Hardy is famous.[12] But the only incident of a macabre or strange nature occurs near the end of the story: the flowering of their father's walking stick that had been put aside after he had been drowned in the weir. As a symbol, however, the flowering walking stick seems an instance of Hardy's penchant for trigger-like cynicism. In a sense, it is effective, in that it gives a kind of generalized moral to the story. Still, one might ask if this tale of two highly motivated

brothers required the artificial device of the flowering walking stick. Its intrusion seems an example of over-extension in an attempt to force an ironic turn, as if mocking the young men, while acting as a crude justification for a worthless parent's life.

Unlike the two previous stories, where successive incidents prepare the reader in someway for the logical possibility of the outcome, this tale does not prepare us for the flowering stick incident. Even had Hardy prepared us earlier with the possibility that Halborough's stick was of the variety of plant, shrub or hedge which when broken off at a limb would commence to regenerate itself, the final circumstance of its growth would still weaken the story--the guilt-ridden irony of the two brothers notwithstanding.[13] The strangeness therefore it gives to the story--otherwise a fine one--makes it appear more as an afterthought than as an integral part of the characterization.

One of Hardy's best and most complete stories is "To Please His Wife" (LLI). Nearly every word directs our attention to the development of the plot. To some extent Joanna Jolliffe is reminiscent of Rhoda Brook, with Emily Lester a milder unaffected Gertrude. But the comparison is tangential only, for in substance, outcome, and presentation, the two stories are markedly different.

"His Wife" succeeds because Hardy does not divide the reader's attention among two or three characters, as tends to be the case in "Two Ambitions" and "The Withered Arm." We get the essential qualities needed to depict the personality of Captain Shadrach Jolliffe, a recently returned sailor after several years at sea, and also the personality of Emily Hanning Lester, a rival for his affections. But it is Joanna Phippard, the woman Jolliffe marries, with whom our interest lies. She has characteristics that we associate with Eustacia Vye, Elfride Swancourt and one or two of Hardy's lesser heroines. Joanna is selfish, jealous, ambitious and conniving. And she is tragic.

Hardy's carefully laid-out groundwork gives to Joanna's life an inevitability that, while terrible in its outcome, has logic on its side. She is unable to humble herself, although opportunities are given her to ameliorate her petty greed and to express some consideration of others. Her chief problem is one of pride. As young women, she and Emily first meet Captain Jolliffe while out walking. He is attracted to the demure Emily. But through coquettish maneuvering, Joanna's flirting has got Jolliffe to commit himself to her. Thinking that Joanna is not serious, he is accidentally seen by her confessing his love to Emily. Jealous, Joanna holds him to his pledge to marry her, and

they wed and live as inept grocers, raising two sons in virtual poverty.

In the meantime, Emily has married a wealthy merchant and brings up two well-educated sons. By contrast, Joanna's lot deteriorates and her derangement progresses in proportion to her envy and greed. For example, she nags her complacent husband to increase their fortune and improve their social standing. To do this, Jolliffe must go back to sea, even though he has "no pleasure at sea." As it is the only life he knows, he is willing to go for the sake of his wife.

Having returned safely from the voyage and handing over some three hundred pounds in sovereigns and guineas to Joanna, she is not satisfied:

> "It is a lot of gold, indeed," she said. "and--is this <u>all</u>?"
>
> "All? Why, dear Joanna, do you know you can count to three hundred in that heap? It is a fortune!"
>
> "Yes--yes. A fortune--judged by sea; but judged by land---." (Ital. his; p. 139)

Jolliffe however agrees to go back to sea, provided his two nearly grown sons accompany him. At first, Joanna balks, as one wonders if she hesitates out of motherly concern or out of a natural possessiveness. But she acquiesces. Shortly the three Jolliffe males depart, leaving notes of

goodby to the wife and mother.

Alone now, the mental agony begins in earnest for Joanna: her men are never heard from again.

Throughout this tale Hardy carefully marks all the poignant details that lead to Joanna's tragedy. Her character is first established in her courtship with Jolliffe and in contrast to that of Emily. Her fears of losing anything or anyone are accentuated by Jolliffe, a sailor by trade, being forced to stay landbound until his wife's envy and greed drive him back to sea; her unwillingness to accept Jolliffe's safe return during the first voyage, and the final leave-taking never to return. All are carefully arranged incidents which culminate in Joanna's mad ravings at the conclusion of the story.

Her eternal watch for the symbolically named ship "Joanna," which had carried her husband and sons away, mocks her. Her eventual derangement is foreshadowed as she hallucinates about her family while praying in church. Finally, having lost her home, Joanna is forced to take refuge, ironically, with Emily.

The horror of the physical and spiritual deterioration that accompanies greed and hardness of heart is vividly demonstrated in the closing passage from the story:

> It must have been between one and two when she suddenly started up. She had certainly heard steps in the street, and her sons calling at the door of the grocery shop [her former home]. She sprang out of bed, and, hardly knowing what clothing she dragged on herself, hastened down Emily's large and carpeted staircase, put the candle on the hall-table, unfastened the bolts and chain, and stepped into the street. The mist, blowing up the street from the Quay, hindered her seeing the shop, although it was so near; but she had crossed to it in a moment. How was it? Nobody stood there. The wretched woman walked wildly up and down with her bare feet--there was not a soul. She returned and knocked with all her might at the door which had once been her own--they might have been admitted for the night, unwilling to disturb her till the morning. It was not till several minutes had elapsed that the young man who now kept the shop looked out of an upper window, and saw the skeleton of something human standing below half-dressed.
>
> "Has anybody come?" asked the form.
>
> "O, Mrs. Jolliffe, I didn't know it was you," said the young man kindly, for he was aware how her baseless expectations moved her. "No; nobody has come." (p.148) [14]

By far one of Hardy's most haunting and weirdly beautiful tales and one of his most eerie is "The Fiddler of the Reels" (LLI). A very strong case can be made for its defying a clear or exact explication. [15] But a reader of atmospheric stories or a lover of gothic romances, and just plain spectral fiction, cannot help finding some pleasure

in this tale.

At an extreme level, frenzy is the term that comes to mind when considering this tale--mad frenzy. It is a well known phenomenon in our own time, when one thinks about the various kinds of crazes that have swept over the world in the guise of popular music and dance since the last fifty years or so. And Wat "Mop" Ollamoor, the incomparable fiddler of the reels, is not unlike those charismatic personalities and spell-binders of recent times. He was a mysterious "woman's man":

> ...supremely so--externally little else. To men he was not attractive; perhaps a little repulsive at times. Musician, dandy, and company-man in practice...he lodged awhile in Mellstock village, coming from nobody knows where.... Many a worthy villager envied him his power over unsophisticated maidenhood--a power which seemed sometimes to have a touch of the weird and wizardly in it. (p. 180)

So Hardy's narrator succinctly describes the reaction of both sexes to Ollamoor. The two people, however, most affected by this "wizard" of the fiddle are the "fragile and responsive" Car'line Aspent and Ned Hipcroft, a stable homespun mechanic.

The action occurs during the Great Exhibition of 1851, in Hyde Park, London. It was a time of innovation, the Zenith of the Industrial Revolution:

> As in a geological "fault," we had presented to us a sudden bringing of ancient and modern into absolute contact, such as probably in no other single year since the Conquest was ever witnessed in this part of the country. (pp. 179-80)

This background is important as a contrast to the actions among the three principals. For amidst this swell of human activity and ingenuity, Mop Ollamoor particularizes the wizardry of the fantastic and the new, on the one hand, and the romantic expression of the primitive, on the other. His effect upon the inhabitants of South Wessex village life is one of awakening dormant tribal rituals and of the bewitching sensation of the physical and emotionally forgotten. In Car'line Aspent, unaffected village girl, Mop's magic finds its greatest adherent:

> She was a pretty, invocating, weak-mouthed girl, whose chief defect as a companion with her sex was a tendency to peevishness now and then. (p. 182)

As in "The Withered Arm" and "An Imaginative Woman," one character actualizes a subconscious need for sensual fascination on the instinctual nerves of the vulnerable. Here that character is Car'line.

To be sure, this story is one which touches the springs of Car'line's untapped and wistful youth suppressed through boredom, and she, like one in a daydream, drifts off into

unknown regions. At first she fights against the mesmerizing melodies of Mop's fiddle, but to no avail. The seeds of her buried hunger, her hidden sensuality, have taken root.

As in the previous stories, the method of presentation lies in the contrasts exhibited between characters. Mop's wizardry with the fiddle contrasts with Edward (Ned) Hipcroft's steady "measured and methodical" ways. Ned, because of his association with Car'line, is himself a bewildered victim of Mop's wizardry. Even as he agrees to marry Car'line, some years after Mop has disappeared from the area, accepting her child by him as his own, he is made to suffer. For awhile, he and Car'line manage a kind of regular existence together, but the haunting sounds of Mop's fiddle remain at the core of his wife's soul.

Finally, Car'line, on her way to her hometown of Stickleford after several years in London, is bedazzled again at a local hostel where the peripatetic Mop is entertaining some patrons. Enchanted, Car'line is pulled against her will into the festivities, burning herself out in reel after reel, until she alone remains of the spent dancers to confront the tantalizing Mop. Fainting from exhaustion, Car'line is unable to prevent Ollamoor from abducting their daughter Carry.

Ned searches in vain for his stepdaughter, for whom he feels more than he does his weak wife. The child is never seen again, although rumors are rife concerning Mop's movements: Word is received that the musician and his daughter have emigrated to America.

The elements of the macabre in this tale are not so much of horror as of fascination or fixation. Hardy builds interest in the tale by allusions to the inarticulated physical needs of Car'line. Mop, the precipitous catalyst, appears in the guise of both phantom and priest, a kind of devil-god. [16]

What strikes a reader, after the dazzling scenes that describe Mop's effects on his audiences, is that once the story is completed, there is no real moral position taken. Culpability cannot be placed on any one character. Blaming Car'line, a simple country girl, who has no way of explaining her own vulnerability, or Ned, whose basic, but unassuming, good sense speaks only of human steadiness that commands our sympathy and respect, is pointless. There is no <u>evil</u> openly shown in Mop, however ambiguous his behavior. His freedom, his charismatic presence and spirit are beyond the pale of absolute censor, since he never speaks but plays in a language that touches hearts and inflames bodies, not

minds. Those persons, like Ned, or Julia, Car'line's sister, lack the innate sense of appreciation, or imagination, to begin to grasp the effects of music on others. Thus, Hardy's story leaves his readers almost helpless to define what has happened in it.

Elements of the supernatural one finds in this tale are curious. The nearest one can arrive at an associational or literary allusiveness is, as Carpenter states, a mythic Orphic influence. [17] On the other hand, in Mop's "wizardry" with the fiddle, there are adumbrations of symbolism that one might, for example, find in an Anaïs Nin story or a Brecht play.

Finally, Hardy's technique in this story is superb, especially when balancing rhythmic cadences of Mop's fiddling with the appropriate verbal expression. One senses the intense energy and passion felt by Car'line and, at the same time, admires Hardy's concrete use of imagery, as in the following passage:

> Then matters changed for Car'line. A tremor quickened itself to life in her, and her hand so shook that she could hardly set down her glass.... After the first moments of paralyzed reverie the familiar tune in the familiar rendering made her laugh and shed tears simultaneously.... Tired as she was she grasped her little girl by the hand, and plunging in at the bottom of the figure, whirled about with the rest...by degrees she was recognized as she convulsively danced on,

> wishing that Mop would cease and let her heart rest from the aching he caused.... There was that in the look of Mop's one dark eye which said: "You cannot leave off, dear, whether you would or no!" and it bred in her a paroxysm of desperation that defied him to tire her down.... She thus continued to dance alone, defiantly as she thought, but in truth slavishly and abjectly, subject to every wave of melody, and probed by the gimlet-like gaze of her fascinator's open eye.... Car'line was now in convulsions, weeping violently, and for a long time nothing could be done with her.... (pp. 196;199;200)

The Chaucerian-like series of tales told by homeward-bound travelers, which Hardy calls "A Few Crusted Characters" (LLI), begins with the strange "History of the Hardcomes," as related by the Parish Clerk. Here, as in "The Fiddler of the Reels," the dance is employed to affect the change between two couples, Steve and James Hardcome, and their fiancées, Emily Darth and Olive Paule.

The two couples, before the dance, are matched according to personalities. James Hardcome is engaged to Emily, both of whom are "gentle, nice-minded, in-door people, fond of a quiet life." And Steve, James's cousin, and Olive, who are "of a more bustling nature fond of racketing about and seeing what was going on in the world" (p.238). Both couples have planned dual weddings. But as the dance continues, they change partners, James dancing with Olive,

Steve with Emily.

Before the long night ends, feelings change. Each couple now has determined that his former mate was a mistake. Consequently, each vows marriage with his opposite--that is, James, the gentle and nice-minded, marries extroverted Olive, while Steve, likewise, marries Emily, his opposite. The makings of a comedy, or even a farce, are now apparent. But in Hardy one must expect a turn of another kind.

A few years after these contrasting marriages, each couple begins to have misgivings. While taking a holiday together at Budmouth-Regis, the couples find themselves paired with their original mates. Steve and Olive, the adventurous couple, want to take a boat ride, but James and Emily, not liking the sea, decide to remain on shore. The former take their boat trip and are lost at sea. When their bodies are recovered they are described as having been "found tightly locked in each other's arms, his lips upon hers, their features still wrapt in the same calm and dream-like repose which had been observed in their demeanor as they had glided along" (p. 248). Meanwhile, the distraught James and Emily, having mourned the loss of their friends, ultimately find each other again, and eventually marry.

The next anecdote, "The Superstitious Man's Story," is

related by the Seedsman's father, "a melancholy man in the back of the van." This tale concerns one William Privett, a solitary man who dies mysteriously. It seems that Privett's demise is foreshadowed by a series of occurrences in connection with a special time of the year, Midsummer's Night. The tradition is that at this time spectral shapes of those persons who will be near to dying within the year are noted entering the church: "Those who get over their illnesses come out...those that are doomed to die do not" (p. 253).[18]

Privett's shape was first seen by his wife, Betty, passing unobtrusively from the house at an hour when, in fact, he was still in bed. The next day, Mrs. Privett is told that her husband was seen the previous night, Midsummer's Eve, entering the church, but did not come out. Three days later, while resting under a tree with a friend, a "great white Miller's soul," i.e., a white moth, is seen coming from Privett's mouth as he sleeps.[19] He has apparently died. On the same day Privett is seen near the edge of a spring where his young son drowned many years before. No one can explain the mystery of Privett's death, except in terms relative to the beliefs surrounding Midsummer's Night.

The next tale as related by a Mr. Day, "the world-ignored painter," concerns "Netty Sargent's Copyhold."

Netty is a young woman, who, as the only surviving relative of her old uncle, wants to secure the family home for herself and her intended husband upon the uncle's death. The house, however, while built by the Sargent family, is on land owned by the Squire. The land can be held only during the lifetime of the current tenant. And unless a new life-lease is signed, the land and the property on it must revert back to the landowner.

Netty's uncle, having procrastinated in signing over the necessary papers for years, suddenly decides to sign them. But he dies just before attaching his signature.

The Squire wants to take over the land immediately, hating such legacies as copyholds, leaseholds and freeholds, because they bar landowners from total authority over their property. His representative comes the evening old Sargent dies, in order to pick up the necessary documents.

Netty, in desperation, meets the Squire's representative and persuades him to agree to witness her uncle's signature from the window outside the house. By careful manipulation of the old man's corpse, she guides his dead-hand in such a way so as to give the impression that it is her uncle's signature the representative is witnessing. [20] He accepts this; they exchange the monies required and the necessary documents and Netty has her copyhold for life.

In each of the three anecdotes Hardy's own narrative voice, as in the previous stories, is subordinated to that of his respective narrators. But each is an example of what makes Hardy's Wessex world function. The travelers are not only natural story tellers, but they are historians in the oral tradition. As has been mentioned already, Hardy's view of Wessex is not that of a single or omniscient narrator, as is found in his novels and frequently in the poems. It is the view of the people, that is, of Wessex itself, in an earthy world where traditions live and are incorporated as customs in their daily life.

In "The History of the Hardcomes," the narrator tells of the heat of powerful emotions under the influence of music and dancing--not unlike what occurs in "Fiddler." Yet the awkward predicament of the principals is suggestive of comedy, even as this humorous aspect is muted by the tragic outcome that follows.

In "The Superstitious Man," the mysterious death of William Privett is fundamentally a tale of the supernatural. Since the Wessex world turns on strange occurrences, Privett's death, rooted in the traditions of village folklore, finds sanction as concrete belief and not as abstract myth. Its authenticity is "validated" by various persons who witnessed Privett's disembodied "soul" before and after death. Thus,

tradition and superstition, however it appears to Hardy's readers, are grounded in the belief that the two are on equal footing, even as they mean different things.

In "Netty Sargent's Copyhold," we have a combination of Wessex effects--humor, morality, satire and a serious economic issue. The humor consists in the entertaining ingenuity of Netty's efforts to secure the family homestead by forgery. The moral issue is the use of deceit by Netty to obtain her uncle's signature. Also, the satire poignantly mocks religion by using the dead man's Bible propped up as a means of showing the Squire's agent that the formerly irreverent and irreligious old man had suddenly found renewed interest in the faith.

Finally, the economic and historical allusions in this anecdote centers on the copyhold itself. In several novels, such as The Woodlanders and Tess of the d'Urbervilles, for example, Hardy has shown serious concern over property rights regarding tenants and landowners in nineteenth century rural England. [21] Most of the Wessex folk, especially those appearing in the short stories, are simple people of the land, whose livelihood depends on their status with respect to some noble landowner. And Netty's methods of achieving her aims, while bizarre, are understandable to those among whom she lives.

The long tale, "The Waiting Supper" (ACM), essentially a story of ambition, sacrifice and love, turns on a grotesque note. But like "The Withered Arm" and "An Imaginative Woman," it includes oddities in the personalities of the two principals, Christine Everhard and Nicholas Long. The cause of the conflict between them has to do with social distinctions and proprieties.

Christine Everhard is a young and flirtatious girl, whose father, Squire Everhard, is a small landowner. She is in love with Nicholas Long, an intelligent, serious but penniless yeoman. Christine, conscious of her social position and not wanting either to offend her father or the proprieties, encourages her young admirer to travel and improve his position in the world. Nicholas agrees to this, provided Christine will marry him before he leaves. The parish parson, however, knowing that the girl is underage, insists on the Squire's consent before marrying them. Unable to secure this, they abandon the plan.

A new impediment enters their lives when a neighboring landowner's nephew, James Bellston, arrives. He is a London-bred and moderately traveled dandy. Christine, because of her own pretentions to social superiority, is attracted to Bellston, who appears to measure up to her conception of sophistication. But despite her capricious

nature, she really does care for Nicholas:

> In great things Nicholas was closest to her nature; in little things Bellston seemed immeasurably nearer than Nic; and life was made up of little things. (p. 48)

The last line points out Christine's dilemma--her craving for comfort exercises a stronger hold on her life than does love.

The usual processes of misunderstanding ensue: Christine's pride is hurt at hearing rumors of her aborted marriage to Nicholas as having, in fact, taken place. And when her father reads about it in the newspapers, the young people are further estranged. Nicholas is hurt, too, by Christine's coolness toward him. When the Squire writes to him and, for the sake of his family's honor, consents to the marriage of his daughter, Nicholas rejects the offer. He feels that the Squire truly despises him and that Christine neither loved nor respected him any longer. He therefore leaves to travel the world.

Returning some fifteen years later, Nicholas learns that Christine's father has died; that she has married Bellston, and that the latter, a scoundrel and wastrel, soon tired of her and absconded with her money.

Nicholas, now a wealthy and cultured man, finds Christine lonely, destitute, and no longer proud. His

feelings toward her remain unchanged, and they recommence a guarded relationship. After a suitable interval, he asks her to marry him, and she accepts with some misgivings; for she has never quite believed the rumors that her missing husband was dead.

They post notification of their intent to wed in the papers, and the marriage date is set. A last supper just prior to their nuptials is arranged by Christine. While waiting for Nicholas's arrival, she ruminates over her past years with Bellston. Just before Nicholas's scheduled arrival, the old clock strikes on the hour and then falls onto the floor.

The houselady, appropriately named Mrs. Wake, interprets this falling clock as an omen of "violent death in the family." Christine tries to shake off this dire predilection, knowing that Nicholas cannot be meant, since he is not yet her husband. Shortly a knock at the door brings a messenger who delivers the bag and great coat of Bellston. Christine's fears are realized: Bellston has resurfaced. When Nicholas finally arrives, he is told of the recent events. Both are shaken, but take the news in stride. Bellston however fails to appear, yet his threatened reappearance at any time haunts them and keeps them from marrying.

Many years later, when the new owner of Christine's old home wishes to rebuild the waterfall, which had become "choked with mud and weeds" over the years, she is informed that "a skeleton of a man had been found jammed among the piles supporting the edge of the fall" in the stream. From the relics of a gold watch the man had been wearing, this skeleton is identified as Bellston. Thus, the mystery is summarily solved as to what happened to Bellston, and Mrs. Wake's pronouncement about a death in the family proves accurate. But for Christine and Nicholas, age and the years of waiting have cooled their passion. Yet their mutual respect and love continue, even though they never marry.

Bellston's disappearance and subsequent unearthing from the milldam, unlike Halborough's in "Two Ambitions," avoids the apparent contrived ending that mars the other story at its close. The incident of the falling clock--a not unusual literary device, or gimmick portending evil--along with the messenger's arrival with the bag and great coat bearing the initials "J.B." and the eventual discovery of Bellston's remains at the bottom of the stream, are incidents supportive of the conflicts within the two principals. It is the indecisiveness of Christine and Nicholas themselves which determines the outcome of the tale.

Christine's capriciousness and pride--and lack of courage--contribute to a bad marriage, which sacrifices love to social advantage. And Nicholas's own reticence to exercise strength of purpose--at least in the latter years of their courtship--gives credence to the circumstantial events, such as the falling clock, the messenger's arrival and Mrs. Wake's premonition, that contrast with his unimaginative spirit.

"Enter a Dragoon" (ACM) has certain effects Hardy has used to a lesser or greater extent in other stories. Mr. Miller, the wheelwright, like Ned Hipcroft in "The Fiddler of the Reels," is the patient long-suffering lover; Selina Paddock, the maligned and misused country girl, is reminiscent of Car'line Aspent; and the irresponsible womanizer, Sergeant-Major Clark, suggests Mop Ollamoor. Also, the dehydrated wedding cake is a reminder of the dried-up meal in "The Waiting Supper." The dancing, and the child that resulted from Selina's former liaison with the Sergeant-Major recalls similar situations in "Fiddler" and in "The Hardcomes."

Selina Paddock thought her paramour, Sergeant-Major Clark, was killed fighting in the Crimea. It turns out that he was wounded only and remained away afterwards convalescing, and, supposedly, because he feared the disdain of Selina's parents. Nevertheless, he decides to come

back to marry her, and then they will leave for New Zealand where life looks more promising.

In the meantime, the well-meaning and good-natured wheelwright, Mr. Miller, on the verge of getting married to Selina, agrees not to press his case, even though he has proved himself faithful and loving to both Selina and her child.

The Sergeant-Major arrives at the Paddock household; he invites the neighbors to join him, and a party follows. In the heat of the dancing, he suffers heart-failure and dies.

Selina, thinking that his finding out about her intended marriage to Miller caused the heart attack, is distraught, even though the doctors explain that a combination of other factors contributed to the soldier's demise. But she leaves home and sets up a business and passes herself off as Mrs. Clark, widow. The wheelwright still wants to marry her, but she refuses him, preferring her independence.

While visiting the gravesite of the Sergeant-Major, Selina sees another woman accompanied by a little boy attending the grave. To her amazement she learns that the woman is the real Mrs. Clark, that the boy is their son, and that her marriage to the Sergeant-Major occurred while he was in another part of Wessex recovering from his wounds. Their

marriage had been unhappy because of differences between them, and the Sergeant-Major left her with intentions of going to New Zealand. Remorse and knowledge of his death have brought her to his gravesite.

The ironic skepticism we witnessed in the previous tales, notably "The Withered Arm" and "The Tragedy of Two Ambitions," is present in this one. But as a depiction of Wessex folk and their trusting natures--and their ignorance of the world at large--this story fits in with the system of values that help make up the enclosed Wessex world. Part of Hardy's fascination for circumstances that prevent his people from experiencing lasting happiness depends on the fact that they too often trust their hearts instead of their common sense. Happiness or its lack, therefore, in the Wessex world--it might be implied--depends not on wishes, goodness or faith, so much, but on its inhabitants exercising good judgment.

One finds it hard to blame Selina for her youthful attraction to the flash and dazzle of Sergeant-Major Clark, even as it was equally difficult to fault Car'line Aspent for her reaction to Mop Ollamoor. Unlike Mop, however, Clark is less dazzling and more realizable, therefore, more contemptible. His weakness is primarily that of irresponsibility. Nevertheless, he ends up a burnt-out shiftless person, whose

dreams of a good life never find satisfaction in the realities of everyday living. Selina, although duped by her innocence, still maintains her sense of respectability, at the expense of loneliness and a lifetime of suffering. But Mr. Miller, unlike the luckless Ned Hipcroft, is rewarded with a new wife. This speaks to the practical good sense of the fundamental character of hardworking Wessex stock--although some readers might say that Miller, like many of Hardy's "good" people, is dull.

"What the Shepherd Saw" (ACM) tells about a young shepherd boy, Bill Mills, who witnesses a grisly murder of a young soldier by a nobleman. The story is told to the narrator by a since long dead Justice of the Peace. Yet we see the events and share the atmosphere as viewed by and felt through the eyes of Mills. Our perspective therefore is three times removed. In a way this distancing helps in establishing the murkiness of the dismal events that occur.

The boy, Mills, is left alone by the head shepherd to tend the flock of sheep one night. Under the shadowy influence of the moon, Mills observes two figures, one, Captain Frederick Ogbourne, rejected suitor of the second figure, Harriet, who has been summoned to the isolated spot

by the captain to reassert his affections. She rejects him finally, but, in order to get away from him, she promises to meet him again the next evening.

The Duke, her husband, also has been hiding behind the trilithon, and has witnessed the liaison, but out of their hearing. This is the first night.

The second night, the situation is as before. Mills, alone, takes up his watch for the promised assignation. But the first figure to appear is that of the Duke. The actions of the Duke in the moonlight, "booted and spurred," intimidate the youth: "[T]he Duke was Jove himself to the rural population, whom to offend was starvation, homelessness, and death, and whom to look at was to be mentally scathed and dumbfoundered" (p. 197). Here then you have the contrast between power and weakness, which helps to build the tension in the story. The noble lord is supreme--benevolent or malevolent; whatever he does is law to the ignorant peasant. And at this level, Mills, ironically, is best protected.

When the Duke hides in the hut, near the quaking boy, hidden himself under a heap of straw, the appearance of the captain follows. Leaving the hut, the Duke confronts the captain, accuses him of dishonoring his wife, and then kills him. He hides the body and lies in wait for his wife. But she does not appear. Disappointed, he returns home and finds

her awaiting him, with an explanation concerning her relationship with the captain.

On the third night the Duke and Duchess return to the trilithon, the Duke humoring his wife, who has no idea of what the captain's fate has been. As they look about, Mills leaves his hut and follows them. Against the moonlight and the shadowy backdrop, he is mistaken by Harriet for her erstwhile lover. The Duke, chagrined, knowing the impossibility of such an occurrence, sees the figure is that of a boy. He summons him to come forward.

The Duchess questions him, but the boy says nothing. Apparently satisfied that he was busy tending his sheep, the Duke and Duchess go home. But the Duke returns and questions the boy in detail. Afraid the Duke will likewise kill him, the boy confesses what he has seen. At this point the Duke gives him an ultimatum: the choice is conclusive--he swears to keep secret what he has seen rather than be killed. To secure the boy's absolute allegiance to himself, the Duke, like Mephistophelis, strikes a bargain for the boy's soul--or, at best, his conscience:

> He took the boy across to the trilithon, and made him kneel down.... "Now, this was once a holy place," resumed the Duke. "An altar stood here, erected to a venerable family of gods, who were known and talked of long before the God we know now. So that an oath sworn

> here is doubly an oath. Say this after me: 'May all the host above--angels and archangels, and principalities and powers--punish me; may I be tormented wherever I am--in the house or in the garden, in the fields or in the roads, in church or in chapel, at home or abroad, on land or at sea; may I be afflicted in eating and in drinking, in growing up and in growing old, in living and dying, inwardly and outwardly, and for always, if I ever speak of my life as a shepherd boy, or of what I have seen done on this Marlbury Down. So be it, and so let it be. Amen and amen.' Now kiss the stone." (p. 207)

The fourth night represents a space in time. Some twenty-two years have passed since the incident of the captain's murder. Bill Mills is the Duke's steward. The Duke's wife has since died. The old nobleman is emaciated and sickly, and Mills himself looks older than he actually is.

Once again it is Christmas week. Mills feels compelled to break his vow of silence about the murder to his patron. He tells the Duke that the old shepherd, the one under whom, as a youth, he was apprenticed at the time of the murder, is dead at ninety-four. Mills tells him also that the old shepherd had witnessed their meeting of the second night. And before dying, he had made his confession to the vicar. This news excites the old Duke.

That night, Mills returns to the spot where the murder had taken place. He stations himself near the Druidical

pillars and observes the scene about the trilithon. While he reflects on his years since the incident, he sees the Duke, dressed in his white nightgown, appear, as if sleep-walking. Mills watches him as he scratches at the earth. Then he gets up and retreats the way he had come. The next morning Mills inquires after him and learns that his old patron has died from a fall down the stairs.

Following the Duke's death, Mills confesses to the vicar what had occurred on that fatal night twenty-two years before. He ends his days as a farmer.

The tone of the tale is appropriately established in the exposition: a bright moonlit night, two mysterious figures, and a druidical trilithon, called "The Devil's door." These scenes recall others found in some of Hardy's novels. For example, the closing scene at Stonehenge in Tess; the starkly rugged furze-covered plains we have come to know well in The Return of the Native, including the isolated shepherd's hut, that is reminiscent of Reddleman Diggory Venn's wheeled hut.

As a story of conscience--a characteristic which Hardy makes use of several times in other tales--the deterioration of both mind and body that takes place evolve from the burden of guilt. What gives the story its macabre and strange connotations is the moody atmosphere overhanging it. It is

the aura of gothicism that makes this story of revenge, isolation, guilt and remorse succeed as well as it does.

Finally, the fact that the events in the story take place during the Christmas season adds a special flavor to the tale, the flavor that one hardly associates with this period of goodwill. Still, in a perverse sense, it is a tale that stresses the negative or diabolical aspects of human nature, as a corollary to Christian hope and faith.

"Master John Horseleigh, Knight" (ACM) is quite involved, and yet it is the kind of historical narrative Hardy revelled in. The story concerns a marriage, secretly entered into by a nobleman to a country girl which is allegedly sanctioned by King Henry VIII.

The narrator, somewhat of a local historian, offers as proof an obscure entry documenting the event. He relates the tradition surrounding this relic of the strange marriage. What ensues is a series of suspicions, misunderstandings, accusations, bigamy, a confession, and death, and ultimate obscurity for all concerned.

The agent or catalyst who initiates the foregoing events is the brother of the bride, Roger. He returns from a long voyage at sea, and learns of his recently widowed sister Edith's quick remarriage to a mysterious man who has fathered her child. Outraged by such peculiar

behavior, Roger hunts down the couple, confronts his sister, who, having been sworn to secrecy about her marriage, propounds the outrage of her brother. After one of her husband's periodic visits, Rogers follows him. He returns to tell his sister what he knows--that she is not a legal wife, that her child is a bastard, and that the man she calls her husband is already married and has other children. While relating these surprising incidents to his sister, her alleged husband comes to her. She confronts him; he does not openly deny the accusations. But before a full explanation is forthcoming, the brother makes himself known to the knight. They fight, and the sailor stabs the nobleman and escapes, never to be heard from again.

Before dying, Sir John confesses the complete circumstances of the entanglement. He is, in fact, legally married to Edith. The woman bearing his name is herself married to a gentleman once thought dead, but who is later discovered to be living in France. Horseleigh's children by this woman, therefore, are the true bastards. Because of his dilemma, and wanting a legitimate heir, he obtained permission from the king to contract a legal marriage, but quietly, so as to avoid scandal among the nobility. Thus, Edith and their child are his legal spouse and heir to the Horseleigh name.

Unfortunately, death claims not only Sir John, but also his child by Edith. She retires to a quiet life, never endeavoring to establish her claim to the Horseleigh heritage. Meanwhile, the illegitimate wife meets her former spouse, and they remarry for the sake of appearances.

One might classify this story as more strange than macabre. But it has all of Hardy's ironic ingredients. Marriage, religion and morality are all involved in this, at times, confusing tale. Roger's sense of outrage against Sir John, also, reflects a common man's efforts to defend his honor, which is as important to him as such things are to Sir John.[22] This subordinate theme concerning basic human rights is seen in other stories, and is an essential characteristic of the Wessex world.

Although Hardy considered this tale to be very slight, its frame, the historical document of the marriage, and the historian's placing of it in the turbulent times of the English Renaissance, shows Hardy's concern for the relation of historical fact to his microcosmic world.[23]

Like "Master John Horseleigh," "The Duke's Reappearance" (ACM) has historical precedent. As its subtitle, "A Family Tradition," suggests, the story is a family legend, or tradition, which gives significance to that part of Wessex where the incident occurs. But more important, at least to Hardy,

is that it is associated with his own heritage.[24]

Placed in the seventeenth century, during the 1680's and the Popish Plot, the tale concerns the rebellious Pretender, the Duke of Monmouth, Charles II's bastard son. The family involved is the Swetmans, maternal ancestors of Hardy.[25] Christopher, the patriarch of the family, and a sympathizer with the Duke's pretensions, gives refuge to a shabbily dressed and mysterious stranger, who refuses any response to inquiries into his status except that he is tired and hungry. Christopher's two daughters, Grace and Leonard, attract the stranger, especially the latter, who is seen by her father in an orchard being unwillingly made love to by the stranger. Feeling his house is being dishonored by his guest, Christopher asks the man to leave. Remorseful, the stranger leaves but asks his host, first, to allow him to keep the old clothes he is wearing, and, then, to hold in safe-keeping certain valuables until he should call for them. Among these valuables is a sword with the inscription "Andrea Ferara" on its blade, which the stranger declares once belonged to his grandfather. Other items are portraits of Charles I and his Queen.

Through hearsay a week later Swetman learns that in a battle the Duke's forces were defeated, and the rebellious son of Charles II had been taken prisoner and confined to

the Tower.

One night, Swetman is awakened by a dusky figure, "dressed somewhat differently now," who he saw "by the light of the moon" was his former guest. This spectral-like figure goes to the closet where the valuables are stored and takes his possessions, "giving a hard gaze at Christopher as he went noiselessly out of the chamber with his properties on his arm" (p. 262).

The next day Swetman learns that the Duke was executed two days before the ghostly appearance of the stranger. Needless to say Swetman is astonished and perplexed, for he was sure the Duke himself had come to claim his property.

Adding to the mystery is a rumor that it indeed was not the Duke who was beheaded, but a surrogate officer, and that the Duke had actually escaped from the country.[26] To Swetman this was the meaning of the stranger's appearance the previous evening. Rather than dispute the known facts reported to him of the Duke's death, Swetman chooses to believe, "like that of thousands of others," Monmouth had escaped.

This tale, of course, conveys a kind of Wessex obstinacy that Hardy admired. Swetman's refusal to accept Monmouth's death, in conjunction with the mystery surrounding his guest, as well as the claiming of the stored articles by the man

whom he believed to be the Duke himself, gives the tale its narrative soundness. Hardy presents Swetman as a sensible person, whose feelings are clouded by doubt and sympathy with respect to the stranger's identity and to Monmouth's cause. The personal items represent proof that heightens Swetman's feelings toward the stranger. At the same time Hardy's own artistic sense, which allows him to perceive the credibility in what could have been, is nicely supported by the standard device that leaves the door open to the reader: the stranger is left unnamed and specifically unidentified, except through innuendo and through the personal articles. Yet one's imagination is whetted by the language, the description and, lastly, the possessions themselves. The plausibility that the stranger could have been a plain soldier, a thief, even, is equally valid. But usually where the feeling is personal, the persons immediately involved tend to take a positive stand in favor of the incident.

Finally, the story's interest is maintained on the basis of the reader's familiarity with the historical period and the events behind it: Charles I, his execution, his Queen, the Revolution, Cromwell's rule, the Restoration of Charles II, the dispute between James I and Monmouth, and the intrigue it entailed. Such as it is, this little story is a

clever anecdote, which, in the guise of a historical footnote, blends well with Hardy's fictive imagination.

On another level, the tale connects Wessex to the larger realm of English history through a specific historical incident in a family's heritage.[27] Hardy does this frequently in his novels--connecting the larger stream of English history to some particular occurrence in an individual's or a series of individuals' lives.[28]

"A Mere Interlude" (ACM) is one of Hardy's longer and better efforts at domestic comedy. Similar in some respects to "The History of the Hardcomes," the plot turns on a momentary incident with ironic consequences. But the complications attending the heroine's situation are more intriguing than those affecting the characters in "The Hardcomes."

This story's heroine, Baptista Trewthen, is also reminiscent of some of Hardy's better known modern ladies, such as Sue Bridehead and Ethelberta Petherwin. She is educated as a school teacher, but despises the profession. She precipitously enters into two marriages within a few days of one another, with the idea of escaping her vocation and to save face; but one marriage ends tragically and the other borders on tragedy.

Baptista, dissatisfied with her life as a teacher,

consents to marry an elderly, rich admirer, David Heddegan. While on her way to fulfill her commitment, she happens to meet an ex-college chum, Charles Stow, also a teacher. Young, lively and impulsive, he declares he had loved her for quite sometime. She likes him, but hesitates at first when he asks her to marry him. Caught up by his exuberance, however, and wanting to escape the drudgery of bearing with an old husband, she marries Stow.

Before going home to convey the news to her family, the couple visit the seashore of Pen-Zepher. While there Stow goes for a swim and is drowned. Baptista, confused, having precariously met, married and lost one husband, decides that circumstances and family expectations are too powerful for her to resist marrying Heddegan. And believing that no one knows of her liaison with Stow, she lets fate take its course.

Her honeymoon, Baptista learns to her dismay, is at Pen-Zepher where her first husband was drowned. She is quartered at the Inn where Stow's body had lain when it was recovered from the sea. While there, she recognizes his hat, left behind in the room after the body has been removed for her occupancy, and is told by the maid that it belonged to "the other gentleman," who is in the room next to her own. By questioning the maid Baptista learns

that the body in the adjoining room is her husband's.

The rather gruesome aspects of this story are mitigated somewhat by the comic by-play between Baptista and the maid, from whom she learns what happened to the remains of Stow after her departure. She feels her position is complicated more as a result of her own involvement with the dead man. Although she tries to get Heddegan to change their lodgings, he cannot do so on such short notice. Thus, Baptista is forced to stay that night lying between two husbands--"Heddegan, on the one hand, and on the other, through the partition," Stow.

After this incident dampens the honeymoon, the newlyweds leave for home. While passing through Pen-Zepher once again, Baptista learns of the funeral for Stow, which she secretly attends.

Some weeks pass and she has almost recovered from her ordeal, when she is seen by an itinerant, who recognizes her as the former Mrs. Stow. In order to keep him silent, and to protect her name, she allows this man to extort money from her. But such deceitfulness bothers her, and she resolves to acquaint her husband with her former marriage. She confesses to him and is surprised by Heddegan's reasonableness and by his forgiveness. It turns out that he too has been somewhat deceitful. He also has been previously

married and has had four children, or "four tragedies," as he refers to them. All daughters, the eldest is as old as Baptista.

When she learns that Heddegan married her principally to save money in the education of his daughters, she nearly faints:

> "O, mercy!" she almost moaned. "Four great girls to teach the rudiments to, and have always in the house with me spelling over their books; and I hate teaching, it kills me. I am bitterly punished--I am, I am!" (p. 303)

She meets the daughters and resigns herself to her fate. In time her feelings change toward them from disgust to a kind of love that comes from habit and acceptance of the inevitable.

The turns in this story are as starkly ironic as any in Hardy's stories, but there is a frankness, too, that favors the almost improbable situation. Its moral outlook is one of human folly and the consequences that follow the indecisive and uncommitted persons in the world.

The tale is told in the manner of those found in "A Few Crusted Characters," that is, the author, as the amanuensis, recounts the tale as given to him by "the traveler in school books." This framing device, used frequently in other stories, aids in distancing the teller from his tale, and gives it individuality and authenticity, as one of Hardy's

"possible occurrences" stories.

As the story develops detail by detail, we come to understand that Baptista's character and not fate is responsible for the fortunes that mark her life. For instance, her marriage to Stow comes about through her lethargy. Her personality complicates her life more by helping to obscure the real motives for marriage to either man in the first place. The circumstances that bring her to Pen-Zepher after her marriage to Heddegan are not so fated as one might be led to believe. Her honeymoon had been prearranged by the scrupulous and wilful businessman, Heddegan. Also, the entrance of the itinerant opportunist who recognizes her after her marriage to Heddegan is again part of Baptista's folly; her inability to accept personal responsibility for her actions takes her deeper into deceit. The fact that she confesses finally to Heddegan about her former husband is a belated effort to avoid unpleasantness, a symptom, more or less, of her lethargic personality.

The real test of her character comes when she must confront the shrewd Heddegan with his own reasons for marriage. This counter-confession not only confounds Baptista, but it makes her travails simultaneously inane and serious. Inane because she has needlessly worried about her position; serious because what she sought to escape came back to haunt her,

namely, the profession of teaching. In other words, Heddegan's reasons for marriage--the education of four nearly grown daughters--were more practical than Baptista's.

This satiric story fits in with Hardy's feelings for Wessex and its inhabitants by addressing another aspect of Wessex folk, rustic ingenuity and miseducation. Heddegan, a comic character with hints of the reformed rake about him is almost charming; and Baptista's youth and purposelessness almost acts as an indictment against education for women. The difference between Baptista and some of her sisters in other Hardy works, such as Tess, Bathsheba, Eustacia, Ann Garland and Grace Melbury, is that Baptista's educated lethargy makes her passively accept conditions as they are.[29] The fact that she grows to like her formerly mischosen career is incidental, since she exercises no initiative to resist her fate. In short, her choice of vocation is limited, and through resignation she finds a use for it in the least sought after fashion--a teaching stepmother.

"The Grave by the Handpost" (ACM) is, according to Firor, one of Hardy's more gruesome tales.[30] This story about an old soldier who, filled with the pride and honor that comes from patriotism, kills himself out of disgrace for what he deems is cowardice in his son is not new in either literary or historical annals. But that the suicide

should be buried unheralded because of the tenets of the church, and also that his body should be defiled by having a stake thrust through it, is, on the surface, rather dour. When his son, guilt-ridden and remorseful, some years later repeats the tragedy by taking his own life in the same manner, the irony appears to be excessive, even for Hardy.

Despite these incidents, however, the story has many things of significance in it that make these details seem less inappropriate than one might expect. We should remember how much Hardy owed to the Romantic-Gothic traditions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[31]

The plot of this story has characteristics found in at least two of the novels. The story-line in "The Grave" is suggestive of that in The Trumpet-Major. Both narratives use the backdrop of the Napoleonic Wars as the historical setting from which the incidents in the respective tales arise. Only in the novel, the general structure has a romantic linkage, wherein two brothers, one a warrior, the other a pacifist, are pitted against one another for the love of a woman. But in "The Grave," the alignment is between father and son, the former a proud, if undistinguished old veteran, living on past glories felt if not actually experienced. The son, genetically a quiet and peaceful person, abhors war and its associations.

With this familiar base, Hardy borrows other structural devices from his bucolic romance, Under the Greenwood Tree, specifically, the rustics making up the Mellstock Choir. Besides the farcical effects these good-natured, almost fairy-like creatures lend the tale, they also relieve the stark violence of the suicides.

The parish parson of Sidlinch village, learning of old Sergeant Holway's suicide, refuses him a Christian burial. The uncoffined body is exiled to a crossroads, a kind of symbolic no-man's land, between his village and that of Chalk-Newton. Presumably, the soul of Holway is damned; thus, a stake is driven through his body. Only a handpost marks the place where it lies.

Since it is Christmas, the minstrels from Chalk-Newton make their annual pilgrimage through the surrounding villages caroling. They come across the gravediggers and learn the circumstances of Holway's death. Out of pity and their sense of common humanity, they sing a carol for the peace of the dead man's soul. Luke Holway, the distraught son, who feels responsible for his father's death, arrives as they are singing. It appears that during a crucial battle his son, instead of fighting, fell ill from his disgust at having been pressured into military service by his father when he would have preferred staying at home living a

peaceful life. The father, therefore, feeling dishonored, killed himself.

Luke enlists the aid of the carolers in seeking permission from the Chalk-Newton parson, a known humanitarian, to give his father a decent Christian burial. But before the arrangements are made, young Holway's regiment is called to fight on the continent. The carolers and the parson, willingly undertake Luke's wishes, but when they learn that the deceased is uncoffined and has a stake through his body, they feel their mission is not worthwhile, and borders on sacrilege. Besides, it is more than likely, they believe, Luke will be killed in battle. So they leave the body alone.

Some years pass and Luke returns a hero. He believes that he has reestablished his family's honor and has vindicated himself in his father's eyes. But he learns that his father's remains have been left undisturbed; that the site of the grave is no longer discernible under the shambles and ruins of the abandoned crossroads.

Thrown into despondency, Luke becomes a recluse, more guilt-ridden than ever over his father's death. Another Christmas arrives, and one morning Luke is found shot through the head. He leaves a note requesting that his body lie next to his father at the Cross by the Handpost. But the

paper is not found until after the funeral, and Luke has been interred in the Chalk-Newton churchyard.

Besides the usual ironies that distinguish Hardy's stories, this story, as in "Two Ambitions," also shows another instance of Hardy's ambivalence toward religion. Luke's burial as a Christian, in contrast to that of his father's, suggests the inherent conflict within the Wessex society between primitive customs, in which superstition dictates how suicides are treated, and Christian compassion: the two lie uneasily together.

The purpose of the discussion in this chapter was to show a thematic quality that distinguishes a series of Hardy's stories. It is important to note, however, that in this discussion of the macabre, inscrutable and strange, Hardy's overall intention is not to enthrall his readers or to frighten them in the way of an Edgar Allen Poe. Those elements in them relative to the gothic are not included primarily for their shock value; but they represent, first, a part of the structural components of the narratives, and second, they reflect the Wessex folk world itself. As Scott says in his discussion of Hardy's use of gothic elements in his stories, he avoids the incredible romantic characteristics of the gothic by integrating the more bizarre and exaggerated incidents into the peasantry folk traditions. [32]

For instance, Rhoda Brook's nightmare is a structural part of the story, in that it makes plausible her feelings of frustration, anger and ultimately her guilt in what happens to Gertrude's arm. And the hints given by Conjuror Trendle as to the probable cause of the affliction serve to tie together Rhoda's guilt feelings and Gertrude's sense of inadequacy. The local superstition for curing Gertrude's ailment is predictable because of the folk beliefs embedded in the culture. Consequently, we are not frightened so much as we are sympathetic and understanding about the causes behind the afflictions of the minds and hearts of the two women.

Ella Marchmill is a victim more of the strange and inscrutable than of the macabre. Her overly active imagination and acute sensibilities leave an imprint on her child after she is dead. In life, her husband, as a pragmatist, could accept the idiosyncrasies of his poetic spouse, even if he did not understand her. But her deathbed confession to Marchmill, her erratic behavior that led to her death, and his finding the lock of the dead Trewe's hair among her effects, would naturally convince the literal minded munitions manufacturer that his wife's strange conduct, when she was alive, was not without foundation.

The real contribution to the macabre and the strange, however, is best seen in "The Fiddler of the Reels." With Hardy's masterpiece in poetic juxtaposition of incident and movement, the description of mood, the use of allusion, and the action-reaction of Car'line Aspent to the mysterious and suggestive force of Mop Ollamoor's fiddle and to the dance, the reader becomes as enraptured as Car'line and as bewildered as Ned. That Mop's charismatic personality as reflected through his music is so mesmerizing is due greatly to the inaccessible psychological spirit of the folk tradition among the peasantry--that is, the reader has no sound moral basis on which to explain why what happens in the story does happen.

"What the Shepherd Saw," again, represents a kind of antithetic Christian parable, but one which becomes a part of Wessex folklore. Its bizarre aspects involving murder and deceit stamp it with those characteristics of conscience that mark "The Withered Arm," "Two Ambitions," and other stories. The exception here is that the manner of its handling, specifically the distancing of the actual tale, the separation of its format into four nights, and the use of a shepherd lad as the protagonist, gives it all the elements of a fable instead of a realistic portrayal of Wessex peasantry.

In "To Please His Wife" and "The Waiting Supper," the principals are subject to character weaknesses. Joanna Jolliffe's and Christine Everhard's situations are commensurate only in some respects. Pride, jealousy, ambition, and greed mark their dilemma and affect those closest to them. But while Christine is in no way as selfish or insensitive as Joanna, both women are overly concerned with the image they project to the outside world. Joanna's greed, pride and egocentricity, however, are self-destructive, since they culminate in her progressive mental and spiritual deterioration. Christine, while losing to the world, also, is chastened and made repentant by her experiences. Because of her contrition, she retains the love and companionship of her partner's heart.

Another device Hardy uses in his stories is an interlocutor between reader and narrator. Most of the time this interlocutor is the local historian, who gives us a glimpse into the little anecdotes that are overlooked in history's larger concerns. If recorded at all they are glancing footnotes, and often remain hidden away in some musty registry, as in "Master John Horseleigh, Knight," or are passed on orally from person to person as they touch a particular family, as in "The Duke's Reappearance."

But to the Wessex folk, and to people everywhere conscious of a heritage, these stories, like others such as "Enter a Dragoon" and "A Few Crusted Characters," are told with an ear for the unusual, even as they suggest the possible; for these speakers of the old ways reflect what has been passed down to them, and from which traditions and legends arise. Regardless of the facts attached to the legends, the important point is the human experience itself, and the Wessex folk are inundated with such experiences which are predicated on the deepest human need--the need to survive, to remain wholly part of one's world, one's people.

Notes

[1] The references to Hardy's short stories and novels are taken from the twenty-three volume Pocket Edition of the works published by MacMillan and Co. between 1906 and 1927. Since not all the volumes are numbered, and there is no uniform year of publication, publication information from each volume used will appear in the bibliography. Also, specific stories from the three volumes on which this study is based will be noted in the following manner: WT for Wessex Tales; LLI for Life's Little Ironies; and ACM for A Changed Man.

[2] F. E. Halliday, Thomas Hardy: His Life and Work, remarks on Hardy's fascination with old superstitions, and recounts an experience the author once had with an old man ("a wizard") who brought "toads' legs in small bags to the river bridge [to] sell them as charms to hang round the neck as a cure for scrofula." Halliday also explains that, as an old folk belief, the "touch" of the king was once considered to "cure this 'King's Evil,' now it was the twitch of a toad's leg that gave the blood a 'turn' [even] as the touch of a hanged-man's neck healed a withered limb" (p. 114).

Ruth Firor, Folkways in Thomas Hardy (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1931), explains that "Hardy's conjurors, Fall, Trendle and Mynterne of Owlscombe, are professional mediators between supernatural powers and men, practitioners of the arts of divination, folk medicine, and magic in a way approved, though not openly countenanced, by the community in which they live" (pp. 86-8).

[3] George Wing, Thomas Hardy: Critical Writers Series (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966), says that the story succeeds, despite the high "improbabilities," because "we are left in a state of conjecture and apprehensive speculation" (p. 24).

Irving Howe, Thomas Hardy, acknowledges the significance of time and place in the story, where "what may seem to us extraordinary is looked upon with a credulous fatalism, as quite ordinary," but he still thinks that the story "groans with improbability" if read with one's eyes on "conventional realism," even though this story "can be valued as a curious mixture of traditional folk belief and modern hypothesis, assumptions drawn from before and after the enlightenment" (p. 80).

Richard C. Carpenter, Thomas Hardy, explains that "the apparently incredible coincidence in the story seems to be no real coincidence at all; rather, it indicates a supernatural predestination which simply cannot be explained in realistic terms" (pp. 76-7). This comment, at least, allows Hardy his particular "donnée" and permits us to believe that what happens in the story very well could have happened.

James T. Scott, "Thomas Hardy's Use of the Gothic," Nineteenth Century Fiction, XVIII (1962), sees this tale as one where the "horror of Gothic preternaturalism is adeptly balanced by a realistic treatment of character" (363-80).

Ernest Brennecke, Thomas Hardy's Universe (1926; rpt. New York: Russell & Russell, 1966), avoids labelling of the story, and tends to view it from a psychological point of view, more or less as a kind of aberration. He says that the story is an example of Hardy's "idealistic viewpoint," that shows his "belief in the supremacy of the mind over bodily conditions." The story therefore shows that the mind is used as the "creative principle underlying all visible phenomena" (p. 19).

[4] Evelyn Hardy, Thomas Hardy: A Critical Biography, is more definite about the story's "psychological subtlety--and dramatic power." She rates it, along with "The Fiddler of the Reels," as one of Hardy's two finest stories (p. 185).

Lascelle Abercrombie, Thomas Hardy: A Critical Study, believes that the story does not represent any "fleeting compound of tragedy." Instead, "the slow and formidable process of this tale" has a series of "movements [that] rush together into a blazing instant and settle in tragic equilibrium" (pp. 45-6).

[5] Firor states that the use of the "corpse-cure" and the "dead hand" was well-known and long used "for various cures well up to 1900 [and] must have suggested the theme of this tale to Hardy: hangmen made a business, for fees, of admitting several persons at a time to the scaffold at the time of execution. Wens and goiters were commonly believed to be curable by the 'dead touch' " (pp. 110-11). See also Halliday, note 2, for more anecdotal information on Hardy's fascination with old superstitions.

[6] Evelyn Hardy feels this story is "the most complex of all Hardy's tales, emotionally, for we have the crisscross [of] relationships," between women attracted in the same way

to the same man, Gertrude through marriage, Rhoda in her illegitimate son by Lodge; yet they are both "drawn to each other despite mistrust and hatred.... The interplay of hatred and attraction, of the unsuspected forces agitating the actors, and of those ironic ones controlling their circumscribed world, are all the stuff of a tragic drama of the highest order" (p. 185). See also note 4.

[7] Howe says that "it is easy to 'translate' the events of this grotesque tale into an acceptable instance of character psychology, but [this can only result in] a distraction from Hardy's boldness of narrative" (p. 80).

[8] Firor notes Hardy's knowledge of folk belief and its affinity with modern medicine. For example, she says, "The theme of the story...is based on a medical hypothesis that is still being debated by physicians, the question of prenatal influence..." (pp. 121-22).

[9] Prefatory Note, Life's Little Ironies, dated May 1912, Hardy says, "Of the following collection the first story, 'An Imaginative Woman,' originally stood in Wessex Tales, but was brought into this volume as being more nearly its place, turning as it does upon a trick of Nature, so to speak, a physical possibility that may attach to a wife of vivid imaginings, as is well known to medical practioners and other observers of such manifestations." See note 8.

[10] F. B. Pinion and Evelyn Hardy, eds., One Rare Fair Woman, note that the Solent Sea where the heroine stops is Southsea. Other comments with respect to the story I find intriguing. For example, the editors say that, "like Mrs. Henniker, she [Ella] is interested in Shelley's poetry...."; that Ella represents "the poet's 'ideal She' as Mrs. Henniker was Hardy's" (p. 38, n. 116). This comment appears more conjectural than documented fact. There is nothing in the story that would necessarily lead one to conclude that Hardy had Shelley in mind in the illusory "Robert Trewe"; indeed, the narrator in the story makes a point of stating that Trewe is a minor poet of "recent" vintage; also, that among "the rank and file" his poetry was "impassioned rather than ingenious, luxuriant rather than finished" and who was "little attracted by excellencies of form and rhythm apart from content...(WT, p.8). These remarks hardly seem to fit Shelley. Also, the only other known reference to the story by Hardy is made in The Life, as a one-line entry: "December: Found and touched up a short story called 'An Imaginative Woman'" (p. 260, in the one volume Archon Books edition, 1970).

[11] Norman Page, "Hardy's Short Stories," Studies in Short Fiction, compares some elements in this story to Jude the Obscure and The Well-Beloved (pp. 75-84). While there is much in what he says about The Well-Beloved, I do not quite see the analogy to Jude. But Ella does have characteristics found in other Hardy heroines, such as Viviette Constantine, Mrs. Charmon, and, to a lesser extent, Elfride Swancourt.

[12] Clive Holland, Thomas Hardy, O.M.: The Man, his Work and the Land of Wessex (London, 1933; rpt. New York: Haskell House, 1966), reacts to the story as it appeared in Harry Quilter's Universal Review [ca. 1888, ref. The Life, p. 213]. He says that, "Here, as in many of his stories, Hardy seizes upon a tragic and sensational idea and works it out to its inevitable end without any incident to lighten the somberness of the main plot." Still, Holland quotes Edmund Gosse's laudatory statement about the story, who "thought it was one of the most dramatic and complete stories Hardy had written" (pp. 213; 215)

Florence Emily Hardy, The Life of Thomas Hardy (London, 1962; rpt. Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1970). Following up on the previous entry, Gosse's remarks are amplified from "among the letters received by Hardy" in 1889. Besides being "one of the most thrilling and most complete stories Hardy had written," Gosse adds that "I walked under the moral burden of it for the remainder of the day.... I am truly happy--being an old faded leaf and disembowelled bloated and wet rag myself--to find your genius ever so fresh and springing" (p. 215).

[13] Edmund Blunden, Thomas Hardy (1942; rpt. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967), finds the story "an exceedingly interesting study in circumstance and character, and reasonably free from the strange involved style which embarrass the novels and clogs many of the minor tales" (p. 205).

[14] Carpenter believes that "Hardy shows how choice leads to untoward results" (Ital. his). He feels that the end of the story is "terrible in its pathos [because] Joanna's pitiful rationalizations, her persistence in a fruitless hope, are pathetically human. It might be argued that she does not deserve to be crushed in this manner for the simple fault of vanity and a desire to best her rival in love, but that is the essence of tragedy as Hardy sees it" (pp. 72-3).

[15] Carpenter says that, "Hardy goes beyond the possible to deal quite frankly with the supernatural, more so than

he does anywhere in the novels.... Hardy does not try to give this tale a rational explanation, except to imply that music in such masterly hands as Mop's has an Orphic influence.... [Overall] Hardy breaks with realistic tradition quite definitely here and gives us a story that belongs with folk tales of witches and warlocks" (p. 76).

Howe considers this story as "one of the great, if barely known, stories in the English language...." In it "Hardy strikes into depths of obsession that he never approaches in his other short fiction.... It is a country tale, but told with severity and sophistication.... Not even in the quiet of Wessex can there be assurance that life will not be disordered or exalted by some intruding power, some obsession bearing possibilities of the unknown. Mop himself is kept at a distance, ominous but unexplained: a demon-lover of country taverns, for whom music and sexuality flow together and the lute of abandon speeds through the scrape of a bow" (pp. 82-3).

[16] Simon Gatrell, "Thomas Hardy and the Dance," Thomas Hardy Year Book, 5 (1975), feels that "the whole story is based upon the magical, even sorcerous power of Mop Ollamoor's fiddle over Car'line Aspent's feet--it is a narrative of the effect of music upon the soul, illustrating Hardy's belief that music inspires the dance and the dance enhances passions.... There is something of the supernatural, of the folk-superstition or -tale in it...Mop... appears without warning and disappears without trace, is alien [and] plays nothing but dance tunes" (pp. 46-7).

Carpenter sees Mop as "a Mephistophelian character like William Dare [in A Laodician], though even more demonic, [who] disappears forever" (p. 76).

Evelyn Hardy feels that the story "is the supreme example in Hardy's work of the malefic power of music, and the only one in which the fiddler, knowing his powers, consciously uses them to destroy his victim.... The mesmeric quality of music is the theme...in which its malefic effects are drawn with mastery" (p. 186).

Douglas Brown, Thomas Hardy, feels that "Hardy achieves his most spectacular and disturbing treatment of [his] narrative imagery. Every detail of the tale makes its metaphorical point.... The tale of the beguilement of the village girl by the demonic fiddler from the alien world is grounded

securely in the traditional music and dance and the social milieu of Stickleford life" (pp. 117-18). See also Howe, note 15.

[17] Evelyn Hardy, in addition to her previous comments on the tale, says that there are "recollections of that emotion which had troubled Hardy when, as a susceptible child, he had danced and wept simultaneously.... The subjection of a person's will, through music, dancing or some other agency, a power allied to witchcraft and necromancy, fascinates Hardy" (p. 186). See also note 16. See Gatrell, note 16; Carpenter and Howe, note 15.

[18] Firor recounts how prevelant such beliefs were--and are to this day--in parts of England. References are made to other works of Hardy's; for example, Jude the Obscure (Part III, Chap. VIII), "where Jude sat alone one night after Sue had gone, as watchers sit on Midsummer Eve, hoping to see the phantom of the Beloved"; and, she adds, in his poem "On a Midsummer's Eve," in Moments of Vision, where specific acknowledgment of this folk belief is used by Hardy as a means of conveying mood and suspense (p. 51).

[19] Evelyn Hardy tells of the belief of the "visibility of the soul of a sleeper who is about to die" in the family in the form of a "miller-moth" or "a miller's soul." While she points out that the superstition dates back to the fourteenth century tale of Havelock the Dane, she does not believe that Hardy necessarily makes use of folk belief to copy from ancient literature, but as a poetic device and in appreciation of folk tradition as he remembered it in Dorset (p. 184).

[20] Firor says that "the system of 'lifeholding had a curious interest for Hardy" from personal associations. "The folk-belief that the signature of a person not yet cold in death is valid in law may be a relic of sympathetic magic" (pp. 250-51).

[21] See Chapters 51 in Tess of the d'Urbervilles and II in The Woodlanders.

[22] Firor vouches for the authenticity of this story, but says in reference to the Horseleigh family's heritage: "The ancient family pedigree of the Cliyffton Horseleighs does not mention this marriage, but an earlier one to the daughter and heiress of Richard Phelipson, of Montislope,

Nether Wessex, who bore him two daughters and a son, who succeeded to the estate." She adds that, "Sir John had indeed two contemporaneous wives, Edith, the second, his only legal one." She also alludes to other more unusual practices that occurred during the reign of Henry VIII: "No doubt the king's headship of the church for a time led men to practice similar but more malicious devices than [bigamy]" (p. 238).

23 "To Mrs. Henniker," 30.6.93, Letter 6, Fair Woman. In this letter Hardy alludes to this story, but not by name: "I have posted to you today the Summer number of the Illustrated [London News, June 12, 1893]--in case you might like to see the story: but don't read it carefully, as it is of the slightest" (p. 9).

24 F. E. Hardy says that apparently the story is one of several accounts on the Swetmans' involvement in the Monmouth Rebellion. The one on which the story is based is reportedly less authentic. The biography is cautious when it says that "certainly a mysterious man did come to Swetman after the battle, but it was generally understood that he was one of Monmouth's defeated officers" (p. 6).

Firor, besides the information mentioned in note 24 and recorded in the story, gives some additional historical information that proves of some interest regarding the forms of punishment administered to the inhabitants who were thought to have sympathies with the Monmouth cause. She states that, "It is small wonder that the memory of this rebellion still lingers in folk-tradition: 328 men of Wilts, Somerset, Devon, Hants, and Dorset were executed as Monmouth sympathizers; and 894 were sent to plantations; one was a relative of Hardy on his mother's side" (p. 298). See also the poem "At Shag's Heath," Human Shows Far Phantasies, which differs considerably in its account from the story.

25 "To Mrs. Henniker," Nov. 29, 1896, Letter 37, Fair Woman. Hardy refers to the story, again without its correct name: "I have a 'tradition' in its [The Saturday Review (London), December 14, 1896] Christmas supplement--quite short. Something like it occurred in my mother's family, who, from time immemorial down to 100-150 years ago, were yeomen in this county farming their own land--which now belongs to Lord Ilchester." A footnote appends information that the Swetman family "lived at Melbury Osmund, north of Melbury Park and House, the home of the Earl of Ilchester" (p. 58, note 187).

"To Mrs. Henniker," June 5: 1918, Letter 138, Fair Woman. In this letter Hardy extends an invitation to Mrs. Henniker to visit Melbury where the "house [is] from which the two sisters of my maternal ancestor [Swetman] ran by the back staircase when pursued up the frontstairs by the King's soldiery in the Monmouth Rebellion" (p. 181).

26 F. E. Hardy, see note 24.

27 See Letters, note 25; also see F. E. Hardy and Firor, note 24.

28 See, for example, The Trumpet-Major and The Dynasts, both of which concern individual soldiers during the Napoleonic Wars.

29 Albert J. Guerard, "The Women of the Novels," Hardy: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Albert J. Guerard (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), remarks that, "With luck as commonplace as her own character was commonplace, Baptista Trewthen...might have drifted through the most uneventful of cloistered lives. As it is, her indifferent drifting character provokes one of Hardy's finest comedies" (pp. 68-9).

30 Firor comments that in this story Hardy "introduces us to a new kind of ghost," which is not introduced "in person, but indirectly--the malicious, dangerous physical ghost of the suicide buried at the crossroads with a stake through his body. The story is as gruesome as anything in Hardy" (p. 62). A curious side reference, I have found, occurs in Byron's "Preface to Cantos VI, VII, and VIII" to Don Juan. It is likely that Hardy knew of this allusion, since he was quite familiar with Byron's works. The allusion is in the third paragraph of the "Preface," and has reference to the manner in which Lord Castlereigh, Britain's Minister of War and Foreign Secretary during the Napoleonic Wars, died, as a suicide, in 1822. Byron comments: "Of the manner of his death little need be said, except that if a poor radical, such as Waddington or Watson, [the first, a defender of the French Revolution; the second, tried for treason against the government], had cut his throat, he would have been buried in a cross-road, with the usual appurtenances of the stake and mallet" Byron: Poetical Works, ed. Frederick Page and John Jump, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 730.

[31] James T. Scott says that Hardy's "minor fiction and tales are the chief examples of gothic elements of the preternatural, the terrible and the grotesque.... Preternaturalism of gothic fiction ranges from forthright diabolism and witchcraft to subtle manipulation of legends and tales which merely hint at the sorcery of dark powers." Hardy's "spectres and fiends...lose their odor of infernal brimstone and acquire the manners and gestures of the Wessex peasantry [and] provide the groundless fancies of Gothic romance with a credible basis in regional custom and belief" (p. 370). See Scott, note 2.

[32] Scott, see note 31.

Chapter III - Romantic Triangles

The love triangle is an old device that serves Hardy on an elementary level--as a means of contrast. The central figure, the woman in most cases, is placed in the position of choosing between two admirers. In Hardy, the choice for reasons of dramatic effect or to indicate some moral purpose is usually the wrong one, which, generally, ends catastrophically.

But the triangular device as contrast is not utilized by Hardy entirely in such a simple way. He also concentrates on the emotional conflicts that reverberate outside the characters themselves and which effect the stability and well-being of others. Even on those few occasions when the man is the focal point, caught between two women, it is usually the woman's caprices which ordain the outcome. Yet underlying much of the suffering of both sexes, one recognizes a kind of insensitivity on the part of the man who shares culpability for the way things turn out.

For example, in two stories whose plots are somewhat similar, but where Hardy projects different effects, the catalytic agent is a man. In "Fiddler of the Reels" and in "Enter a Dragoon," the central figures are women,

Car'line Aspent and Selina Paddock, respectively. Both women are native to Wessex and are sensitive and susceptible to flare, flash and exhibitionism that constitute excitement to them. The men who cause these volatile feelings to erupt are both rootless and fascinating to the young country girls. Mop Ollamoor, the mesmerizing fiddler, and Sergeant-Major Clark, the profligate soldier, are free spirits, whose care-free exuberance and strange presence awaken in the girls dormant passions over which they have no control.

At the other pole of these triangular relationships are two staid unimaginative men of the country, Ned Hipcroft and Mr. Miller. It is characteristic in fiction that women often find the rascals, villains and seducers exciting or, at least, intriguing. The steadfast, honest, hardworking and decent men are bland and dull. Hipcroft and Miller are no exceptions. They cannot compete with the likes of a Mop Ollamoor and Sergeant-Major Clark for the women of their choice; but each must wait until the infatuation or the fascination with such men subsides or ends, or they must take what is left as second best.

Hardy's handling of each story goes in two directions. Ned suffers in silence, as Car'line's inexplicable emotion for a spectral will o' the wisp, such as Ollamoor, haunts

her, presumably, for years after he disappears from the scene. For Miller, the waiting for Selina is conditional, since he finds that she is determined to reject him for the memory of her dead lover. He is practical, even good-humored about the situation, and soon finds himself another woman.

The fact that Mop disappears and that Sergeant-Major Clark dies, however, is not the crucial issue of either story. Car'line and Selina remain the focal points. Both women, while sympathetically presented, are, like Eve, only more awkwardly, in the tradition of tempters for men. Looked at from another angle, however, Car'line and Selina can be seen as victims of society and its traditions that foster images of women as prizes which the dominant male seeks to possess. The men always count for something. Either they are patient and able providers, as Ned and Miller are, one a sober mechanic, the other a successful wheelwright; or, they are like Ollamoor and Sergeant-Major Clark, the one an itinerant musician and entertainer (or artist), the other a soldier. But the women are only country maids, passionate and longing, responsible to and for the man. [1]

The man, in youth, has two important reasons for wanting a woman: to mate and produce children, preferably male; or, to amuse or comfort them. Needless to say, this attitude toward women, directly or indirectly accepted by both sexes,

is a fundamental one in the primitive Wessex that Hardy loved, and for Victorian society, in general.[2] Yet a part of the ambiguity in Hardy suggests also both the fascination and a sense of the enigmatic he shows toward his central female characters, as in Car'line and Selina.[3] Deep within each is an unconscious restlessness, a wanting to be and to do something other than remain country girls or become wives. The pent-up emotions in Car'line and the hungry desire in Selina to become more than a wheelwright's wife is a recognition on Hardy's part that there is some cause for women's discontent.

Many of Hardy's women, regardless of their level of intelligence, are inarticulate with respect to their plight. Because the traditions and customs of many ages cannot be immediately overthrown to modify their ignorance, these women must suffer the pains of incomprehensible guilt, as if they were eternal Earth Mothers. Some resign themselves to their lot, as presumably Car'line and Selina do; others, such as Ella Marchmill, in "An Imaginative Woman," die from frustrated longings to be more than what they are; or, like Joanna Jolliffe, in "To Please His Wife," they are driven insane by guilt and their own misplaced and misunderstood ambition.

Among these stories concerned with triangular relationships, there is one wherein Hardy complicates the involvements between sets of characters. "Fellow Townsmen" (WT) uses the basic device of the male centered between two females. Except for the shift of focus, the woman, Lucy Saville, a soldier's penniless daughter, is potentially far more interesting than the man, Barnet, a wealthy flax merchant, who functions more or less as an active cynosure of respectability.[4] Hardy adds an additional male, Downe, a lawyer, whose role as rival contrasts with the main protagonist. But Downe lacks the capacity to endure prolonged suffering. Both men, however, are worthy in their way. Both count for something in society. What makes Barnet more worthy is his stoical acceptance of his fate, his courage in facing losses that his lesser rival cannot accept. The subsidiary figures are Barnet's socially proud and distant wife, and Mrs. Downe, a gentle caring wife and mother, and Charlson, an unethical and shiftless surgeon.

Another plus for the worthiness of the male is that the two men in "Fellow Townsmen" are friends, a condition that is against women, unless they are positioned as madam and maid. Between Barnet and Downe, whether as rivals or worthy friends, their social conduct is never questioned.

Barnet has married his well-to-do London wife, and has brought her back to live in Port Bredy. She is extravagant, cold and selfish. Downe, in contrast, has a happy wife and family. Lucy Saville, the young woman whom Barnet has rejected for his socially prominent wife, and whom he visits occasionally, struggles alone in her small home teaching and painting pictures for a living. Charlson, a corrupt physician, in debt to Barnet, knows of his benefactor's visits to Lucy. His sly, half-suggestive efforts to insinuate a covert liaison between the two former lovers is disdained by Barnet.

Downe, aware of Barnet's unhappiness, suggests, in an effort to improve relations between his friend and his wife, that the easy and open pleasantries of his own spouse might be helpful by offering Mrs. Barnet a woman's friendship. Barnet reluctantly agrees; he feels, though, such a step is pointless, given his wife's extreme haughtiness.

The two ladies take a boat out to sea. There is a storm and the boat capsizes. Mrs. Downe is drowned. Mrs. Barnet, a spark of life still within her, is left for dead by the unscrupulous Charlson, as a means, first, of repaying his debt to Barnet, and, second, to relieve his benefactor of the burden of a loveless marriage. Barnet is tempted, but his better nature triumphs, and through remedies passed down in his family for drowning victims, he saves his wife's

life.

Meanwhile, Downe is so prostrate at his wife's death that Barnet exercises great energy to console him. Mrs. Barnet, on the other hand, revives fully, and after some stringent disagreements with her husband, she leaves their home and goes to London to reside with her relatives. Barnet seizes what opportunity this separation affords him to see Lucy. She tells him she intends to leave Port Bredy to go to live in India where she has a brother. He tries to prevent her leaving by asking his now sullen friend Downe to take Lucy on as his housewoman and as tutor to his children. Downe agrees and Lucy accepts, although without the knowledge that Barnet has been instrumental in her new situation.

Barnet accidentally, and briefly, meets Lucy with the Downe children at the half-finished new house his wife had wanted built to gratify her vanity. He learns that she and Downe are compatible in their working relationship. Several months pass; his wife does not return. More months pass, and Barnet receives two letters of conflicting importance. One comes from London notifying him that his wife has died. His joy is short-lived, for the other letter is from Downe announcing his marriage to Lucy that very morning, and asking him to attend the wedding as a personal gesture to

them both. Gripped by the irony of the situation, tormented by the fact that he returned his wife to life, he now realizes that he has lost Lucy irrevocably. Nevertheless, Barnet attends the wedding of his two friends. Shortly thereafter he leaves Port Bredy.

Some twenty years later, after touring and living about in various places of the world, he returns home. Downe is dead. His children are married and living away from home. The house which formerly symbolized extravagance and sadness has been the home of Downe and his family. It is now solely occupied by Lucy, his widow.

Barnet calls on her. He proposes marriage to her since nothing stands in their way. Lucy is, at first, flattered, but rejects him. He resigns himself to her refusal and leaves. She, left to her thoughts, is impressed by his urbanity, his distinguished and gentlemanly bearing. This view of her old lover revives her youthful interest in him. She regrets her refusal of him. When he fails to call again, she inquires after him. She learns that he has left his hotel with a cursory promise of returning in a couple of days. But he never does. Lucy too has missed her chance to escape loneliness.

This story, in some respects similar to "The Waiting Supper," must be ranked among Hardy's finest. Its tight

narrative, although unrelieved with any humorous touches, is carefully structured around several incidents and events. The triangular base of the three principals, Barnet, Downe and Lucy, typifies the usual Victorian problem, the unhappy marriage.

The structural device of juxtaposing contrary circumstances (as only Hardy can do it?) is done well. But again a heavy burden is placed on the woman in the relationships. Mrs. Barnet's life is saved, although the impression is that she deserved to die to free the worthy man for the one woman he loved. The first Mrs. Downe dies, although she deserved to live because of her decency and homely virtues. The fact that Lucy marries Downe is not a guarantee that their married life was happy. The focus is on Barnet, whose circumstances are more cruelly judged and whose singular quest for happiness is denied--notwithstanding the fact that had he married Lucy, their life together would not have guaranteed happiness, either.

The picture, then, in this triangular relationship--and, indeed, in most but not all of the stories between men and women and their loves--is that the man, severely judged because of his choice in women, is made to suffer unduly. If the woman--in this case, Mrs. Barnet--had been less selfish and more temperate in her tastes, Barnet would have

faired well enough. If Lucy, especially when a second chance in later years to marry Barnet had presented itself, had been less smug and more compassionate in her feelings for Barnet's years' long penance for his earlier mistake, she could have found some comfort in her twilight years.

The method Hardy employs in "Alicia's Diary" (ACM) is epistolary, and the single point of view is that of a young lady, whose sisterly concern for her sibling, and devotion to her family, shows a clever but not wholly successful effort to depict self-delusion.

In this story, the importunate narrator, Alicia, alleges having common sense and judgment on behalf of both her family and, particularly, the innocence of her sister Caroline. When she learns that Caroline, visiting Paris with her mother, has met and fallen in love with Charles La Feste, a French landscape painter, she feels neglected but hastens to subdue her resentment under the guise of tolerance.

Wedding plans are postponed when their mother becomes ill and dies. Alicia feels that now she will have a chance to scrutinize La Feste. A photograph sent of him by her sister impresses Alicia. Caroline, now home, grows anxious about her engagement, as La Feste has been detained in France for business reasons.

When he does arrive, Alicia admires his looks and manners,

and soon comes to like the artist seriously. La Feste, equally impressed with her apparent knowledge and sophistication, declares his love for her. He feels now that he cannot marry Caroline. He goes away to consider what he should do. Meanwhile, Caroline, not hearing from him for months begins to pine away. Fearing for her sister's life, Alicia writes to La Feste imploring him to return and to go through with the marriage as a comfort to her sister,

He does return but consents to the marriage only if it is not real, since, if official, and Caroline should die, he would be forbidden by English law to marry Alicia. Deep concern for her sister causes Alicia to "struggle between duty and selfishness," and she concedes to a mock marriage. La Feste, however, sets three stipulations: 1) if Caroline should die in any event, Alicia would marry him a year following her sister's death; (2) should Caroline survive, he would tell her how and why their seeming marriage was made, and should she agree to it, he would solemnize the true wedding between them; (3) should she turn against him because of the subterfuge, he would leave England and Alicia would join him. Alicia accepts each of the conditions.

La Feste and Caroline are married by a student curate, who feels that the extraordinary circumstances warrant this act of charity. After the ceremony, La Feste leaves and is

not heard from. At first, Caroline, believing herself truly married, is overjoyed, and recovers from her illness. But after several months she is mystified and alarmed by her "husband's" disappearance. Her letters to him go unanswered. So she departs for the continent to find him.

The father, thinking that La Feste's abandonment of his daughter is insulting and dishonorable, goes after her, accompanied, of course, by Alicia. They track the girl to Venice, where Alicia finds her sister in a hotel room. In an effort both to clear her conscience and to help ease her sister's delusion about her status, Alicia confesses to her the whole affair and the reasons behind it. Angry and mortified by the deception, Caroline and her father prepare to return home. Alicia finds La Feste and tells him what has happened. Reluctantly, he speaks to Caroline. But the injured girl and her father rebuff him. He returns to Alicia and tells her that he has overheard her exchange with Caroline from the adjoining room in the hotel. He then asks her to be his wife now that the truth is known. Alicia, in a gesture of righteous humility, says he must first see if Caroline will not still have him. If she agrees, he must marry her in earnest and forget Alicia.

La Feste, cognizant of the ironic turn of fate in the proposal, says nobly, "honor shall be my word, and not my love" (p. 124).

Returning to England, Caroline and La Feste solemnize their marriage. Following the ceremony, Charles disappears, and several months later his body is found at the bottom of the weir. For a time Caroline is distraught, but she does not have a relapse. Instead, she accepts the common belief that La Feste has been drowned accidentally. Alicia, however, remembering La Feste's words to her before the wedding concerning honor, not love, believes otherwise. Five years later, Caroline has married the since ordained curate, who participated in the original mock marriage ceremony. And Alicia has resigned herself to the inevitable, a penitential spinsterhood.

Alicia's efforts to appear as if she is above the events reflects Hardy's own insight into the psyche of women. We learn much about Alicia from what is left out of her diary: her egocentricity, her coquettishness, her jealousy and her guile. The shallowness of her nobility and the callousness of her handling of La Feste's love for her tell more about her own failings as a person. She certainly never loved; but she sought to control.

It is not doubted that Alicia's allegiance to duty came before love. But her greatest goal was a kind of sainthood or martyrdom in the face of temptations. In a way, Alicia represents the female counterpart of the male charlatan; her

myopic view of society and the hypocritical role she plays in it are predicated on personal conceit masked as noble intentions, altruism and self-sacrifice.

A comment must be made on the manner of the story's presentation. So far as it goes, this appears to be Hardy's single effort in the epistolary method. As a palpable reminder of Smollet and Richardson, it lacks the poignancy of their work. Imitations of Smollet's satire, those satirical elements that exist in this story, are forced. The one major point that could be made in its favor (and as a possible acknowledgment of Richardson's work) is that Hardy makes a concession to the old Wessex gentry. But unfortunately what evolves from this experiment is a kind of commonplace, if psychologically ambiguous, tour de force. It detracts and mocks the composite picture and genuineness of the real down-to-earth Wessex folk.

While tangentially a part of the Wessex world, the continental flavor injected into the story's latter half gives it a semblance of having been composed by two separate hands. The basic story-line is typical Hardy--that of an easily impressionable girl, Caroline, who falls in love with a Frenchman, La Feste. This is already a thinly disguised plot outline of "Fiddler of the Reels," and hints of the similar plot-line we have seen used in "Enter a Dragoon."

The story, nevertheless, is well written, on the whole. But its insular point of view, suggested by its frame, loses a sense of continuity one gets in the usual narrative form. Those elements in it that would seem to benefit from development are fragmented in an episodic fashion--the dated letters function as running commentary but appear disjointed and hurried. The weakest structural area is in the long continental section, where dramatic depictions are reminiscent of documentary or travelogue. The digressions, meant to extend the suspense for the reader, tend rather to weaken the cohesive effectiveness of the story.

As an unsuccessful experiment in a kind of high, if parochial, comedy, one must concede that Hardy did well to abandon it. As an experiment in form, however, it does demonstrate Hardy's narrative versatility.

Two stories set against a military background are "The Melancholy Hussar" (LLI) and "A Changed Man" (ACM).[5] The central figures in each triangular situation are women, but the focus in "The Melancholy Hussar" is on the woman; in "A Changed Man," it is on the man. The relationship between Phyllis Grove and Matthäus Tina in "Hussar" is classical in its premise. The young lovers, foreign to one another, are two lonely people caught in the conflicting web of their personal emotions and between duty and social responsibility.

They are truly victims of circumstances beyond their control.

Phyllis Grove, a young woman isolated in the backwoods of a Wessex hamlet, living alone with her father, a failed doctor, is without any hope of mitigating her boredom. The only prospect opened to her comes in the person of one Humphrey Gould, a thirty-ish bachelor, "an approximately fashionable man of a mild type" (p. 154). Her father approves of the match between Gould and his daughter, although the girl feels nothing for the man. Because of his own impecunious state, Gould postpones setting a date for their marriage and leaves the county for Bath. He promises to return in several weeks, but stays away indefinitely.

Not long after Gould's leaving, a troop of York Hussars, a regiment of the King's German mercenaries, comes to encamp on the surrounding downs. Phyllis, like Selina Paddock, is dazzled by the magnificently uniformed soldiers. One day, perched atop her garden wall, she sees a "fine, tall soldier" approaching her, steeped in thought. She is impressed by his melancholy look. They catch each other's eye, but say nothing. Several days later, she and Matthäus Tina meet. She learns of his background, how he hates the army, how he misses both his mother and his homeland.

They fall in love, and out of desperation, Tina talks Phyllis into going back to Saarsbruck, his home, with him,

as he and a friend intend to desert the Hussars. Her father, hearing rumors of this attachment to the young Hussar, threatens to banish her to a distant aunt's. This action by her father determines the girl to meet her lover and to run off with him.

On the night she stands waiting near the road for Tina to fetch her, a coach stops, and she hears the voice of Gould, who has returned precipitously. Feeling guilty, thinking that she has been unjust to Gould whom she feels now has obviously returned to honor his commitment to her, she refuses to run off with Tina. Although she declares her love for him, she must honor her betrothal. Unable to persuade Tina to abandon his scheme of desertion, which, for the sake of his friend, he must see through, the lovers part never to meet again.

Gould, actually, has come back to tell Phyllis that he is already married, and hopes to enlist her aid to smooth the future difficulties which this disappointing announcement will have on their respective parents. Phyllis is surprised, but not unhappy at the change in her situation. She has never loved Gould, and regrets that she has not gone with Tina after all.

Tina, his friend, and two other deserters, are captured. Pleading on behalf of the other two defectors, Tina and his friend alone are executed. Phyllis witnesses these shootings

from atop her garden wall. They are buried in the local churchyard, and she attends their graves until her own death many years later, when she is buried beside them.

This story, tenderly tragic, lacks the sexual conflict that occurs in the others. As a love story, it is successful, in that the two lovers speak with the language of the heart and soul, rather than of the tongue. Neither Phyllis nor Tina is selfish. They are innocents caught up in a system marked by social and traditional priorities. Phyllis is dependent upon an embittered iconoclastic father, who has the power to will his daughter's life, whether in marriage or otherwise. Tina, a young German, impressed into the service of a foreign army in defense of a foreign king, is at the mercy of the military code which of necessity must crush the exclusive hopes of any individual for the overall discipline and efficiency of the fighting unit.

Even Humphrey Gould is unusually exempt by Hardy from any scathing remarks, since his situation as idling bachelor and social gadfly appears to be in open protest against his family's more conventional desires. Although he comes back to Phyllis to confess his marriage to another woman, an act that seems callous, it might also be viewed as honorable on Gould's part, whether initiated by guilt or some other motive.

Gould, following in the steps of Hardy's practical men, realizes that the marriage of a penniless man to an equally penniless woman--where there is not the least benefit of love--is a fatal move for them both. Indeed, there is pathos in his confession to Phyllis that begs for compassion on the reader's part, considering Phyllis's own disinterest at the outcome:

> "...[Y]es, I have privately married a dear young belle; and if you knew her, and I hope you will, you would say everything in her praise. But she is not quite the one that my father would have chose for me--you know the paternal idea as well as I--and I have kept it secret. There will be a terrible noise, no doubt; but I think that with your help I may get over it. If you would only do me this good turn--when I have told my father, I mean--say that you never could have married me, you know, or something of that sort--'pon my life it will help to smooth the way vastly. I am so anxious to win him round to my point of view, and not to cause any estrangement." (p. 171)

There is, also, an attack in this seemingly slight story on two fronts that speaks out for the noble actions of both Phyllis and Tina. One attack appears to be on enforced relationships that do not consider the feelings of those persons directly affected; the other has to do with the inhuman spiriting of young men during this period into military service against their will, a contradictory practice in its barbarity when one thinks of the glories heaped upon individuals, regiments and armies in war.

On another level, Hardy gives us a poignant picture of human relationships that outwardly cannot withstand the imposed artifices of society and traditions which condemn one to the tyranny of another, as Phyllis and Gould must bend to the wills of their families and Tina to the military. Still their spirits remain unbroken. This we see in Phyllis's resolve to renounce her lover and to suffer the consequences of her fate in years of loneliness; and in Tina's noble actions, the actions of a pacifist and a brave soldier, not those of a coward, as his desertion is branded by the military.

In "A Changed Man," the situation between the sexes reverts to what usually occurs in Hardy's love relationships. The principals, Captain Jack (later Reverend John) Maumbry and his wife Laura, are the couple in conflict. The conflict stems from the personalities of the two, although external circumstance plays its part. In the latter instance, the third participant, less significant than is usual for a soldier-lover, is a Lieutenant Vannicock.

Jack Maumbry, of the King's Hussars, is, along with his troop, quartered outside of Casterbridge. Maumbry is a dashing, lively and eligible soldier, the type that appeals to and shares in the favors of the local young women. We learn that the handsome captain has fallen under the spell of a

beautiful young lady, Laura. It is not long before they are married.

There comes to town a young pastor, a Mr. Sainway, who halts band playing on Sundays because it disrupts services and blasphemes against the sober forms of Christian tenets. Laura, informed by her husband of this restriction by the parson, is outraged that such infringements on the public spirit should occur: "Why, it is the one thing that enables the few rational beings hereabouts to keep alive from Saturday to Monday!" she exclaims (p. 10).

Shortly, Maumbry informs his wife that he has since made the acquaintance of Sainway and finds him a reasonable fellow. Indeed, he makes frequent visits to the church and listens to the "preaching of the gentle if narrow-minded curate" (p. 11). Eventually, Sainway is called away to another church, and, during an extremely bad winter, he becomes ill and dies.

This event marks the turn in Maumbry's and Laura's life. Grieved and penitent, Maumbry confesses to his wife that he no longer wishes to remain a soldier; instead, he will devote his life to the church, exchanging, therefore, the military uniform for that of the church. His wife is appalled, and

refuses to accept this complete reversal of her hopes and dreams. But the former dashing soldier, skilled in his trade, becomes Reverend John Maumbry, a drab and somber preacher.

The following months see Casterbridge hit by the ravages of a cholera epidemic. Maumbry gives himself indefatigably to the alleviation of the afflicted and to the fight against the disease. To protect his wife, he sends her to the shore near Budmouth Regis, which is separated from the plagued region by a valley with a high ridge. It is while languishing at the shore alone that Laura meets and develops a relationship with a young officer, Lieutenant Vannicock.

When she sees her husband, she tells him that the people of Budmouth want to do something to help relieve the suffering. To do this they are going to put on a benefit dramatic performance. Maumbry dislikes the idea; he feels it mocks the seriousness of what is occurring in the hopeless environs of Casterbridge. But she insists and he says no more about it. The performance takes place, and stars Laura and Vannicock as lovers.

Laura, displeased with her husband's new lifestyle, agrees to run off with Vannicock. She writes her husband and tells him why she can no longer endure her life as the wife of a dull if dedicated parson.

On their way Laura and Vannicock notice a "lurid glare,"

and surmise that it comes from where Maumbry is fighting the plague. Following it, they find her husband furiously boiling clothing in a huge kettle. Laura, affected by the weary aspect of Maumbry's face, decides against leaving that evening. She offers to help him. Maumbry is annoyed, but noticing Vannicock beside her, he accepts the Lieutenant's excuse for being there. They help him complete his dreary task. At its completion Maumbry himself falls ill. He is carried home in the fly which was to take Laura and Vannicock away. Later, he dies from the disease.

Now free, Laura goes back to the shore. When Vannicock returns her forgotten articles left at the scene on the ridge, neither of them is anxious anymore to marry. The excitement of their former liaison is gone; between them hovers the shadow of Maumbry.

In both "The Melancholy Hussar" and "A Changed Man," the triangular relationships are less complicated than in several of the previous stories discussed in this section. For example, the third parties, as in the case of Gould and Lieutenant Vannicock, function more as narrative foils than as substantive characters, as is the case with Ned Hipcroft in "The Fiddler of the Reels" or Downe in "Fellow Townsmen." But the emphasis is placed on the worthiness of the male, whose good judgment and sense of duty is interfered with by the

temptations that women present. This last, however, is not so much the situation with Phyllis Grove, Mattähus Tina and Gould, as it is with Maumbry, Laura and Vannicock.

Phyllis's actions are not directly responsible for Tina's. It is more than likely that Tina would have tried to desert his regiment whether or not he had met Phyllis, since his depression arose from exterior circumstances. But whether in agreement or not with her decision, one admires Phyllis for refusing to run away with Tina. Laura's change of heart, on the other hand, at the sight of her feverishly overworked husband, while commendable, is less acceptable. She continues to be self-centered to the end. The note she has written informing her husband of her intention to run away with Vannicock is not destroyed; instead, it is, symbolically, if somewhat mockingly, placed in Maumbry's coffin--as if to advise him that she will not die with him. True, some observers might see this action of Laura's as burying her secret with her husband; but even the aftermath of that does not free Laura from her obligation to him. She has been unfaithful to him in life. His death, ironically, keeps her faithful to him still.

From different perspectives one might see Hardy as being critical of both Maumbry and Laura. Maumbry's original profession, the military, is a reputable one; its ultimate goal

is, however, the way of death. But Laura's view of military life has nothing to do with death: she is a soldier's girl and likes the gaiety normally associated with the soldier's life--the band playing, the marching and the uniform. When Maumbry exchanges his glorious uniform for the drabness of parson black, he has, in effect, acted as a deceiver. Laura therefore has every right to feel outraged. Conversely, as Maumbry's wife, he has the right to expect her to accept his new way of life. She sees, too late, that Maumbry's bravery in the face of disease and pestilence is no less enhanced than it would have been facing the guns of war. And his death from wounds essentially as mortal as those by gunshot forces her to feel moral guilt, from which she suffers in lonely repentance.

One of Hardy's more remarkable love triangles is illustrated in the excellent story "On the Western Circuit" (LLI). It is a story of guile and guilelessness. Again, the women, Edith Harnham and Anna, must bear the wounds of neglect and cunning deceit: the former at the hands of a dispassionate unimaginative husband, and the latter at the hands of a sexual adventurer.

This story is similar in its contrasting elements, particularly in the setting, to "Fiddler of the Reels," with its carnival-like display that simulates sensual excitement.

It does not, however, quite carry the objective and spiraling majesty of the marvelous rhythmic interactions of Mop Ollamoor's silent command over Car'line Aspent. But it is not meant to convey that kind of power.

Using the merry-go-round of a visiting fair, an intrusion of mechanical wizardry and seduction in the small but pivotal mid-Wessex city of Melchester, as an invitation for adventure, Hardy sets his scene for a drama of conflicting emotions. In Edith Harnham, a lonely winemerchant's wife, we are reminded of Ella Marchmill in "An Imaginative Woman." Like Ella, Edith is highly impressionable. And while she is more sophisticated and articulate in unburdening her inner feelings, this does not mean that she is any more cognizant of her deeper frustrations than was Ella. But where Ella desired fulfillment as an artist, Edith craves fulfillment as a woman. Her husband, like Marchmill toward Ella, is distant. Yet Edith can express her feelings in a way that Ella could not; she has a medium in the person of Anna, her maid. Anna, however, the illiterate dupe to both Edith and to her seducer, Charles Bradford Raye, cannot express her buried emotions. It is Edith Harnham, then, on whom the real pathos falls in this domestic tragedy, although Raye and Anna will also suffer unduly.

Anna, as the catalyst, is without any education at all.

She feels her way through life. Brought up in a back county of Wessex by an old aunt equally ignorant, she displays innocence, beauty and a natural vivaciousness. Edith recognizes in the unspoiled Anna the uninhibited zest for life which has not been stamped out of her by the conventions of society, such as social breeding, education and the right marriage for security instead of for love. But Anna's physical attributes enflame Charles Raye's youthful hot blood, as he watches her form melding with the up and down movements of the merry-go-round--itself propelled by flaming engines: "He had never seen a fairer product of nature, and at each round [of the merry-go round] she made a deeper mark in his sentiments" (p. 92). And after conversing with her a short time he knows that she is "unreserved--too unreserved--by nature" (p. 93). Raye also knows that he has scored; Anna will be his prize, his conquest.

Edith languishing at home, witnesses the excitement of the fair from her window. Somewhat piqued at her own bored state, and after learning that her husband has seen Anna in the company of a young man, she sets out to meet them. They meet. She and the young people become enmeshed in the crowd. So close are they pressed together that Edith is thrilled by the inadvertent touch of Raye's hand on her own, an act of lovemaking which he intended for Anna. Thus, the initial act of deceit, however unintentional, is committed.

Edith, curious and impressed by Raye's looks and apparent gallantry, follows the couple home and notices that they disappear into the shadows. Upon questioning Anna, she learns what has passed between them. Anna has kissed Raye as an innocent act of gratitude; for as she tells Edith, Raye says that it would "do her no harm and him a great deal of good" (p. 98). Edith, remembering "a magic in his wooing touch of her hand," feels jealous of the lovers. She cannot believe that such an ignorant girl can "capture" a suave-looking young man as Raye. The fact that it is Raye who puts himself into Anna's way never enters her mind.

Charles Bradford Raye is described as an "end-of-the-age young man" by Hardy, somewhat in the mold of Ollamoor, but without his mystical qualities. His attractiveness to Edith has as much to do with his being unattached and, therefore, seemingly free, as it has to do with his handsomeness. Edith, like Anna, is described as "impressionable," even though she is between the ages of twenty-eight and thirty. The unrealized romantic feelings normally associated with youth have lain fallow in Edith for reasons mentioned earlier. Her restlessness and emotional immaturity make her seem as unsophisticated as Anna.

After several clandestine liaisons with Anna, Charles leaves her, remorseful that he has taken advantage of her

innocence. In London, now, he thinks of her and wonders why she does not write. He writes to her asking her to do the same. Soon he receives the "most charming little missive he had ever received from woman" (p. 103).

By now the deceptions are well advanced, for Raye, having deceived Anna in his attentions and by concealing his full name, is, in turn, deceived by the return note which, unknown to him, has been written for her by Edith.

In time Anna becomes pregnant. She wants Raye to come back to marry her but does not know how to relate this information to him. Her mistress, seizing the opportunity to serve two causes, her own and Anna's, consents to help the girl. For Edith, again like Ella Marchmill, realizes that "she had become possessed to the bottom of her soul with the image of a man to whom she was hardly so much as a name" (p. 108).

Anna's condition makes it necessary that she leave Edith's home, although Edith will continue to intercede on Anna's behalf with Charles in future correspondence. She finds herself writing to Raye not the thoughts and feelings of Anna, but those of her own heart. She is described as being in "the ecstacy of fancy" (p. 111).

Raye, "though selfish, and, superficially at least, infested with the self-indulgent vices of artificial society," possesses "a substratum of honesty and fairness" (p. 112).

He has second thoughts about the wronged girl. Believing her well-educated and "bright in ideas," one who "expresses herself with a taste that must be innate," he decides he can do no less than marry her. Anna is pleased when she learns of this. But Edith laments that Anna could never appreciate Raye, and wishes it were she who was bearing his child.

Anna, accompanied by Edith, meets Raye in London, and they are married. Following the ceremony, they return to Raye's lodgings. Happy, Raye asks Anna to write a letter to his sister thanking her for their wedding presents.

Anna, barely able to write her name, is found out by Raye. He is shocked. Humiliated, she runs from the room in tears. Raye learns that Edith is the real spirit behind the letters. He realizes, too late, that he has been deceived. Edith confesses her original purpose was to aid Anna, but she too found pleasure in her efforts. Each confesses that they were lovers--in correspondence, at least. And as a parting token, they embrace once and part.

Raye, not unlike Jules's reaction to his Phene in Browning's Pippa Passes, when the deception played on him by his friends is found out, grasps the irony of his situation; he faces the fact that he receives what he deserves. He leaves on a honeymoon with his pregnant, ignorant and illiterate wife, secretly clutching the love letters of a woman he can

never have. Edith, meanwhile, compromised by what she felt was unselfishness toward her maid, now feels that she is the true culprit in her lover's ruin.

The social and psychological disparities that make women victims of callous men are relieved somewhat by what happens to Raye. His decision to do what he thinks is decent does not correct the initial error. Had he originally known that Anna was illiterate and uncultured, there is little doubt that he would have found some way to excuse his conduct toward her and to forget her. And Edith, curiously naive herself, becomes indirectly and unintentionally the avenger of her sex. She has meant no one to be hurt; she wants to sublimate her own personal unhappiness by fusing her hidden desires with those of Anna's. But her sensitive intelligence and consciousness will burden her far more, one suspects, than they will either Raye or Anna.

One recognizes, in Hardy, that marriage is a scapegoat. Neither marriage for gain nor security, nor marriage for love is possible in his Wessex world. Some perversity tied into the conventions governing the relationships between the sexes prevents marriages from being happy. It is as if marriage mocks the free interactions between men and women, and becomes, for Hardy, a kind of cosmic joke.

Throughout his short stories, there are conditions which approximate a contented if not a happy union. Mostly they occur on the fringes of matrimony. Where marriage does take place we never really witness the years of wedlock. Those arrangements existing on its periphery involve partners who arrive at some kind of agreement between themselves, when, because of intense suffering or the passage of time, the fact of marriage has lost its viability.

An instance of the first condition we have noted in "Fellow Townsmen," in which Charles Downe has an apparent happy union with one wife and loses her in a drowning accident. He marries a second time to Lucy Saville, whose qualities as a wife are never displayed, but who is useful to her husband, as Baptista Trewthen is to Heddegan in "A Mere Interlude," as tutor and stepmother.

Another instance of contentment in marriage, which the reader never sees, is in the tale "To Please His Wife," where Emily's marriage--Joanna Jolliffe's gentle, self-effacing former rival--is presumably fortunate and relatively happy. But we are never shown whether or not this is so. Indeed, even in Hardy's major works the only instance where a union might possibly work out happily occurs in the novel Far From the Madding Crowd.[6] This is, of course, pure conjecture, for one can only presume that Bathsheba, shamed and emotionally

battered by her past conduct, will remain subdued by a strong but dull Gabriel Oak. At least, the dénouement of that story promises to be a more successful and mutually satisfying union between two people who, from the beginning, were made for each other.

An example of the second condition where two frustrated persons arrive at a form of mutual agreement in their relationship is seen in "The Waiting Supper." Christine Everhard and Nicholas Long, after years of expecting the arrival of an unloved husband who has kept them apart, are ironically held together by the discovery of the husband's skeletal remains found at the bottom of the local weir. Although Nicholas would undoubtedly marry his Christine even in old age, each feels that the pattern of visitation established over their years of trial has formed in them a satisfactory condition that makes marriage an insignificant bond.

Another factor that seems to resolve these triangular relationships is the role that death plays in them. In several of the stories discussed or referred to in this study, one of the partners dies tragically. The death of that partner augments--or justifies--the condition of guilt of one or both of the remaining persons. In "The Withered Arm," the death of Gertrude Lodge is grotesque; it is more than a plot convenience to get rid of an obstacle. Rather, Gertrude's death

appears undeserved at first, but it does relieve her of miseries which she was not wholly responsible for. Lodge and Rhoda Brook, on the other hand, suffer the greater ignominy of having to live out their lives in deteriorating guilt and lonely penance.

While in other stories the death of one of the lovers is not as barbarous as in "The Withered Arm," the resultant frustrations that the one or two remaining persons must endure is, nevertheless, critical. The exception to this sense of depression and guilt is seen in "The Melancholy Hussar." Phyllis Grove's story is probably the most sympathetic of the lot. In her resignation to the death of Tina, at least she has been spared a spiritless and loveless marital ritual with Humphrey Gould. She remains true to her dead lover's memory, content to live a lonely life, tending her dead Hussar's grave.

In two stories, "Fiddler of the Reels" and "On the Western Circuit," death does not play any part in the break up of the relationships, but the kind of wedded misery that remains in the life of Ned Hipcroft and Car'line in the former, and in that of Charles Raye and Anna in the latter, has all the indications of a lifetime of unhappiness--even a fate worse than death.

Finally, while the use of the triangular device in

portraying romantic relationships is an ancient one, Hardy has made use of its simple structure like a virtuoso. Time and again he varies the formula to depict some significant nuance in the relations between men and women. While it seems that the woman comes off, by and large, as the most victimized in the relationships, the fundamental insight into the female personality he brings to these tales is illustrative of his strong compassion for their feelings. If the men appear to be more worthy and reputable in the quasi-primitive world of Wessex, it is the women--oppressed, chagrined and frustrated--who are, in the main, more representative of the human spirit. They strain against conventions that at once maintain and frustrate the social order.

Notes

[1] Katharine Rogers, "Women in Thomas Hardy," The Centennial Review, 19, ii (1975), acknowledges how Hardy "repeatedly shaped his characters and plots [in the novels] to show his sympathy with women and his awareness of the disadvantages society laid upon them [and] devastatingly exposed male chauvinism." But she asserts that "beyond Hardy's conscious intentions...he could not altogether overcome the sexual stereotypes of his culture" (pp. 249-58).

Ernest Brennecke, Thomas Hardy's Universe, gives an older opinion on Hardy's views on women. He says that, "Hardy's conception of woman and her place in the universe is, even in the novels and stories, so foreign to accepted idealization of other imaginative writers that many a fair dame has sworn eternal enmity to him" (pp. 125-26).

[2] Rogers thinks that Hardy believed, as if instinctively, in the irrationality of women. Despite his sympathy toward women, the novels demonstrate his tenacious "sexist assumptions," wherein he "still could not quite see [women] as human beings like himself." Hardy's "primary sympathy remains focused on the sensitive rational man." She concludes by stating that "only men among Hardy's characters can rise to an altruism that extends beyond their family; only men can combine stability and moral soundness with the ability to think" (pp. 249-58).

[3] Irving Howe, Thomas Hardy, says, perceptively, that Hardy was one of the few nineteenth century writers who was "endowed with a precious gift: he liked women" (p. 108).

[4] Albert J. Guerard, "The Women of the Novels," Critical Essays, feels that Hardy's "characterizations of young women are rarely ambiguous and with the single exception of Sue Bridehead require no interpretation.... These women do...fall into fairly distinct groups--the sweet ingenues, the restless hedonists, the patient and enduring sufferers.... As a rule the women of the short stories and novelettes resist obvious classification more often than do those of the novels. It is hard to see why this should be so, unless a brief glance fixes on obvious individuality.... The women, whatever their perverse absurdities, are also more plausible than the men. Hardy's was a world of young women and girls, but even the older women hovering in the background of his achievement are convincing and individualized.... Hardy's women, young or old, unfailingly betray

themselves by some radically feminine impulse...by some characteristic gesture or unguarded word. They blunder ahead, creating the circumstances that trap them--while the men go through their dull and predetermined paces" (pp. 65; 69-70).

[5] See "Prefatory Note" in Life's Little Ironies, dated May 1912. "Hussar" and another story, "A Tradition of Eighteen Hundred and Four," were transferred from Ironies to Wessex Tales, "where," Hardy says, "they more naturally belong."

[6] By major works, I refer to such novels, besides Far From the Madding Crowd, as The Return of the Native, The Mayor of Casterbridge, Tess of the d'Urbervilles, and Jude the Obscure.

Chapter IV - Conscience and Love versus Pride and Independence

The word ambition has its detractors as well as its defenders, and is no less ambiguous with either group. As a thematic ingredient in literature, ambition has as many faces as any other generalized term: love, hate; good, evil; truthfulness, falsehood; openness, deceitfulness--and a host of other such terms that infuse literature, as they do life. In much of Hardy's work, ambition is the subtle alloy that binds the conflicts of conscience and love with pride and independence in his characters.

For example, Jude Fawley's singular ambition to become a Christminster scholar is abetted by a deep pride in his desire to better himself. The frustrations and obstacles he meets are not alone responsible for his failures. His passionate nature is as much a burden to his achievement of some kind of moderate success in his life. Sue Bridehead, too, exhibits personal pride and a desire to be more than she is in the face of great odds, regardless of the social stigma attached to her ambition. That she, at first, is thrilled by Jude's attraction to her and later suffers from her caprices--causing others to suffer--is no less a

problem of conscience. But unlike her intense cousin, she acknowledges defeat by renouncing her pride, independence and her guilt-ridden passions. For Jude, however, these tensions become his nemesis and, finally, his destroyer. But it is with Jude, rather than with Sue, that our greater affections lie. Despite the fact that he lashes out against the world for his misfortunes in the end, we still have sympathy for his ambitions, for his desire to achieve something in life that makes living at all worthwhile.

As in his novels, Hardy's Wessex folk in the short stories are caught between the forges of individual conscience and love; between pride and independence. Less complicated in their personal ambitions than the characters in the novels, those in the stories, nevertheless, have deep frustrations, regardless of their limited horizons. Their attitudes depend on circumscribed life patterns, such as marriage, social status and economic conditions.

In "Interlopers at the Knap" (WT), for instance, the central conflict facing Charles Darton, the wealthy would-be gentleman farmer, is one between his conscience and his feelings for two women. His seeming compassion for the plight of his former love, Helena Hall, the widow of his second love's brother, Philip Hall, places him in a foolish and unfortunate position.

En route to marry Sally Hall, he is confronted by the woman who had jilted him five years before, Helena. She has come back from the continent a broken woman, with two children and a very sick husband. When they meet and Helena admits to Darton that she could not marry him because of Philip's prior claims on her, Darton, as if forgetting that his honor is at stake, offers to help Helena by taking her children under his wing until she and her husband are settled. He is told by the surprised Sally that, since her brother has died, he is free to take charge of Helena's children. Darton, seemingly without any recognition of the implications in his offer to the widowed Helena, agrees to postpone his marriage to Sally until after the burial of her brother.

Sally Hall, a remarkable person, exemplifies the heroic woman in her positive aspects. She is strong-willed, without being a termagant. Living with her widowed mother, who encourages the marriage between her and Darton, she has good-naturedly agreed to his "very honorable offer."

Darton himself is not a mean man. But his great problem is reconciling his pride to his fortune. He knows well his position in life; he is a "contemplative" man, who appreciates the comforts of rural gentility. Because of this, he wants, above all, a woman who will compliment his social and economic

stations. Such a woman he covets in Helena. When she runs off and marries Hall, however, Darton feels he wants nothing more to do with "superior women." And so his courtship of Sally Hall, a woman by whom he can "do no better, even from a fairly practical point of view," is begun.

Darton follows in the line of self-righteous men in Hardy's fiction. This is one of the reasons they are not as interesting as his women. They have a sense of their correctness when it comes to matters of love and marriage, which we have seen often enough in other stories. Darton, while strong, is hardly heroic; he is described as being "kind to a fault," but he is callous, however unwittingly, to how women feel, especially when it conflicts with his own self-importance.

While Helena's reasons for choosing Philip Hall are romantic, and no doubt are spurred on by the idealism of youth, she finds in him a sensitive soul, as well as a man of some education. But as the wife of the drably practical Darton, Helena would have undergone unimpassioned tedium and the impersonality of duty. It does not matter that she is herself weak, and that Philip is even weaker. Neither she nor Philip belongs to the Wessex world, in spirit, at any rate. Her tastes are not for farms, acreage and livestock. Her desires are continental and foreign to rural life. The

failure of both young people is a story that itself belongs to another world.

But Sally, whose "independence made her one of the least jealous of women," while hurt--a condition that escapes the self-centered Darton--sees his weakness better than he does: Darton still wants a "superior wife."

When he finally marries Helena, the inevitable comes to pass: Helena, "a fragile woman, of little staying power, physically or morally...[having] loved herself out," dies (p. 204). And so Darton, having achieved what he thought he wanted most, loses (as he has come to learn too late) what he needs least, the superior but weak woman. For he realizes that Helena despises "the rural simplicities of a farmer's fireside" (p. 205). He has misplaced his true affections for a whim, and he comes to acknowledge that Sally Hall, who "had a pre-eminent qualification for [his] household," should have been his wife.

What are these "pre-eminent qualifications" that Darton learns about too late? Sally Hall has the strength, the independence, the pride, and most of all, the steadfastness that complements the rural equanimity of Wessex. It is steadfastness that Darton, after months of letter-writing, promises Sally, as he offers repentance for his folly.

From the first, Sally, while liking Darton, is not so insistent upon the marriage as her mother has been. When

she learns of the relationship between Darton and her sister-in-law, and sees how solicitous he is of Helena, she concludes without bitterness that marriage is not for her. After she refuses him a final time, Darton, amazed at her intractability, wonders if she bears any grudge against him:

> "Then you despise me, Sally!"
>
> "No," she slowly answered. "I don't altogether despise you. I don't think you quite such a hero as I once did--that's all. The truth is, I am happy enough as I am; and I don't mean to marry at all. Now, may I ask a favour, sir?"
>
> "To any extent."
>
> "Please do not put this question [of marriage] to me anymore. Friends as long as you like, but lovers and married never."
>
> "I never will," said Darton. "Not if I live a hundred years." (p. 215)

In another story where conscience and love conflict with pride and independence, the outcome, while strained, is meant to convey repentance and renunciation of an immoral situation. "The Distracted Preacher" (WT) might very well have been Hardy's most brilliant comedy in his short fiction. But because of the serial restrictions placed on him at the time, he was forced to revise the dénouement to comform to the standards of Grundyism. [1]

As in much of Hardy's short fiction, the incidents in this one have a historical foundation. The chief conflict

is between the Reverend Richard Stockdale, a young Methodist minister, and Lizzy Newbury, a young widow, who become romantically involved. In conjunction with his romance, Stockdale is drawn into the longstanding local custom of smuggling. Smuggling was practiced in the distant villages of the Southern English coast for centuries. [2] The conscientious young Reverend is caught between his moral scruples and his love for Lizzy, a leader of the smuggling ring. The question in the story therefore is whether or not Lizzy is justified in giving up a tradition for the likes of Stockdale.

Lizzy, like Sally Hall, is strong-willed and independent, but she has more spirit, and, because of her nefarious activities, is more deceitful. Stockdale's intrusion into the lives of the villagers is a misfortune. While the people of the Nether-Moynton village are friendly, they are not likely to readily accept the confidence of an outsider, especially a cleric of the calibre of Stockdale.

Still, the story is full of action, as seen through the eyes of the perplexed and ingenuous Reverend Stockdale. He not only becomes an unwilling participant in aiding and abetting the smugglers, he is inaugurated into a new experience, the vocabulary of the folk. He learns what a "lugger" is, what "go to creep" means, and other such expressions. But he also knows Lizzy is wrong in her activities, and considers

his dilemma between love and his profession almost contradictory:

> Lizzy was unmistakably a fascinating young woman, but as a minister's wife she was hardly to be contemplated. "If I had only stuck to father's little grocery business, instead of going in for the ministry, she would have suited me beautifully!" he said sadly, until he remembered that in that case he would never have come from his distant home to Nether-Moynton, and never have known her. (pp. 254-55)

Lizzy, though she loves Stockdale, finds it difficult to accept his arguments. She explains to him how her father and grandfather, her husband, and even her mother, along with all the villagers have been involved in smuggling for generations. But Richard is adamant in his protestations:

> "Lizzy, all this is very wrong," he said. "Don't you remember the lesson of the tribute-money? 'Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's.' Surely you have heard that read times enough in your growing up?"
>
> "He's dead," she pouted.
>
> "But the spirit of the text is in force just the same."
>
> "My father did it, and so did my grandfather, and almost everybody in Nether-Moynton lives by it, and life would be so dull if it wasn't for that, that I should not care to live at all."
>
> "I am nothing to live for, of course," he replied bitterly. "You would not think it worth while to give up this wild business and live for me alone?"

"I have never looked at it like that." (p. 254)

Despite this last line, however, we never quite feel that Lizzy is ever conscience-stricken in what she does.

After an exceedingly dangerous raid by the excisemen, in which they are again outsmarted by the ever resourceful villagers, Stockdale's effort to appeal to her patriotism produces an angry response from Lizzy. She tells him, as he pleads with her to give up "this business" of smuggling, he does not know what he is asking her to do:

> "What I make by that trade is all I have to keep my mother and myself with."
>
> He was astonished. "I did not dream of such a thing," he said. "I would rather have swept the streets, had I been you. What is money compared with a clear conscience?"
>
> "My conscience is clear. I know my mother, but the king I have never seen. His dues are nothing to me. But it is a great deal to me that my mother and I should live." (p. 285)

Stockdale declares that unless she marries him and gives up this illegal manner of supporting herself he must leave her, that to continue as she is doing would be a mockery. She retorts: "But why should you belong to that profession? I have got this large house; why can't you marry me, and live here with us, and not be a Methodist preacher any more? I assure you, Richard, it is no harm, and I wish you could see it as I do!" (p. 286).

Neither of the lovers can change their positions, and they part.

In most respects this should have been how the story ended. But an author must at times adhere to some conventions in his plots, however false to truth or to reality. [3] Stockdale, two years later, returns to Nether-Moynton. Having heard of a near tragic circumstance involving the excisemen and the smugglers, he learns from Lizzy, now completely alone, of her own part and wounds sustained in the fray. She renounces her old way of life and leaves her home for that of Stockdale's as his wife. [4]

The sentimentalism which appears in the last sentence of the tale is ironic to the point, perhaps, of cynicism. Lizzy's becoming a pietistic purveyor of religious tracts may have pleased a gullible self-righteous public, but such an ending ignores the fundamental argument present in the story, that is, how one's customs often are tied to his survival. [5]

In the story "For Conscience' Sake" (LLI), emphasis is placed on duty and honor, and the guilt that follows in later years from one's youthful folly. Millborne, a retired middle-aged businessman, living in London, realizes his loneliness in life. He has reveled in his bachelorhood for many years, without a care for anyone but himself. Illness and age have

touched him, and he reflects on his former conduct toward a young woman to whom he had promised marriage many years before. He had reneged on that promise after having had an affair with her. He now returns to his village with the intention of fulfilling his obligation to her and, thereby, restoring his honor.

He finds her living under the name of Leonora Frankland, widow. She has prospered in the music business and has built up a respectable life for herself and her now grown daughter, Frances. They meet, and Mrs. Frankland, naturally enough, initially rejects Millborne's reasons for renewing their relations. The daughter, unaware that he is her father, dislikes Millborne's courting of her mother. His pursuit distracts from her own hopes of marrying a young clergyman, the Reverend Mr. Cope.

The young clergyman however is unable to marry at the moment; he has met with objections from relatives to any alliance between him and the widowed businesswoman's daughter. But Millborne, determined to correct his former wrong to Leonora despite her objections, appeals to her sense of respectability. Promising to marry her as an "old friend," he will remove her from the questionable status of working woman by taking her and Frances to London. This argument, along with visions of London society, eventually persuades both women

that the marriage can have advantages.

The Reverend Mr. Cope comes to visit Frances in London, and accompanies the family on a boat trip. When seasickness overcomes both Millborne and his daughter, Cope recognizes in their facial characteristics similarities that distress him.

Following the boat ride, the Reverend Mr. Cope stays away from Frances for some weeks. Becoming concerned and sensing that her romantic troubles are related to Millborne in some way, Frances asks her mother to go to her silent lover's village to find out if he is ill. Mrs. Frankland goes and returns the same day with the news that Cope is well; she has learned, too, that the "estrangement was fundamentally owing to Mr. Millborne having sought her out and married her" (p. 45). Pressed for answers, Mrs. Frankland reveals to Frances her true relationship to Millborne. Outraged, the young woman is demoralized.

Events prove even more catastrophic for Millborne. Castigated by both his wife and daughter for intruding into their lives after his long absence, disrupting their planned prospects, he decides that the best thing for all is to return them to their Wessex life and to go his own way. He reestablishes his wife and daughter in the town where the Reverend Mr. Cope abides. He settles on them legacies which permit

each to live comfortably to the end of their days. The tale concludes with a letter from Millborne acknowledging his double folly in trying to reconstruct an experience that is beyond repair:

> "I have learnt that there are some derelictions of duty which cannot be blotted out by tardy accomplishment. Our evil actions do not remain isolated in the past, waiting only to be reversed...." (p. 49)

Millborne's venture into matrimony in an effort to reclaim his honor is a failure. His belated allegiance to high principle is repaid by the two women with the same indifference he has previously shown toward them. Leonora hardly can be beholden to a man who mercilessly jilted her many years before. Through the ensuing years she has managed by industry and perseverance to overcome tremendous hardship to achieve and maintain her daughter and herself without his aid. Thus, he can rightly recount that "our evil actions do not remain isolated in the past, waiting to be reversed." He learns that having a wife proves a difficult penance.

The pity one feels for Millborne (if one does) is centered in his ignorance of the human heart. His motives, despite their honorable objective, are selfish and charged with guilt--not unlike Michael Henchard in The Mayor of Casterbridge, with whom Millborne has an affinity. Hardy's handling of the story, neither commenting on or overtly showing partiality toward

any character, demonstrates fine mastery of narrative. Millborne's egotism is balanced by Mrs. Frankland's practical experience and courage in a world where she has overcome much humiliation--a world that her counterpart but opposite in personality, Susan Henchard, never could withstand.

Doctor Bindon, Millborne's interlocutor, at the outset cautions his friend against his venture by admonishing him that, "after twenty years of silence--I should say, don't!" (p. 32). As if to paraphrase Shakespeare, the insinuation is that in this case it might have been better for Millborne had conscience kept him a coward. But, of course, this cowardice is exactly what Millborne is attempting to disavow, to "recover [his] sense of being a man of honour" (p. 32).

We have already seen how pride works against the happiness of Joanna Jolliffe, in "To Please His Wife," when her envious and grasping nature destroys her family and she loses her sanity. In "A Changed Man," where guilt and love are Laura's bane, we have seen how she comes to recognize the shallowness of her youthful folly and vanity. She too is left to repent her indiscretions in a hollow loneliness, the "ghost" of her martyred husband an "insistent shadow" that keeps her apart from the lively world she so admired and courted when Maumbry was alive.

The most delicate instance of pride and conscience, love

and independence is in the sad, but complacent fate of Christine Everhard and Nicholas Long in "The Waiting Supper." Sad, because the two are naturally suited to one another; but Christine's unsettled manner and Nicholas's indecisiveness, especially following the years upon his sojourn abroad, keep the two, more or less, proxy lovers in their mutual affection for one another. They maintained, however awkwardly, a relationship that withstood the weariness of years--even after the body of Christine's husband was recovered from the weir many years following his drowning.

In this chapter we have examined stories that show men and women who, either from pride and independence or from conflict between love and conscience, are kept apart. Often we find in Hardy an ambivalence toward the ambitions which underlie the various conflicts motivating his characters. But unlike his novels, where the motivating forces in the characters have promethean effects on others, the stories show frustrations exemplified by characters who are more domestic, local, simple and direct. The plight of Charles Darton and Reverend Stockdale is recognizably human within the confines of the social and religious attitudes of their respective counties. As for Millborne, his strained latent humaneness, however admirable in the abstract, is linked to his personal guilt, which reinforces the original stigma

that mars his character and troubles his soul.

The women in the stories are recognizable for their independence and practical good sense. Sally Hall and Lizzy Newbury are admirable in their loyalty to principle and to their sense of community. Neither of these women is petty or vindictive toward others. Sally Hall's magnificence in the face of Darton's egocentric caprices is emblematic of the best of pride; Lizzy Newbury's allegiance to her compeers in the face of moral censure represents a high quality of loyal commitment.

In this closed society Hardy's characters interact as independent entities. His women therefore are portrayed as equals to their men in maintaining self-esteem. By balancing the disparities existing between his men and women, Hardy indirectly chastizes both sexes, whose foibles and obstinacies tend to disrupt the natural complacency of the Wessex environment.

Notes

[1] Albert J. Guerard, "The Women of the Novels," Critical Essays, says that it is Lizzy Newbury who makes this story one of Hardy's "most successful comedies." Furthermore, he likens her to Eustacia Vye as the most independent of any of his heroines: "She is a very unmoral young lady," he says. But unlike the "real Lizzy" upon whom the character in the story is based, and who did not marry her preacher-lover, she marries and reforms her old way. Guerard adds that Hardy "regretted that the conventional ending" had to conform to magazine requirements of the time (p. 69).

Irving Howe, Thomas Hardy, sees the story as stressing the comic and making a "sly thrust at Victorian convention." While Hardy "controls the scene expertly," the weakness comes in a "concluding lapse into virtue, presumably forced upon him by the needs of magazine publication" (pp. 80-1).

[2] Evelyn Hardy, Thomas Hardy: A Critical Biography, besides commenting on the tradition and the "delight in smuggling" that is described in the story, agrees with Guerard, that Lizzy is "one of Hardy's most resourceful feminine characters" (p. 183).

[3] See note 1.

[4] Lascelles Abercrombie, Thomas Hardy: A Critical Study, considers the story possibly one of Hardy's "finest experiments in irony," but he believes that it falters at the end. He says an "admirable wrench becomes subdued to the religion of her pithless husband, and gets in the end to writing tracts wherein her former masterful qualities are shown up as horrible instances of unregenerate nature" (p. 46).

[5] Douglas Brown, Thomas Hardy, points out the feeling "for local ties and tradition" in the story, and how relationships are solidified among the villagers "with gay humor in the illicit smuggling" (p. 116).

Chapter V - Concerning Intruders and Returning Natives

In most of Hardy's fictional works, an external force is used to dramatize the conflict among the characters. This force tends to serve as a catalytic agent that disrupts the lives of the people and to disturb the homogeneity of the Wessex world.

In the novels, for instance, nature is this pervasive force that hovers over the Wessex world, like some miraculous Being, permitting certain movements and patterns among his characters in order to work out a measured sense of freedom; but nature always intervenes when boundaries are overreached. Sometimes nature has been credited with being another character in the novels.[1] At other times what is credited to nature is no more than Hardy's omnipotent voice inculcating philosophical views on man and his relationship to the uncaring universe; and at another time nature is depicted as man's friend and protector--often, too, as his enemy. But in his less ambitious short stories nature is undoubtedly subordinate to human concerns. Rather, it is character, local customs and personal attitudes that shape responses. Where the larger face of nature invokes its presence at all, it works, more or

less, from within the characters or among them.

There is no storm and deluge sweeping man's labors and his livestock away, as if he were an insignificant insect, such as we witness in passages of Far From the Madding Crowd, nor is there the sense of inevitability and fateful catastrophe outside of human control, such as we find in Tess of the d'Urbervilles or Jude the Obscure. There are hints of these things, to be sure, in the stories, but they are subdued and limited to the direct interests and concerns of the ordinary folk.

In the stories this external force acting on the Wessex inhabitants is characterized by two common strains--returning natives, those persons who for whatever reasons have left their places of birth and have come back to reestablish their ties, to retrieve lost status or to reclaim lost privileges. Often their return is one of disappointment and disillusionment. The other force, by far the more menacing, centers on an intruder, who poses a threat to the stability of persons and customs. This latter, more so than the former, depends as much upon the willingness of the local participants to permit intrusion as it does on the intruder. What this means is that the intruder comes to a village innocently enough, and his strangeness, evidenced by his superior education, experience, or sophistication, attracts the ingenuous curiosity

of some person or group. This attraction has much to do with some hidden dissatisfaction on the local inhabitant's part, and usually results in a kind of mental or spiritual deracination.

Hardy's intruders, generally speaking, while alien to the particular local environment to which they migrate, are neither positive nor negative influences, necessarily. They are not shown as doing evil or causing ill to anybody, regardless of the implications--but neither are they bent on doing specific good. Their motives are prompted by personal interest, usually romantic, or they are mysterious, arousing the interest of the local residents.

In some stories the intruder operates as a foil to lovers in conflict. In "Interlopers at the Knap," for example, the returning native, Philip Hall, comes home after a long absence with a wife and children. His arrival triggers the conflict among Charles Darton, Sally Hall and Helena--the last Philip's widow and Darton's former fiancée.

Philip's intrusion aborts the wedding impending between Darton and Sally, and rekindles Darton's romantic feelings for Helena. At the same time, Sally, self-reliant and proud, shows her strength and determination to maintain a high moral purpose and resolve when she later rejects Darton's renewed interest in her following Helena's death. Philip Hall's short-lived

entrance, then, into the lives of his people causes a chain of events for which he unwittingly is responsible.

Another instance where the intruder functions as a foil and exacerbates the romantic difficulties between lovers is in "A Changed Man." Lieutenant Vannicock's involvement with Laura Maumbry is less determinant than Philip Hall's, but it is used to express Laura's own dissatisfaction with the way her marriage to Reverend John Maumbry, formerly a dashing captain in the King's Hussar's, has soured. As an intruder, however, Vannicock does not cause the disturbance between Maumbry and his wife; neverthess, his presence emphasizes, even complements, Laura's shallow and vain disposition to frivolousness that prevents her from being the dutiful wife of a dedicated clergyman.

In "The Waiting Supper," the situation is more disruptive than in "A Changed Man." The problems that James Bellston brings to the romance between Christine Everhard and Nicholas Long cross social and class boundaries. Bellston represents a class of farmer-nobles; this places him on the same social level as Christine, as opposed to Nicholas, whose rank of yeoman places him only slightly above the peasantry. But Nicholas's nobility of character contrasts with Bellston's profligacy, and places the latter in the position of villain and spoiler between the lovers.

While Bellston may function as a foil to the happiness of Christine and Nicholas, his death, ironically, becomes a medium through which love, loyalty, and penance test the endurance of the lovers' devotion to one another. This therefore is an instance where the intruder exerts both a negative and a positive influence in the story.

Another instance where an intruder is used as a foil, but with less disastrous effects than in "The Waiting Supper," is "A Mere Interlude." Baptista Trewthen's meeting, marriage and loss of Charles Stow is an example of Hardy's humorous use of awkward complications. The problems that arise for Baptista upon Stow's drowning are offset by the wily Heddegan's own hidden purposes for marrying her.

Except that Stow is young and attractive and Heddegan is middle-aged, prosperous and conniving, the former's place in the story serves only to give Baptista a modicum of adventure in an otherwise humdrum existence. Stow's intrusion is more benign than onerous.

But there are several stories where the intruder's influence on the local inhabitants is more serious.

For example, in "The Melancholy Hussar," Matthäus Tina enters the secluded world and life of Phyllis Grove and affects her profoundly. Although she loses him to a firing squad, she is content to remain faithful to his memory. She

exemplifies fidelity to an eternal love. In this story, Tina's presence is positive, for it permits an otherwise drab and lonely girl a chance to have experienced a human connection which would have passed her by under different circumstances.

In "The Distracted Preacher," the Reverend Richard Stockdale's intrusion into the world of Lizzy Newbury opens up new vistas of experience for him--and her. As a would-be disrupter of customary practices and provincial attitudes, he exhibits a moral force that, rightly or wrongly, benefits the redoubtable Lizzy; her smuggling exploits, meant for fun, profit or for revenge against unfair taxation, has promised a precarious, if not ultimately fatal, career.

In "On the Western Circuit," Charles Bradford Raye enters the lives of Edith Harnham and Anna innocently enough, and he pays a price for his involvement. His attraction to the ignorant but pretty Anna is a case of a young man's carefree oats sowing. Once having taken advantage of the girl, his own sense of manliness is aroused when he learns that he has impregnated her.

Anna's mistress, Edith, learns of her distress, and agrees to assist her maid and friend, but does so eventually for hidden motives of her own. Her married life, dull and unproductive, is sublimated in furthering the nuptials between Anna and

Charles. Her passionate letter-writing, ostensibly in Anna's behalf, becomes the vehicle of her own repressed desires, and Charles Raye falls in love with Edith whom he mistakes for Anna.

After having married the illiterate Anna, he learns of his error too late. In short, while the joke is on Raye, we anticipate a sorry life for all three.

"The Fiddler of the Reels" witnesses the advent of Mop Ollamoor into the lives of Car'line Aspent and Ned Hipcroft, which, as we have seen, is nothing short of tumultuous.

Mop, unlike any other of the intruders in Hardy's fiction, including the novels--with the possible exception of William Dare in A Laodicean--is supreme in his influence on those around him. No one really knows him; he is almost unhuman. But the emptiness he leaves in Car'line after having done with her, and the despair that Hipcroft feels in the wake of Mop's intrusion in their lives raise feelings of pity for them. One senses that Mop poses a serious threat to the whole community, since he becomes, in a larger sense, a kind of herald that augurs change in the Wessex world. His kind penetrates like an electric shock to the very core of dormant human emotions, which, once awakened, can be stirred and guided in any direction, toward good or ill, creation or destruction.

In "Enter a Dragoon," the intruder is a soldier, Sergeant-Major Clark, whose involvement with a local girl, Selina Paddock, is based on deceit. But the tragedy for Selina is not the heart-attack that kills Clark; it is the pathos of calling herself a widow, taking his name and living alone with their child. She attends his grave assiduously, only to learn that he was already married and had fathered another child after having met her. The irony in this tale is pathetic and one feels that Clark, whatever his motives, deserved his end.

Another pathetic tale which, we observed, tends to confuse our sympathies is "Alicia's Diary." We see in Charles La Feste a reluctant intruder, whose entrance into the lives of the English girls, Alicia and Caroline, is a regrettable one. Instead of being the victimizer, La Feste turns out to be the victimized. Through careful manipulation by Alicia, who stands for family pride and moral righteousness, La Feste apparently has been caught in a romantic web as vicious as any spider's.

When Alicia's duplicity is revealed to Caroline, and La Feste is forced to marry her whom he no longer loves, he chooses the path of least resistance to a life of misery--he kills himself. Alicia and her family, presumably belonging to the well-educated and prosperous inhabitants of Wessex,

are well equipped to withstand any alien interference from the outside. La Feste, as an intruder, despite all of his continental savoir faire, is thwarted at the boundaries after confronting Wessex snobbery.

Finally we have the intruder who operates not so much as a foil in a romantic situation, but as an historical oddity. This occurs in "The Duke's Reappearance." The biographical interest this anecdote had for Hardy has been discussed.[2] The ghostly appearance of the ill-fated Duke of Monmouth to Christopher Swetman supports tradition that gives continuity and permanence to Wessex as a viable community. As in "The Distracted Preacher," for example, this story is part of Wessex folklore and demonstrates an attitude of the inhabitants toward the whole of England.

The returning natives, those persons who have grown up in Wessex, absorbed its customs, but have left for various reasons, may or may not be disrupters of the complacency or stability of the Wessex world. They tend to return to Wessex because of some personal failure or disappointment in the outside world. Or, their reasons for leaving in the first place arise from some initial frustration or disappointment.

We have mentioned in "Interlopers at the Knap" how Philip Hall's return home affects his relations with his

family. Millborne in "For Conscience' Sake" is another prodigal whose return home is disruptive. As a youth, filled with ambition and obvious self-confidence, he leaves his native village and the girl he has promised to marry to seek his fortune in London. After many years his loneliness and isolation bring him back to his village. But his return is tragic, for the self-justification he has hoped to receive in fulfilling his promise of marriage to his former love cannot atone for his youthful insensitivity toward her. In the end, Millborne is left lonely, deracinated, and comforted by drink in a foreign land. Apart from Wessex, he is a man without a country.

From another perspective, and under circumstances not unlike those affecting Nicholas Long in "The Waiting Supper" or Millborne in "For Conscience' Sake," we have the situation of Barnet in "Fellow Townsmen." Like Nicholas, Barnet is a victim of love and frustration. But he is caught between the coldness of a London-born wife and his love for a girl of low origin, whom he has rejected for his socially acceptable marriage. When he is once again free to marry, the girl he loves marries his friend. Thwarted once more and embittered, Barnet leaves his village to wander the world, a rootless but refined traveler.

Years later, like Millborne; he returns a man of middle-

age, and learns that Lucy Downe, his old love, is herself now a widow. Seeing a third and last chance at happiness, he visits her. Confessing his former wrong to her, Barnet feels that the years of suffering and wandering the world are ample penance for his former effrontery toward her. But Lucy, unprepared for this renewal of old ties to her old lover, rejects him. Barnet leaves, never to call again.

Barnet's leaving of Wessex forever is not unlike what happens to Millborne. As to whether his fate is similar, one cannot say; but it is easy to surmise that even if he does not end his days a drunkard, his rootlessness and exile from Wessex will be just as lonely and irrevocable as Millborne's.

At the other end of the spectrum of returning natives, we have Sophy Twycott in "The Son's Veto" (LLI). As a housemaid employed by a childless widower, Vicar Twycott, she gains his attention by ingratiating herself to him. Overzealous, she falls and permanently damages her foot. With solicitous care the Vicar, who heretofore thought little of Sophy, comes to depend on and to admire her homely virtues. Sophy, although admired by a young man of her own class, Sam Hopson, has always hoped to marry higher. Sam, consequently, is put off and Sophy succeeds in marrying her vicar.

The vicar, aware of the possible distaste his marriage

to a peasant girl might have among his parishioners, decides that he will give up his position in the town of Gaymead and move to a small pastorage in London.

While in London a son is born to the Twycotts. But because the vicar is a sickly man and many years older than his near illiterate wife, he dies. He leaves her well provided for, however, with a home of her own and the means to give her son a gentleman's education.

The years pass and Sophy has grown lonesome, since her son spends much of his time at school or in the company of his educated and socially prominent friends. Ashamed of his ill-bred mother, Randolph Twycott makes every effort to avoid any situation that will bring her before the public eye.

It so happens that Sam, her rejected suitor, one day passes by her house, and she calls to him. He has not married, continuing to feel that Sophy is the only one for him. Since she has been in London, however, Sam too has moved to another town and has prospered as "manager at a market-gardener's on the Southside of London."

In a short time he and Sophy are taking rides together. Sam pursues his suit for Sophy's hand. But she, knowing her position as a vicar's widow, and the kind of gentleman her son is developing into, is indecisive about encouraging Sam. Yet she is lonely. Sam is available, and she confesses to

him that she misses her old home in Wessex.

Their continuous meetings revive Sophy's interest in him. She learns that Sam dislikes London life, too, and wants to open up his own green grocer's shop in Aldbrickham, a short distance from their native village. While this news delights her, she is still hesitant because of her son.

Randolph Twycott, a fastidious young man, in training for the ministry by way of following in his father's footsteps, is devastated by his mother's wish to marry what he considers an ignorant village lout:

> "I am ashamed of you! It will ruin me!
> A miserable boor! a churl! a clown!
> It will degrade me in the eyes of all
> the gentlemen of England." (p. 21)

Following such an outburst, any happiness she has envisioned for her and Sam is ended. Sam is sorry for this turn of events, and reluctantly returns to Aldbrickham. Meanwhile, Sophy's lameness worsens, and she is confined to a wheelchair, where she remains for the rest of her life.

In time, Randolph is certified a clergyman. But his mother, resigned to the fate that she chose years before, dies. In compliance with her last wishes her body is returned to Gaymead, her native home, and there interred.

In this story we have a case of a native's return home as a corpse, as a result of her youthful ambition: she has

passed up the simple honest happiness offered her by a young man of her own class. When given a second chance for happiness, she is victimized by her son. It is Sophy's own weakness that makes her life such a tragic one. But she achieves her final dream: she is taken back into the bosom of her Wessex environs.

Two stories about returning Wessex natives illustrate horrifying personal tragedies. In both death results, one by murder, the other by suicide.

In "Master John Horseleigh, Knight," the return of Roger, a sailor and brother to Edith, after a long absence is not the occasion for celebration one might expect. Instead, his return is calamitous. He finds his sister, a recent widow, married out of her class to an already married nobleman posing as a local villager. The moral issue of bigamy notwithstanding, Roger's anger takes the form of seeking revenge for the dishonoring of his family. He kills the nobleman and flees to parts unknown.

It is difficult to imagine Roger having allegiance to the Wessex world, since his life there appears to have been of short duration. As a sailor, he has spent many years away from his native environment. And his return has lasted only long enough to end in murder.

Luke Holway, the benighted and reluctant soldier in

"The Grave by the Handpost," follows in his father's footsteps by committing suicide. The honor Luke sought to restore to his father's memory by giving him a Christian burial and by distinguishing himself in battle proves fruitless. His wishes for a decent resting place for his father's body go unregarded. He feels such terrible guilt that he shoots himself through the head as his father has done. His final request to be buried next to him at the crossroads is denied Luke. For out of a sense of honor and respect, the villagers bury the son as a Christian, not as the suicide he was.

In this tale, one feels that Wessex exacts steep recompense from its sons. Beyond the obvious irony in Luke's case, both deaths can be looked at as Wessex equations. In life the father and son found themselves estranged. In death, regardless of their final resting places, they belong to the same soil.

Finally there is the native who returns to his birthplace only to find himself an alien. Such is true of John Lackland in "A Few Crusted Characters" upon his return to Longpuddle. He has gone away with his parents "across the seas" while still a boy, but his memories of his homeland never leave him. Longpuddle is in his blood, even as it had been in the blood of his father and his grandfather. Now his family are

all dead. Only he has "come back to the old place, having nourished a thought--not a definite intention, but just a thought--that [he] should like to return here in a year or two, to spend the remainder of [his] days'" (p. 224).

Lackland is not rich, for "even in new countries" there are "failures." To acclimate himself to his old home, he wants to learn about the people he knew as a boy. So begins a series of anecdotes related by a bevy of Wessex natives who infuse their narratives with the customs, the good and bad, the loves and losses of their world.

Like anyone returning home after an absence of many years, he finds changes that prompt a mixture of reactions. What Lackland has cherished through the years from his earliest memories are no longer part of the Wessex reality. At the cemetery on the headstones, "whitened by the moon," are the people he once knew, who hold in their graves the memories that continue to live in his mind.

Lackland is seen by the villagers for a few days after his arrival, and then, ghostlike, he silently disappears. The world he remembers no longer exists. The vestiges of the past, recognizable in the descendants, are not strong enough to hold this hopeful but unreconstructed native son.

In this chapter we see how Hardy's use of specific characters serves to emphasize the innate qualities of the

Wessex he seeks to create. By having persons enter this world as (1) intruders and (2) as returning natives, or outsiders who had roots once well-established in the various Wessex communities, he demontrates the manner and form he takes to protect his little world and to safeguard its people.

As a self-contained world, Wessex holds its power over the people by heritage, isolation, beliefs, feelings, and memory. The problems faced by certain individuals arise from an ingrained individualism that sometimes works against them. This is the case with Philip Hall, Millborne, and Barnet, for example. These natives, because of ambition or personal frustrations, leave their Wessex world only to find themselves more isolated and frustrated in the larger world. When they return they have lost contact with the unconscious essence that holds Wessex together. It is as though they have broken their ties with their heritage and have found that once broken they cannot be reestablished--at least in life.

For those who leave and come back either to die or to be buried, the Wessex world becomes like a mother with outstretched arms, taking back prodigals, as a gesture of forgiveness for those who wantonly turned away from her in life. Nevertheless, Hardy's Wessex maintains its mode of stability and preserves the linkages between its people and the environment.

Notes

[1] Donald Davidson, "The Traditional Basis of Thomas Hardy's Fiction," The Southern Review, addresses what he believes is Hardy's "habit of mind." Among such qualities that make up this habit of mind is a view of the "changeless character of the Wessex world," where "nature, itself unchangeable and inscrutable, is the norm, the basis of Wessex life." Those who accept and do not rebel against norms of nature are the "changeless characters." Tragedy occurs, he asserts, when the "changeless and changeful" characters become "engaged in bitter conflict" (pp. 162-178).

Richard Carpenter, Thomas Hardy, extends the Wessex metaphor as a "land [that] breathes the essence of the tales that take place in it.... Egdon Heath's [The Return of the Native] somber face broods over the misfortunes of mankind, but every other Wessex setting has something of this same character.... Even the winds that blow and the rains that fall take their nature from the human events of the novels--or, perhaps, human nature takes some of its characteristics from the winds and the rains" (pp. 28-30).

Evelyn Hardy, Thomas Hardy: A Critical Biography, is critical of the artistry exhibited in Hardy's stories, and says that he "finds it hard to dispense with the passages of mounting poetic fervor, which occur in the novels when he is moved by nature and uses her moods to symbolize those of humankind" (pp. 183-84).

Irving Howe, Thomas Hardy, referring to the novels, says that "nature is not a mere backdrop, a contrivance we are invited to admire for its picturesqueness.... Nor is nature a mere cluster of inert objects...to be apprehended as a pleasing but mute surface.... Nature speaks [and] seems to live and breathe, it becomes an animated presence, it stirs and brushes against us like a pulsing hand" (p. 22). It should be noted that in each of these references, the comments specifically pertain to the novels; but the information conveyed is just as appropriate to all of Hardy's works, especially the poems and, to a lesser extent, the stories. Still, nature permeates Hardy's work in such a way as to render each of his creations an integral part of the conception of the Wessex environment.

[2] See Chapter II, notes 24 and 25, p. 75.

Chapter VI - The Use of the Military for Historical Background and Dramatic Effect

Of all the major English novelists of the nineteenth century, Hardy is one of the most persistent users of soldiers in his work. His fascination with the romance, mystic and the glamor surrounding the military, while not as endemic as his fascination with music and dance, is yet a concrete force in his folk tradition. In some cases the military presence has much to do with the legends and tales of his novels, specifically The Trumpet-Major and Far From the Madding Crowd. Each novel has captains, lieutenants and sergeants whose persons tantalize and project on the rural consciousness of the Wessex world images of wonder, adventure, excitement, and above all, love. In the stories "The Melancholy Hussar" and "A Changed Man," the military presence, especially the individual soldier, helps to further incident or plot, or to vary the conflicts of Wessex folk encounters.

Notwithstanding his fine poetic drama, The Dynasts, with its epic panoramic vision that grasps the essence of the professional soldiers at war during the Napoleonic era, Hardy's views on the military are in no way meant to glorify the

profession. As an integral part of Wessex, his use of a military background has an impact in his work which helps to focus the setting or to further the particular situation being depicted. It also helps in establishing a set of conditions from which we gain an insight into the author's views of his fictional world.

For example, despite Hardy's obvious fascination with military trappings, there never appears any actual place for open warfare or siege in the stories or novels. The soldiers are incorporated into the plot, usually as contrasting elements for projecting a kind of emotion in the people. Most often soldiers are a disruptive component upsetting the balance between the routine day-to-day cares of the people and the inward yearnings or chafings of individuals--usually in young women. Among notable instances that come to mind from the novels, one is the rivalry between John and Robert Loveday for the hand of the capricious Anne Garland in The Trumpet-Major; another is the harrowing enchantment Bathsheba Everdene has for the irresponsible Sergeant Troy in Far From the Madding Crowd.

But in the stories the soldier functions outside the larger patriotic military horizon, that is, Hardy's rural characters are a kind of demarcation line, which places a barrier around Wessex village life. This is seen in "Enter

a Dragoon," for example, where Sergeant-Major Clark interrupts the complacent homeliness of the Paddock family only to die without inflicting more damage than he has already done.

In a more suggestive way we see this protective barrier in the anecdotal "A Tradition of 1804" (LLI), when fears of Napoleon invading England are aroused. [1] Indeed, the tale directly involves Bonaparte himself. While at best this is an atmospheric tale, it demonstrates an historic attitude toward a real danger at the time and gives one a sense of coming face to face with a momentous personage. The same situation is analogous to those childhood forms of patriotic identification, when children sit enthralled as veterans tell and retell stories of real or imagined confrontations with an enemy.

Old Solomon Selby, who "leaned back in the recess behind him and smiled in the fire," is one of Hardy's local griots, historians of legends who help reconstruct the past and maintain the heritage of Wessex. [2] His "narrative smile" is the smile of the dreamer, the mythmaker, whose tales of the past grow wondrous in the present, their magic extending further in time as the realities of the events recede further away from the tale-teller and his audience. The narrator who relays the circumstances of old Selby's narrative to us as an

adult recalling the past does not vouch for the authenticity of Selby's alleged sighting of "Boney" and his men. It is Solomon's "manner of narrating" the adventure which matters most.

True to form, Hardy does not commit himself; nor does he judge his characters. The narrator in the story is cautious in presenting Selby's tale, and while we may be dubious we are not absolutely certain that what is said about the adventure did not, in fact, occur.

Selby is old when the narrator relays the story to us (and one feels it is a story the narrator has heard many times). It is ten years since Selby's last telling of it. This sequence of time points out several negative aspects of the tale. First, the story is only an incident, and one which remains prominent in the long life of a very old man. After many years, amelioration and intermediate knowledge between childhood experiences and those of adulthood are blended into the narrative without thought of distance and time. For example, Selby feels that "of all the years of my growing up the ones that bide clearest in my mind were eighteen hundred and three, four, and five" (p. 208). These early years are filled with Napoleonic conquests of Europe, sorties into the Middle East, and as far as Russia. It is natural that they would be years of great impression in the mind of any young-

ster, especially to one living the isolated shepherd's life as does the youthful Selby.

Selby's night of watchfulness, when he and his Uncle Job, himself a "sergeant of foot," had witnessed Bonaparte's surveillance of the English coast, is miraculously precise in minuscule military matters of detail and identification of mappings, configurations and facial features. Such precision at a distance, and under extremely unnerving conditions, appears like contrivance on the author's part.

But these and other faults, while obvious, should not blind one to the positive side of the tale. The purpose in relating this information is to establish intensity before an overwhelming threat of eminent danger. There is a sense of impending excitement given by such details, although one can hardly believe that young Selby is conscious of them at the time.

From the perspective of Wessex history, however, Hardy invests the story with life. Solomon's tale has immediacy and is protected from too close scrutiny by the smoothing effects of time. Since Bonaparte, despite the country-wide threat he posed to England, never did invade the island, Selby's account has the benefit of hindsight bravado. Most of all the tale scales down the man Bonaparte himself to human dimensions, that is, from a herculean power to that

of a reconnoitering soldier. Granted, one doubts that a man of Napoleon's stature would himself participate in such a mission as to scout the terrain of a prospective beachhead; but here Hardy's wonted liking for the improbable manifests itself.

Hardy's manner of telling a story is always to be suggestive, not definitive. He arouses curiosity about the improbable and relates it in such a way as to leave the reader considering the possibilities. He uses time and distance to cover himself from too blatant fabrication. By using the second narrator to tell the story, the omniscient narrator (Hardy) cannot be faulted for what he attributes to the secondary source, Selby's amanuensis.

In his June 1919 preface to the story, before its transfer from Life's Little Ironies to Wessex Tales, Hardy shows surprise that some years following its publication he was told that the Selby incident was, indeed, a longstanding Wessex tradition.[3] It is also true that Hardy's interests in Napoleonic exploits, especially as they related to England, were extensive. His notes, from which his 1880 novel, The Trumpet-Major, was written, were so copious that he used much of what he did not need for the book as the foundation for his dramatic epic, The Dynasts, some twenty years later.[4]

Finally, "A Tradition of 1804" fits in with the historic and thematic pattern of Wessex. As an illustration of Hardy's reliance on oral heritage (rather like "The Duke's Reappearance," for example), it imparts a flavor of the past in order to immortalize his historical point of reference. By aligning Wessex history and English national history, Wessex maintains its permanence.

In "A Committee-Man of 'The Terror'" (ACM), Hardy presents a somber tale of intrigue that, at first glance, seems to have little relation to the Wessex world--particularly the use of the military as historic background. In fact, it has no direct bearing on Wessex, except as it touches the lives of the local inhabitants. It is an odd tale told through the auspices of an "old Mrs. H____." Like Solomon Selby, she too is aged, in her eighties; but Mrs. H____ receives her tale second-hand from the mouth of her long-dead mother. The time again is the Napoleonic period of 1802-03, but the incidents in the tale reflect on the French Revolution during the 1790's following the Reign of Terror.

The story tells of the ill-fated romance between an ex-Revolutionary, "Mr. B____," and a survivor of the Terror, "Mlle. V____." Underlying their romance is a discussion on moral conscience and conviction of purpose.

Mr. B___ was a once feared member of the Committee of Public Safety in France during the notorious Reign of Terror. Since then the new government forged by Napoleon and his forces has seized power, and Mr. B___ has fled to England.

Mlle. V___, a victim of that Terror, works as a governess in the household of a Wessex soldier, General Newbold. By accident she has recognized Mr. B___ as one of the feared members of that committee whom she holds responsible for the deaths of relatives by the guillotine. The two are brought together by circumstances, and while enmity on Mlle V___'s part soon turns to love, Mr. B___ finds her a sympathetic spirit with whom he hopes to rebuild his life in a new land.

The danger facing both persons centers around the troubles between France and England as a result of the Napoleonic threat. Mr. B___ tries to persuade Mlle. V___ to marry him and to escape the perils of being French nationals in a hostile country. Mlle. V___, at first bitterly opposed to the man, becomes enmeshed in a conflict between her forgiving heart and her embittered soul. She questions him about his committee activities and asks if he is sorry. Mr. B___ says he feels no guilt; that his allegiance to the cause of liberty during the Revolution was impersonal. His faith remains strong in the principles of the Enlightenment on which the revolt was predicated. Confused, Mlle. V___ is unable to make up her mind.

At this point Hardy's ironic muse intervenes to resolve the conflict. Thinking to escape her lover, Mlle. V___ rides a coach for London. Halfway there she renounces her past hatred and opts for love; she returns to the house where she is to meet Mr. B___. Having glanced at the departing coach, however, she sees the outline of shadowy figures on top of it, and imagines she recognizes a familiar form among them.

When she gets home, she finds a note from Mr. B___ releasing her from any pledge of marriage to him. He says that he understands her dilemma: as "one whose life has been devoted, and...sacrificed to the cause of Liberty," he leaves her as he has found her.

Following her initial "shock of surprise and grief," Mlle. V___ recalls "the shape of a figure among the outside passengers" on the coach as that of her friend. The irony of their situation now complete, Mlle. V___ returns to her old job of governess, where "she remained to the end of her days" (p. 232).

In some respects this story is formed on a political-philosophical premise more than on a military one. But given the temper of the times in which the incident occurs--the state of war existing between England and France--the two individuals, as victims of circumstances, are just lonely refugees. The story, like "A Tradition," stands as part of the historical interaction of Wessex with England as a nation in a time of

national concern.

"A Committee-Man," on the other hand, unlike "A Tradition," does not concern itself overmuch with factual accuracy and labored details that may or may not be historically true; instead, the passions of two people, entrapping them in adversities over which they have no control, convey their own personal history--one dependent on an elemental but mutual human experience. For this basic reason, and because the incident takes place in Wessex, its special human interest gives it the required adhesive to fit into the Wessex mosaic of Hardy's imaginative world.

Notes

[1] See Chapter III, note 5, p. 114.

[2] Ruth Firor, Folkways in Thomas Hardy, remarks how Hardy was inundated by stories of the Napoleonic era, "related to him...by old folk who had been themselves eyewitnesses or had known those who had seen the Rainbarrow Beacon burning year after year, folk who had known many false alarms and had felt the intense fear of 'Boney,' the Corsican ogre" (p. 299).

[3] Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings, pp. 23-4.

[4] Preface, The Trumpet-Major.

Edmund Blunden, Thomas Hardy, says that Hardy had "remarked that he had a haphazard way with documents at the time" of the writing of The Trumpet-Major. He quotes Hardy: " 'However, it was the writing of that book which led to The Dynasts, the matter I collected being five times as much as I required for The Trumpet-Major, including what is now very valuable to me...oral information on those times from people who lived in them....' " (p. 47).

F. E. Hardy, The Life, mentions how as a boy Hardy found an old periodical, A History of the Wars, which dealt with the Napoleonic wars: "The torn pages of these contemporary numbers with their melodramatic prints of serried ranks, crossed bayonets, huge knapsacks, and dead bodies, were the first to set him on the train of ideas that led to The Trumpet-Major and The Dynasts" (pp. 17-18).

Chapter VII - Use of the Clerical Profession

One controversy that Hardy's work provoked centered on his use of the clergy. More than once he had to fend off accusations of immorality and anti-religious sentiments. Tess of the d'Urbevilles and Jude the Obscure are two of his major works that were excoriated for allegedly encouraging immoral behavior, the latter work having been publically burned by one irate clergyman.[1] In an earlier novel, Two on a Tower, he was berated for showing the clergy in an improper light.[2]

At the time of his writing Tess and Jude, the issues these books sought to confront were quite volatile. They were set against the greater questions of evolution, scientific and technological advances, and rampant commercialism as opposed to social issues that arose in their wake. The question, too, whether or not religious faith was any longer required, in the light of the great industrial and scientific movements, challenged much of the established social hierarchy in England.

Faced with these larger issues, along with his leading reputation as a writer during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Hardy was frequently ambivalent toward religion and morality, and was often maligned for the wrong reasons. In a close reading of his fiction or his poetry one

sees no overt evidence that he is anywhere anti-religious in the spiritual meaning of the word. A distinction however has to be made between his attitudes toward traditional religion and toward human nature as he sees it. It is this last that most concerns us in the stories.

The clergymen we meet in the stories represent, for the most part, that class of men who see the church as an economic and social ladder to successful careers. The forms and tenets of the church are maintained only as a set of rules that guide them toward advancement in their profession. As such, these men are portrayed by Hardy as hypocrits--sometimes knowingly, sometimes not. At the same time one cannot necessarily class them as either wholly good or wholly bad, for the one condition that exempts his rural clerics from charges of outright charlatanism is their lack of sophistication. Hardy's men of the cloth, such as Randolph Twycott and the Halborough brothers, in their rural setting, are anachronisms, throwbacks to an era in England when men regularly used the church as a means of bettering themselves--as Jude Fawley tries to do. Often the church was the only means for gifted young men to get an education, and to rise in the world.

Hardy's Wessex world, isolated and fearful of modern innovations, escaped the industrialization, along with the rising affluence of the middle-classes, that sprang up during the

1870's. His young men, like Jude, who sought to lift themselves into an intellectually more fulfilling existence, could only choose the long established church as their model for educational excellence. But, as we have noted in Jude's case, such a road was filled with prejudice, frustrations, class obsession and disappointments. When Hardy addresses these issues he points out the conflict between the worldliness of churchman's ambition and true faith, the cornerstone of Christianity.

This does not mean that all of Hardy's clerics are insincere in their vocation. For example, we have seen the endeavors of Reverend John Maumbry in "A Changed Man," after his conversion from the military to the pulpit, to live the honest self-sacrificing life of a clergyman even though it means worldly defeat. Another example is the Reverend Richard Stockdale in "The Distracted Preacher." In so far as he represents religious sentiments, they are not those of the established church. As a circulating Methodist preacher, Stockdale is able to differentiate between worldliness and moral obligations. The story, like the comedy it is, reconciles the ideals of the young "Reverend" with the apparent reformation of the villagers, exemplified in Lizzy. There are examples in the stories, however, where the professional clergyman sees his role as one of upward mobility and social

prestige, with no real concern for spiritual integrity.

In "The Son's Veto," for example, Randolph Twycott is raised a gentleman's son, educated at the best public schools, yet fearful during his growing years of bringing friends home, because he is painfully sensitive to the distinction between his mother's and father's backgrounds. Randolph's father, before his death, had assiduously attended to the hopeless task of educating his socially inferior and near illiterate mother, Sophy, a former housemaid. But the son's tastes are shaped by the well-to-do peers he meets at school. Randolph's shame at his mother's low birth and peasant mannerisms, as a result, is intensified. The reversal of roles between mother and child, where we witness the shame of the son for the parent, is revealed in the impromptu lesson on grammar after the two have gone to a local concert:

> In conversing with her on their way home the boy who walked at her elbow said that he hoped his father had not missed them.
>
> "He have been so comfortable these last few hours that I am sure he cannot have missed us," she replied.
>
> "Has, dear mother--not have!" exclaimed the public-school boy, with an impatient fastidiousness that was almost harsh. "Surely you know that by this time!" (Itals. his; p. 5)

The death of the vicar leaves mother and son fairly comfortable, but the vicar was auspicious enough to know that his

wife is not to be "left with...control over anything that had been her husband's beyond her modest personal income" (p. 11). The boy's education and his eventual ordination is left in the hands of trustees.

In Randolph's development, there never is a question as to the rightness or wrongness of his profession. Like so many other sons of professional men, he is following in his father's footsteps. Any question of faith or wrestling with the spirit never enters his mind.

In this story Hardy criticises the kind of religious mockery that permits a self-centered arrogant young man of Randolph's persuasion to enter a life of ministering to others' needs, to alleviating their sufferings or to sharing in their joys with his lack of sympathy. Hardy's is not an open attack on religion, but an attack on the inbred institutionalizing of a hypocritical system. Randolph, in fact, is a recognizable type in Victorian fiction; he even has affinities to the young "gentleman" Pip in Dickens's Great Expectations. Indeed, "The Son's Veto" actually goes beyond religious sentiments to one of empathic humanity. Randolph feels nothing for others; the clergy as a profession of faith is incidental to his ambitions. [3]

The Halborough brothers, Joshua and Cornelius, in "A Tragedy of Two Ambitions," are more calculating, but, para-

doxically, show greater sensitivity in their plight than does Randolph Twycott. They are poor, and want to escape their poverty through being ordained clergymen. Their dissolute father--the exact opposite to Sophy Twycott with respect to behavior--is worldly and lowly in the worse sense. He is an abominable parent, and enough to test the most resolute of the faithful.

The boys Joshua and Cornelius, studious and stern in their efforts to rise in the world, are deprived of the small legacy left them by their deceased mother. The money meant to educate them has been taken by their sottish father for his own pleasures. Nevertheless, the boys persevere on their own, achieving some success as students, but settling for lesser parish hopes as preaching licentiates. Also, they have the care of a younger somewhat silly but attractive sister, whom they manage to have educated at a fashionable school in Belgium.

After some years their road along the "religious" world of success is encouraging. But their father appears with a gypsy-woman as his new wife. He tries to force himself upon his boys, while at the same time he ridicules their ambitions. He imparts a truth, however, in his comically boorish way, about their calculating efforts. Addressing his eldest and most determined son, Joshua, he hits home when he descends

on him at the theological college: "Well, what sort of a place is this you are living in?.... A kind of house-of-correction, apparently?" (p. 63). The irony in the barb may be lost on both father and son, but Joshua is so sickened by the presence of his father that he almost faints. He wants him only to go away. He agrees to send him anywhere he wishes and to provide for his needs. The father and his gypsy-wife are summarily sent to Canada.

The issue here, as in "The Son's Veto," is not altogether one of filial and parental concord or discord. It is a question of fitness of place, on the one hand, and of spiritual paucity, on the other. There still remains the larger question of institutional integrity or communication between self-interest and concern for the religious faith of a people. Would Joshua and Cornelius have been any more suitable for the church had their father been as upright as Vicar Twycott? Or, even, had he been as sweet-tempered as Sophy? One suspects, because of their background, that the brothers' attitudes may have been more sensitive toward their parent than Randolph's was to his.

As youngsters, Joshua and Cornelius, aware of their impoverished condition, discuss how they still can achieve their aims. Joshua tells his brother of his frustrations by recognizing they can but hope, at best, to be "national school

masters," and to gain admission to a theological college to be ordained as "despised licentiates." Cornelius, more sensitive than his brother, but no less ambitious, feels that preaching the gospel is honorable with or without a hood of distinction. Joshua nevertheless laments that they will never be able to rise from such a position. Here then is the attitude of these young men toward the church. It is a means to worldly ends. Faith, preaching the gospel, caring for others--these are incidentals subordinate to their professional aspirations. The narrator comments on Joshua reveal that:

> His character was gradually writing itself out in his countenance. That he was watching his own career with deeper and deeper interest, that he continually "heard his days before him," and cared to hear little else, might have been hazarded from what was seen there. His ambitions were, in truth, passionate, yet controlled; so that the germs of many more plans than ever blossomed to maturity had place in him; and forward visions were kept purposely in twilight, to avoid distraction. (p. 57)

Joshua spurs his brother on. He maps out the fashion of his sister's future, in conjunction with his own, for, he feels, "if her face is not her fortune, her face and her brains together will be.... That she should be, every inch of her, an accomplished and refined woman, was indispensable for the fulfillment of her destiny, and for moving onwards and upwards with us" (p. 59).

And so, Joshua, "with his limited human sympathies," disregards his brother's seeming awareness of their own brand of charlatanry about the "fat living" they are looking forward to. He admonishes his brother with this rationalization:

> "Ah, well--don't think lightly of the Church. There's a fine work for any man of energy in the Church, as you'll find," he said fervidly. "Torrents of infidelity to be stemmed, new views of old subjects to be expounded, truths in spirit to be substituted for truths in the letter...." He lapsed into reverie with the vision of his career, persuading himself that it was ardour for Christianity which spurred him on, and not pride of place. He had shouldered a body of doctrine, and was prepared to defend it tooth and nail, solely for the honour and glory that warriors win. (p. 60)

We have here the level of religious fervor in the brothers Halborough. They have "shouldered a body of doctrine," and like vassals protecting their lord, are sworn to defend it against all enemies: "[W]e are in for Christianity," Joshua says to his brother in response to a terse dismissal of Bishop Paley's treatise on church doctrine, Evidences, "and must stick to her whether or no" (p. 61). The Hardyan mockery in these passages is aimed at the brothers, not at religion itself. One senses a kind of pity for these young men, whose uphill battles are doomed to failure. There is desperation in their efforts, so transparently artificial and uninvolved with the compassionate element in the human

spirit as they are.

Joshua, ironically, in his pledge to his brother earlier in their careers, has seen what the church as an institution really stands for:

> "To succeed in the Church, people must believe in you, first of all, as a gentleman, secondly as a man of means, thirdly as a scholar, fourthly as a preacher, fifthly, perhaps, as a Christian--but always first as a gentleman, with all their heart and soul and strength." (p. 65)

Regardless of the cynicism expressed here, we see that Joshua understands the way of his world.

In time Joshua is ordained and becomes a favorite in a local parish. His good fortune is heightened by the presence of a local landowner recently widowed. Prospects for himself to rise socially, and for a good match for his now finely educated sister, Rosa, are so promising that he is overjoyed. Even his brother Cornelius is developing in his own way. But, to their chagrin, they learn that their father has returned alone from Canada, and is now in a jail not far from them, having been arrested for disorderly conduct.

Joshua is incredulous; the progress of his sister's romance with the young widower has advanced to such a stage that he fears their father's return will dash all their hopes: "Beaten!" he exclaims. "We are to be beaten on the eve of our expected Victory!" (p. 74). Despondent, the brothers lament their situation.

Meanwhile, the wedding between their sister and Fellmer, the young landowner, is announced. Joshua and Cornelius learn that their father is coming to give his daughter away, having read of their expected nuptials in the local paper. The brothers go to intercept him on the road, but they miss him. Backtracking, they find him seated against the road bank, drunk.

Unable to get him to return to town, to leave them in peace, they resignedly watch as he staggers toward Fellmer's home, taking a dangerous shortcut across the weir. He falls into the weir; his cries for help go unattended by his sons. When they do respond, too late, he has drowned. His walking stick alone remains. Joshua tosses the stick further back onto the bank, and each of the brothers endeavors to forget their lost father.

Here is the crucial dilemma for the brothers. This man, their father, a source of travail, a man of ill-repute and utmost vulgarity, a man who has frustrated every yearning and hope they had ever entertained to succeed in the world, is finally silenced. The brothers are guilty of several crimes, no doubt, and chief among them is moral negligence and lack of Christian charity. Their guilt places them beyond any worldly recompense.

While the brothers recognize their deception for what it is, the revelation to them is not one of remorse as much as it is a lamentation over the loss of their worldly ambitions. Joshua says to Cornelius, some years after their father's death:

> "But here are you doing journey-work, Cornelius, and likely to continue at it till the end of the day, as far as I can see. I, too, with my petty living--what am I after all?.... To tell the truth, the Church is a poor forlorn hope for people without influence, particularly when their enthusiasm begins to flag." (p. 85)

Later, thinking about the cast-off walking stick that once belonged to their father, they notice that it has grown and flowered. The mocking irony is, therefore, complete. Finally, the two clergymen meditate on the possibility of taking their own lives.

Hardy's handling of this tragic story is masterful. While it has a similarity to Jude, the tale has a completeness all its own. [4] Jude however takes on greater issues, universal in their implications, which look toward the future of the individual in a changing society. "Two Ambitions" capsulizes the problems of morality on a personal level: how much is one willing to concede of his inherent humanity for the ubiquitous rewards of worldly success? Is the church at fault in this particular case of the brothers Halborough?

Hardy definitely feels that the picture the church offers to young aspirants stresses issues and things far more than it does spiritual qualities. Perhaps Joshua is to be believed when he confesses to Cornelius his position in the world following their father's death: "As for me," he says, "I would rather have gone on mending mills, with my crust of bread and liberty" (p. 85).

Finally, the problem for the Halboroughs is that they have discounted, until too late, the element of human frailty. Their hatred of their father is too deep to be eradicated by abstract doctrine. In a profession that sometimes calls forth extraordinary efforts of human endurance, the brothers Halborough are just ordinary men.

The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate how Hardy made use of clergymen as a type to focus a view of the church as an institution. The establishment tends to welcome young men of promise, frustrated by limited circumstances, and gives them a means to expect more in the world. Some bring to their religion a faith that pays little heed to theology and doctrine, like the Reverends John Maumbry and Richard Stockdale. Others, like Randolph Twycott, are born to their profession, a situation that has a long historical precedent. And others, like the brothers Halborough, filled with unquenchable ambition, think of the church only as a calculated means to their social and economic ends.

Notes

[1] Preface, Jude the Obscure. Hardy comments in his 1912 "Postscript" to his preface, that the book's initial reception was so negative that as a result of the poor "verdicts from the press its next misfortune was to be burnt by a bishop--probably in his despair at not being able to burn me."

F. E. Hardy, The Life, discusses the pros and cons with respect to Jude's publication in the biography, in detail (pp. 270-287).

[2] Preface, Two on a Tower. In the preface of 1895, Hardy says that "on the publication of the book people seemed to be [of the opinion] first, that the novel was an 'improper' one in its morals, and, secondly, that it was intended to be a satire on the Established Church of this country. I was made to suffer in consequence from several eminent pens" (p. v).

[3] Robert Gittings, Young Thomas Hardy (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1975), suggests that Hardy is somewhat responsible for the attitudes taken toward him by his contemporaries. He mentions the "legend that Hardy suffered some sort of snobbish rejection is really derived from his own bitter and sarcastic remarks about the clergy in some of his novels, and particularly some short stories.... Perhaps the most unpleasant character in all Hardy's works is the egregious and cruel young snob who becomes a clergyman in "The Son's Veto," which Hardy seems to have considered his best short story." Gittings further suggests that "Randolph" may have been formed on Hardy's wife's nephew, Walter Randolph Gifford (p. 46).

Carl Weber, Hardy and the Lady from Madison Square (Waterville, Me: Colby College Press, 1952), corroborates Gittings's remarks about Hardy's feelings toward "The Son's Veto," observing that Hardy did indeed believe this was "the best story" he had written, but Rebeckah Owen, the "Lady" in the book's title, disagreed; she believed that " 'The Three Strangers' was far above it, and above all his and other people's short stories." Weber says that "in this instance, at least, she was right and Hardy was wrong" (p. 114).

[4] F. E. Halliday, Thomas Hardy, says the story is a "variation on the theme...about the young man who could not go to Oxford, and [is] a brief anticipation of Jude [the Obscure]" (p. 115).

Richard Carpenter, Thomas Hardy, says that "not all the stories have this kind of ironic image, characteristic of Hardy's best novels; but the father's walking stick approaches it." (For reference to the "flowering walking stick," see Chapter II, pp. 20-21). Carpenter adds that "the irony [in the story] is grimmer and more severe than in 'On the Western Circuit'." He believes that "the source is similar: two compelling motives, the choice of either one leading to unhappiness" (pp. 71-2). While I understand Carpenter's meaning, I find the analogy between the two stories is not very good. Raye's motivations, along with those of Edith Harnham, are entirely different, both in circumstance and situation, from that of the Halborough brothers. And despite the life-long misery awaiting the three characters in "Circuit," no one was murdered by negligence, nor was religious feeling feigned.

Chapter VIII - The Aura of Wessex as Depicted in Two Descriptive Tales

Throughout this study Wessex has been discussed from its specific rural background to its ubiquitous wholeness as an historical reflection of Hardy's imaginary world. Implied in the discussion, as well, has been what Herbert Muller calls Hardy's "spaciousness." [1] That is, Hardy's Wessex has a primordial <u>feel</u> that vibrates with life and meaningful activity in a relatively small area. This activity is partly the result of Hardy's fluid imagination, partly the result of his cultural heritage, and partly the result of his sensitiveness to the vast significance of little things.

In many respects Hardy had an archeologist's grasp of the importance of minutiae. He could structure his narratives into cohesive patterns that tested relevant data. It was Edmund Blunden who said that Hardy had the talent to become a different kind of writer, other than a novelist. [2] Trained early in life to become an architect, he possessed skills sufficiently honed to have made a career for himself in that line of work. His inclination in architecture was not toward building new structures but the restoration of

the old, particularly churches. This may seem paradoxical since Hardy was a vigorous agnostic. But, like many artists, he possessed religious sensibilities exclusive of dogma or theology.

Hardy was curious about himself and his environment, the Dorset he lived in and loved all of his life, the magnetic world that held him enthralled; it contained all the materials he needed to forge his trade as a writer. Dorset is real. But Hardy's imaginative powers and his equally sensitive nature transposed his native Dorset into the legendary Wessex, where one reality was superimposed on another. Time and space congealed to make of the relics, the customs, the hints and suggestions of a forgotten past part of what he, like a photographer, snapped into an image of the present. All those things he saw around him were meshed together, so to speak, by his artistic nature. From these bits and pieces of the past, Hardy made Wessex what Richard Carpenter called a "completely envisioned reality." [3] This meant that he was able to project his "envisioned reality" into a concrete thing, where his readers could believe that Wessex existed, indeed, that it exists. It is a land that, as David Cecil says, Hardy turned into an "elaborate study of landscape." [4]

Hardy's Wessex connotes an essence that renders it permanent in time. To create this semblance of a lasting vision,

he skillfully balances the past with the present by linking up what has been with what still remains. From such linkages there is depth of sensations that stresses closeness--closeness of land to people; people to people; emotion to emotion; in short, hearts beat, flesh touches, pain and joy are shared, confluent with the winds and storms of Wessex--all as old and simple as the barrows and mounds of antiquity strewn over its lands.

Unlike what we find in his poems, and frequently in the novels, Hardy does not attempt to answer the eternal question of man's relationship to God or nature in his stories; he tries, instead, to show how man relates to himself and to his immediate surroundings by instilling in him certain patterns of predictability that come from his inherited traditions. Hardy's Wessex prefigures a promise--a covenant--with man, which functions also as a reminder of what he is and from where he came.

Two tales among Hardy's stories that best exemplify this aura of Wessex in both its past and its present are "The Three Strangers" and "A Tryst at an Ancient Earthwork." In them the vision Hardy describes bears witness to the primary elements of Wessex man and his environment that will give us the burgeoning world of the Wessex we recognize in the novels and poems.

Several critics and commentators consider "The Three

Strangers" (WT) one of Hardy's finest stories, if not the finest. [5] It is one of the most anthologized, certainly, perhaps because it includes every constituent device Hardy has ever used in his works. The story has humor and seriousness; music and dancing; oddness, gruesomeness and suspense; rusticity; marriage and a christening; a hangman, a fugitive, and an escape; compassion and comradliness.

The most imposing aspect of the story, beyond these characteristics, is its opening. Hardy's expository landscaping, Blunden believes, is too long and overwritten for a short story. [6] Technically speaking, Blunden is correct. As an art form, the modern short story had been developing along prescriptive lines since the days of Edgar Allan Poe. Irving Howe, with others, has suggested that Hardy's stories are not in the mainstream of the form that grew out of the American, European and Russian traditions, and, I would add, which twentieth century writers have shaped into a definite art form. [7]

But that is just the point. Hardy has his own unique conception of his craft, and his stories are consistent with his beliefs. [8] What Blunden, for one, appears to want is a functional or conventional form in a story, where structural unity conforms to a set of rules; but what Hardy gives in this story is an organic structure, a form where incidents emerge out of the background, not necessarily in a well-rounded

fashion to fit a prescribed ideal. For instance, without the exposition in "The Three Strangers," the tone and color, indeed, the inherent ebullience of it is lost. What remains are the condensed characteristics noted above, which, lacking the umbrella-like atmosphere of the exposition, makes the story skeletal.

Hardy begins "The Three Strangers" by surveying a seeming wasteland, isolated from anything resembling civilization--a land apparently lost in time. But there is life, a remarkable pervasive presence that keeps in touch with living men:

> Among the few features of agricultural England which retain an appearance but little modified by the lapse of centuries, may be reckoned the high, grassy and furzy downs, coombs, or ewe-leases, as they are indifferently called, that fill a large area of certain countries in the south and south-west. If any mark of human occupation is met with hereon, it usually takes the form of the solitary cottage of some shepherd. (p. 35)

The "solitary cottage," the only structure apparent in this sweeping landscape is like something in a Turner painting that one feels sure Ruskin would have admired.[9]

Hardy's usual organizational device of time and distance fixes the picture of this openness in the mind. It clings to the memory--out of definite reach, but there.

The "fifty years ago" of the first sentence of the second paragraph removes the scene far enough from the present to

make one feel its authenticity. In a way this sentence has the ring of a fairy tale beginning; but unlike the fairy tale, the picture presented is not diverting or made up to entrance children. If Hardy had not told us that the area he has described was "not more than five miles from a country-town," we would still feel the vastness and isolation that the shepherds themselves feel in their ignorance or actual carelessness about other places. They live within these boundaries dictated to us, which for them is the only world that matters. The closeness of these "furzy downs"-counties are made more important to the inhabitants by the "inimical seasons" that discourage insiders from leaving and outsiders from entering.

The "sleets, snows, rains, and mists" are protective barriers, and these elements are the particular ingredients Hardy uses--God-like--to create his Wessex world. His shepherds know how to live in this world without the shaping imaginations and sober thoughts of poets, philosophers and artists, "'that less repellent tribe...who 'conceive and meditate of pleasant things'.'" These herdsmen of the plains of Wessex, without recognizing it, stake claims to what was once, in ancient times, places and things used by shadowy forbears for other purposes to live:

> Some old earthen camp or barrow, some

> clump of trees, at least some starved fragment of ancient hedge is usually taken advantage of in the erection of these forlorn dwellings. (p. 35)

In the midst of these ancient remnants the family of Shepherd Fennel inhabits an exposed house, Higher Crowstairs, situated by the "crossing of two footpaths at right angles" on the upper valley or coomb. They feel at no disadvantage from the fierce weather, although his fellow shepherds tend to pity them "their sufferings." This seemingly non-bucolic region of Wessex can be contrasted with the idealized and romanticized shepherds' existences in the peans of antiquity. Hardy's shepherds reveal the kind of reality about what their life truly entails, as opposed to the pleasant pictures we usually associate with the poetic shepherds of the past. Wessex is no Greece. Nevertheless the harshness of the south Wessex terrain Hardy describes is not particularly an enemy--or friend--to its inhabitants. They accept their environment.

The story itself centers on a christening party held at the Fennel homestead for one of the rustic shepherds celebrating the birth of his second child. The gaity of the party, which includes some nineteen neighbors and friends, is interrupted by a stranger, later to be identified as one Timothy Summers, a thief who is on the run for having stolen a sheep to keep his family from starving.

The unwitting frolickers accept the first stranger hospitably into their gathering. It is a rainy night and he is soaked. Shortly, another stranger, mysterious-looking and garbed in black, appears. Through song and riddles, he is identified as the itinerant hangman on his way to perform his duty to the crown in Casterbridge on behalf of an escaped sheep-stealer.

Hardy's irony--and sense of macabre fun--is seen in the scene between the unknown victim, Timothy Summers, the first stranger, and the hangman. Each is fully at ease in the home of the good shepherd. They exchange shop-talk, as the escapee, the only one in the know about the ironic situation, is momentarily startled by the entrance of the third stranger, his bereft brother.

The activity following upon the third stranger's entrance is spontaneous. He is mistaken by both the hangman and the villagers for the accused escapee, as he turns and runs. While the women faint and the men stumble about and bump into one another, they set out in hot pursuit to locate the miscreant. When he is finally caught and brought back to the Fennel home, the authorities are called, and the villagers and the hangman realize their mistake. In the meantime, the real culprit, Timothy, has escaped for good, and the villagers have lost interest in the chase since they feel "the intended punish-

ment was cruelly disproportioned to the transgression, and the sympathy of a great many country-folk in that district was strongly on the side of the fugitive" (p. 61).

This summary, of course, does not do justice to Hardy's marvelous comic effects, filled with the ironic turns that make the story a fine example of good farce. But those elements that give it its peculiar Wessex flavor depend much on the geographical background. The opening setting is a thumbnail portrait of Wessex country that permeates every other story or poem Hardy has written. The rustics form the groundwork of the Wessex picture, as important as the geography itself. These are not tragic or deracinated men and women pulling away from their origins, seeking to extend themselves beyond the boundaries of their world. But the characters portrayed in this tale emphasize the fundamental quality of immutability or permanence of the Wessex world without which Hardy's greater novels and poems would be less memorable.

The comic element in "The Three Strangers" is undoubtedly a re-working of Shakespearean relief, in the Bottom or Dogberry tradition, for example. The drollery and pastiche of the constable are miniature Dogberry--used by Hardy elsewhere, most notably in his more classically structured novel The Mayor of Casterbridge.[10] The other rustics are replicas of any number of memorable characters in his novels. The macabre

is suggested in the guise of the hangman. The fear his presence invokes in the would-be revellers is ritually acted out by the symbolic circling of this dark intruder, so as to ward off his carrying of evil among them, as he incants to them his riddles about his profession.

Music and dance, the odd matrimonial matches between old and young, give the rustics, on the one hand, fairy-like--or better, sprite-like--characteristics, but they are invested with a homogeneity of place, on the other, that appears odd only to those outside this world. As crude and irregular as nature itself are these rustics in their seeming behavior, but there is nothing malicious about them. They have their personal cares; yet they recognize and honor simple human justice in the compassion they show toward the accused sheep-stealer. They find it ludicrous that a man should be hanged for stealing food to feed his starving family. These rustics know very well what it means to be hungry.

Disregarding the controversial introduction to the story for the moment, a look at the narrative structure itself might reveal why some critics hold the tale in such high regard. F. E. Halliday likes it for its action which, in the classic tradition, is confined to a single evening. [11] The story, in fact, is conceived in the guise of a play--which Hardy did dramatize for the stage. [12] The scene and all the characters

(except for the chase where the men find themselves in pursuit of their prey among the coombs) are located in one place, Fennel's home. The dialogue is fast and lively, the characters balance one another, with the real culprit and the hangman sharing center stage, and supply the suspense in their mutual ignorance of one another. The climax comes when these two adversaries remain behind to finish eating, drinking, and conversing, while the others have taken up the chase.

Blunden's remarks on the story may have some validity.[13] But his view does not consider Hardy's narrative purpose in conveying not only the rustic's isolation, but, more importantly, his interaction with this seemingly desolate environment that for many more sophisticated persons appears to invite boredom, at least, and tragedy, at best. In some ways Hardy might be guilty of misleading his readers by such a serious and somber introduction. Yet, all things being equal, his introduction to this story is no less weighty than that used in The Return of the Native, given the proportions of the novel. There is a remarkable similarity between the two opening scenes.

Hardy is showing us the self-sufficiency of Wessex as a world apart. His characters know, love and understand it, even as he does. And all the important values that men should be concerned with are just as marked there as elsewhere--work,

love, play, companionship, sharing and compassion. It is as though he emphasizes that in Wessex nature reigns supreme, but men manage to live anyway--and the two are impartially aware of each other.

In "A Tryst at an Ancient Earthwork" (ACM), we do not really have a story at all, but a descriptive narrative grafted onto an essay. This tale grew out of a speech Hardy presented at the Dorset Field and Antiquarian Club in 1884.[14]

The skeletal story-line is simple enough. The narrator has been summoned by an archeologist to meet with him at an old burial mound of the ancient Romans. He helps him to unearth some relics and old bones. The relics are the property of the county, but the archeologist confiscates a statue of Mercury for himself. He hides it on his person and both men leave the area. Some years later upon the death of his old friend, the narrator learns of the theft of the statue.

This sketch may have no real significance as a story. Its importance lies in the brilliant prose itself, which relies on its descriptive powers to hold the reader.[15] As in the opening of "The Three Strangers," but more expansively, the sketch unfolds like the sweep of a painter's canvas, depicting natural phenomena interacting with its environs. The ancient fort Mai-Dun, the focal point amidst stratums of land and rock, arrests the eye of the narrator:

> With the shifting of the clouds the faces of the steeps vary in colour and in shade, broad lights appearing where mist and vagueness had prevailed, dissolving in their turn into melancholy gray, which spreads over and eclipses the luminous bluffs. (p. 173)

Birds "soar suddenly into the air, and hang over the summits of the heights with the indifference of long familiarity." And "as the birds rise behind the fort, so do the clouds rise behind the birds, almost as it seems, stroking with their bagging bosoms the uppermost flyers."

One feels that Hardy is describing the Wessex equivalent of the Creation. Yet nature is portrayed as a kind of curator or protector of seemingly forgotten treasures, fossils and relics of the distant past. The narrator crosses this wonderland of sounds and sights as an explorer if not as a transgressor onto hallowed ground.

He sets out at early evening for his midnight rendezvous with his friend. On the way to the meeting at the ancient fort he observes and imbibes the character and ambience of this forsaken habitat. All that really is known about Mai-Dun is that its origin is Celtic, and that it was occupied by the Romans after their invasion of Britain.[16]

His way to the meeting place is tortuous, up and down sloping hills, following grassy covered paths thought to be routes once traversed by former inhabitants. The isolation,

the fits of rain, winds and lightening storms heighten the narrator's imagination and he feels as if he is on a pilgrimage through another time, a time of Roman soldiers and pitched battles.

The historical allusions are juxtaposed by the narrator; he becomes suspended between the past and present, absorbing the nuances filtering from the furze valley and contours of the hills that transfigure time. On the one hand, he can imagine how "men must have often gone out by [the fortress] gates...to battle with the Roman legions under Vespasian" (p. 178); on the other, he sees around him evidence of oxen and sheep, and "badgers, rabbits, and hares" as the only remaining life forms.

Here again Hardy employs one of his favorite devices when he wants to infuse his work with his brand of reality and authenticity. The life that was and the life that is suggest continuity and linkages among cultures. What otherwise could be taken as a fantasy world in its pure imaginative sense becomes, instead, a concrete world of artifacts, curious pathways and probable ramparts for launching armies. Wessex antiquities become marvels of survival--things changed only from their original external forms, but things fixed in place and preserved by time. Transience in the kinds of men, conditions and means men lived under and by, all goes on, but nature reclaims and redistributes the once prized possessions no longer

useful to those persons who formerly fought, lived and worshipped on her grounds and under her skies.

The ancient fortress of Mai-Dun, the dominating feature of the Wessex terrain, is a monument--like the great monument of Salisbury Plains, Stonehenge--to the permanence of Wessex. It is, to Hardy, as meaningful a tribute to man's connectedness with his past as the pyramids, the Hanging Gardens or the Acropolis.

"A Tryst," like "The Three Strangers," contains sources on which Hardy drew for his other works. For instance, the relics which are uncovered in this descriptive piece appear again in The Mayor of Casterbridge, in Jude the Obscure, as well as in the poetry. [17] In the vicinity of the grounds are the remains of Roman soldiers; Hardy acknowledges the same in his poem "The Clasped Skeletons." Again, the remains of Susan Henchard are interred in the area.

With just these two selections, Hardy implants in our minds a primary source for all his Wessex creations. In them the aura of Wessex filters out and binds each of his stories in such a way as to form the cohesion I have been endeavoring to depict in this study.

Whether one reads Hardy's stories individually or as part of a total scheme, they can enhance his novels and poems. But the stories read as a composite group elicit a quiet pleasure

of their own, and they do not lessen one's esteem either for the artist or for his other works. At best I would think his stories give him a new dimension and make us feel much closer to the spirit behind the author and the man.

Notes

[1] Herbert J. Muller, "The Novels of Thomas Hardy Today," Southern Review, 6 (Summer, 1940 - Spring, 1941), besides its spaciousness, asserts that though Hardy's Wessex is "a little world, it is still a world, and the final stress should be upon the vast dimensions he gave it--not to be found" anywhere else. Hardy "invested these few acres with a grandeur, [and] erected on them one of the sublime conceptions of fiction" (His itals; pp. 214-226).

[2] Edmund Blunden, Thomas Hardy, discusses Hardy's fascination with his home county of Dorchester, which to him was "still a Roman as well as an English capital," and says that Hardy "need not have been a novelist in order to win fame as a writer" (p. 54).

[3] Richard Carpenter, Thomas Hardy, calls Wessex "one of the great fictional settings of literature." Hardy kept "using it, elaborating and varying his treatment until it took on all the depth and richness of a completely envisioned reality." He adds that "the region itself is centered in the county of Dorset, but it is more nearly coterminal with the ancient Wessex--the county of the West Saxons.... It thus is both concentrated and extensive, a rural landscape which yet includes a great variety of specific settings." Wessex therefore is, as a symbolic microcosm, "quite as much, or more, a creation of art as it is a record of reality" (pp. 28-9).

[4] Lord David Cecil, Hardy the Novelist, explaining his statement, says that Wessex "combines as no other does, breadth and intimacy. Such a writer as Wordsworth confines himself in general to the broad outlines of his subject.... [W]ith broad brush [Wordsworth] sketches in mountain, lake and sunset sky." But Hardy employs a "combination of botanist's microscope and astronomer's telescope." Hardy's "picture of the country and county life [is] first among the manifestations of his imaginative power...because it is the most individual manifestation. No other novelist has done anything like it" (pp. 69-73; 77-8).

[5] Blunden's comments are mixed. In this story, he says, Hardy "has employed the marvelous observation and knowledge of county humours which no writer of English fiction has possessed

in the same degree. The pictures are richly realistic, the painting is that of the Dutch school sure enough--but it would have been better had the method been less stately and leisurely." But he "appears inclined to give us rather an evening address on eweleazes and shepherds' cottages than to ensnare our sense with significances of secrets and dangers. The information of its kind is good and abundant, but it belongs to other occasions and purposes..." (pp. 203-04).

Edmund W. Gosse, "The Speaker's Gallery: Thomas Hardy," Speaker, II, believed that this story was Hardy's "most complete," because the " 'tension of its wild emotion' raises common scenes of ludicrous humor to the heights of tragedy." Hardy is "one of the very few living English writers who can be measured with the great masters without sinking into insignificance" (pp. 295-96).

F. E. Halliday, Thomas Hardy, feels that this story is "perhaps the best of all [Hardy's] short stories...[because] it is a short story, not a short novel. The action being confined to a single evening in the living room of a shepherd's cottage..." (p. 114).

Carl Weber, Hardy in America (1946; rpt. New York: Russell and Russell, 1966), views the story as one of Hardy's "very finest." But, he continues, "curiously enough, it attracted very little attention." Weber quotes [from a review of it in Sewanee Review (1892), by] W. P. Trent: " 'There are few stories in all literature more perfectly worked out in every detail than "The Three Strangers." ' " Yet, in 1883, when the story first appeared, Weber notes that "there seemed to be few readers to agree with that judgment" (p. 48). See also Chapter VII, note 3, p. 174.

6 See note 5.

7 Irving Howe, Thomas Hardy, believes that Hardy's stories "have little to do with the main line of the modern short story," as is found in the short fiction of Checkov, Joyce or Hemingway. "Hardy's short fiction might be described as tales, since that is to put them in a mellower light and relate them to a more easy-paced and amiable mode of narrative than we can usually find in the modern short story" (p. 76).

John Wain, Introd., Selected Stories, comments that,

"The greatest masters of the form, in Hardy's lifetime and since, have all tended to seek their material in the realm of the unremarkable.... Hardy's dissent from this attitude leaves him isolated among modern writers of the short story. He seems to have been perfectly aware of this, but it hardly worried him. He had the unruffled conviction...that everyone was out of step except himself." Wain adds that "some of [Hardy's] stories are frankly anecdotes. Others are sufficiently complex in plot to have been written at length as full-scale novels had he cared to do so" (pp. xi; xiv-xv).

Trevor Johnson, Thomas Hardy (London, 1968; rpt. New York: Arco Publishing Company, Inc., 1971), ends his study with only a passing reference to the stories, in general. His opinion of them with the exceptions of "The Three Strangers," "The Withered Arm," "Fiddler of the Reels," and "The Distracted Preacher," is not very high. Like others, he feels that putting Hardy's stories against the likes of Maupassant or "such modern masters of the form as H. E. Bates, Hardy's work in this genre is too encumbered with plot and incident to make the impact its imaginative fertility deserves" (p. 154).

Blunden says that in Hardy's short stories, "we find the touch more erratic and, in the main, the results uneven and only good in parts" (p. 203).

Evelyn Hardy, Thomas Hardy: A Critical Study, comments that Hardy's short stories "bear little resemblance to those of the great masters of this art as we know it.... [He] does not readily lend [himself] to this kind of prose, which requires a style more incisive and a form more highly compressed.... When he submits himself to the discipline of short story writing Hardy fails to be concise...he is often wordy, or moves over a large area than that required to reach his destination..." (pp. 183-4).

[8] See "The Science of Fiction," Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings, pp. 134-8.

F. E. Hardy, The Life, notes in several chapters throughout the biography Hardy's opinions and views toward literature and literary matters. But he states in more or less specific terms what his view is of the "purpose of fiction," and how this purpose is realized. He says that the writer must "give pleasure by gratifying the love of the uncommon in human experience, mental or corporeal"; that he must "strike the balance between the uncommon and the ordinary so as on the one hand to

give interest, on the other to give reality." While Hardy sees this "balance" as a problem for the writer, he believes the key is not to make characters themselves incredible or "abnormal," but that the events themselves should appear to be so. The "writer's art lies in shaping that uncommonness while disguising its unlikelihood, if it be unlikely." Perhaps his most famous dictum which substantiates his beliefs about the art of fiction is contained in the sentence, "A story must be exceptional enough to justify its telling." And, further, "The whole secret of fiction and the drama--in the constructional part--lies in the adjustment of things unusual to things eternal and universal. The writer who knows exactly how exceptional, and how non-exceptional, his events should be made, possesses the key to the art" (pp. 147; 150; 252). See also John Wain, note 7.

9 See Blunden, note 5.

10 See The Mayor of Casterbridge, Chapter 28: Constable Stubberd's testimony against the "furmity" woman.

11 See Halliday, note 5.

12 F. E. Hardy records how at the suggestion of J. M. Barrie, Hardy dramatized his story as a one-act play, which was performed in 1893 (p. 256). See also Carl Weber's Hardy of Wessex (1940; rev. 1965; rpt. New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), pp. 129-132. In addition, Hardy had written an original drama, besides his epic The Dynasts. The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall was written and performed in 1923. For details on this dramatic effort consult The Life, pp. 422-24, specifically, and Weber's Hardy of Wessex, pp. 275 and 310. An interesting note concerning Hardy's view of writing for the stage as opposed to novel writing is contained in his response to a questionaire under the caption, "Why I Don't Write Plays," dated 1892, and collected in Personal Writings, p. 139.

13 See Blunden, note 5.

14 "To Mrs. Henniker," 22.9.93, Letter 17, Fair Woman. Hardy says the tale was originally an article entitled "Ancient Earthworks at Casterbridge" for The English Illustrated Magazine, December 1893, "with four photographs by W. Pouncy of Dorchester." He goes on to say, "I have been buying photos all afternoon to illustrate an article of mine on a noted

earthwork near here" (p. 27, note 85). See also Letter 23, dated Dec. 1, 1893, where Hardy remarks that since the editor of the English Illustrated [Clement Shorter] "had taken it upon himself to identify the spot [in reference to the article] with Dorchester, which I did not wish him to do, since it is just possible that a character who appears in the narrative [the local archeologist who had pilfered a statue of Mercury] may be said to be drawn from a local man, still living, though it is really meant for nobody in particular" (p. 36).

See "Some Romano-British Relics Found at Max Gate, Dorchester," Personal Writings. Notice especially the editor's headnote and footnote (pp. 191-95). See also the pertinent essay, "Maumbury Ring," and editor's footnote, pp. 225-232.

Blunden, in reference to "Maumbury Ring," says that Hardy "had been following the excavations undertaken through the Dorset Field and Antiquarian Club [Hardy being an honorary member] with eager interest.... [Hardy's] account of the proceedings is naturally an unconscious fragment of autobiography, and must not be too sparingly used..." (pp. 120;123).

Weber, Hardy of Wessex, summarizes facts of Hardy's interest in antiquarian relics, and his relationship with Henry Moule, a close friend. Of the story itself, Weber says that in 1885, Hardy "wrote a sketch 'Ancient Earthworks and what two Enthusiastic Scientists Found therein'. Twenty-three years later, when Hardy was sixty-eight years old, he went on a drenchingly wet day to the old Roman ring...and watched the excavations then being conducted there" (p. 25). From these observations Hardy's article "Maumbury Ring" was composed and published in The London Times (October 9, 1908).

F. E. Hardy says that Hardy's interest in archeological digs is indicated when he first began excavation for his home Max Gate between 1883 and 1885 (p. 163).

15 Blunden says that "apart from the plot, the piece shows Hardy's great ability for topographical and reflective composition--the midnight ascent up the outer, the second and the final rampart is perfectly realized" (pp. 54-5).

16 Ruth Firor, Folkways in Thomas Hardy, comments that "Mai-Dun [Maiden Castle] is huge and amazingly complex in design. It was probably a large and permanently walled city

of the Bronze Age. The Romans developed Durnovaria, our modern Dorchester, as a dwelling-place, and turned Mai-Dun into a fort, which was abandoned after their withdrawal." She adds, "It must have taken the men of the Bronze Age, or earlier, many years to erect these five miles of valla; its situation and plan are magnificent even today. We know nothing definite of its history" (p. 272).

F. E. Halliday describes the topographical make-up of Dorset, the "Durnovaria of the Romans, where their roads met and crossed one another...." He adds that the "traveller from south to north...from Weymouth to Sherborne, climbs the chalk escarpment at Upwey and follows the straight gently-falling road flanked by barrows that were ancient long before the Romans made it, and on the left the multiple ramparts of the finest prehistoric fortification in the country, Maiden Castle [Mai-Dun] a mile-and-a-half in circumference. On the outskirts of Dorchester is another and even stranger earthwork, Maumbury Rings, again prehistoric, but adapted by the Romans to make a provincial Colosseum, an amphitheatre for the staging of gladiatorial combats..." (pp. 5-6).

17 Firor relates that Dorchester "reminds one of Roman occupation at every turn. Maumbury Rings, the Cirque of the Gladiators, must have rivaled the Colosseum itself in its day. Here Henchard met Susan, his wronged wife...here an imaginative person in broad daylight might well fancy he saw the slopes lined with Hadrian's soldiery watching the gladiatorial combat." [See The Mayor of Casterbridge, Chapter XI] "Some workmen at Max Gate," she continues, "unearthed a whole platoon of Hadrian's, and a Roman lady of evident nobility and her spouse, an event which Hardy commemorates in 'The Clasped Skeletons' [see Winter Words]... At Dorchester, too, was the Roman burying ground in which the dust of Mrs. Henchard [see Mayor, Chap. xx] mingled with the dust of women of whom all that remained was the glass hairpins and amber necklaces they had worn, and of men who had been buried with coins of Hadrian, Posthumous, and the Constantines in their mouths." [See also "Her Death and After" and "Maumbury Ring" in Wessex Poems.] Referring to Jude the Obscure, Firor remarks that the "pageant of history fascinated...Philotson, with whose unavailing efforts to finish a work on Roman-Brittanic antiquities the reader sympathizes" (p. 289). [See Jude the Obscure, Part III, Chapter VI and Part IV, Chapter IV.]

Chapter IX - Children's Stories

When one considers the romantic and sensitive quality that permeates so much of Hardy's fiction, it is surprising that he did not write more for children. Because of his penchant for irony, Hardy might have been successful at such writing as Stevenson, Carroll, or any other author who directed his talent toward the children's market.

But Hardy's intense zeal to probe consciences and to frame characters' behavior, as well as to confront certain moral issues of the day, did not appeal to the stringent Victorian tastes that guarded against children's exposure to certain kinds of literature. He had already experienced social censure for his literary positions on moral grounds. Since his writings over the years caused such contention, directing his pen toward children may have been too formidable or, at least, too burdensome for any publisher to encounter.

Hardy nevertheless wrote a few stories for children, of which two, "Our Exploits at West Poley" and "The Thieves Who Couldn't Help Sneezing," were solicited by publishers. Neither is especially memorable--which is not to say they are not interesting.

In general, the way is short between Hardy's unusual and

seemingly improbable story plots and the traditional fairy tale. Any good fairy tale, while dependent on the conventional attitudes of a given time, requires a low level of perception on the reader's part. Its content is obvious, usually moving in a straight line from beginning to end, with easily identifiable polar features, that is, a good and bad, or black and white moral point of view.

Similarly, several of Hardy's Wessex tales, such as "The Three Strangers," "Enter a Dragoon," and "The Fiddler of the Reels," as well as "What the Shepherd Saw," are examples that parallel fairy tales. But the various shadings he incorporates in them lifts these tales, imbuing them with more subtle insights. It has been long recognized that many fairy tales with their obvious appeal to children are incisive in subliminal ways. Indeed, the fairy tale, deeply rooted in our cultural and moral value systems, has a complexity that often far outweighs its seeming palpability.

The same characteristics noted in the fairy tale are recognized in Hardy's long short story "The Romantic Adventures of a Milkmaid" (ACM). But in this story his scope is much broader, and the "Milkmaid" tale, despite its profusion of incidents, is not as unsuccessful as some commentators would have us believe.[1]

The story parodies the fairy tale, the gothic romance, and, in several ways, it is a self-parody. Below the surface of Margery Tucker's romance with the Baron von Xanten, one recognizes a perennial childhood favorite, "Cinderella." But as usual in Hardy, the fairy tale element is modified and reshaped to fit his purpose.[2]

For instance, Margery is Cinderella without her horrid step-sisters and step-mother. She is ephemeral enough to be neither good nor bad. Her first meeting with the Baron, however, is menacing, in that he is gloomy, foreign and mysteriously depressed. For example, she arrives in time to prevent him from committing suicide. In appreciation, she receives a letter from him, in which he attributes his new outlook on life to her intercession. He promises her anything she wishes. She tells him that she would like to go to a local dance. Fearing detection for some unrevealed reason, he offers to take her, instead, to a formal ball held in the adjoining county of Toneborough.

After teaching her how to waltz, he provides fine clothing for her, transforming her from a common dairymaid to a beautiful lady of apparent wealth and station. His carriage takes them to the ball, where they are introduced under fictitious names. They dance for several hours and are admired. But at the predetermined bewitching hour, they leave,

returning to the hollow tree from which they started. There Margery dons her old clothing and watches, horror-struck, as the Baron burns all of her evening's finery. Before parting, she promises that she will come to him anytime he feels a need for her.

This then is the synopsis of the Cinderella part of the story.

We have often seen how Hardy fills his stories with a plethora of incidents to further his plots. He has been highly criticized for this.[3] But if Hardy had stopped in "Romantic Adventures" at this variation on the Cinderella theme, I believe the story never would have been published. And despite Hardy's own ambivalent feelings about the tale and the negative critical reception it received, the story was frequently pirated in America.[4] Its popularity may not prove its artistry, but the pirating indicates it had appeal among some segments of the reading public.

Beyond the Cinderella theme in the tale, Margery prefigures certain aspects of his greater and more tragic heroine in Tess of the d'Urbervilles. In fact, publication of "Romantic Adventures" in 1883 precedes Tess by some eight years.[5]

Margery, like Tess, is a milkmaid caught between two lovers. She is linked to her betrothed, Jim Hayward, on the one hand, and to the Baron von Xanten, on the other. But where Tess'

dilemma is rooted in both custom and culture, and gives her personality a deep inner sensitivity, Margery's relationships are more transparent and capricious. In this respect, she has an affinity to Car'line Aspent in "Fiddler of the Reels" and Selina Paddock in "Enter a Dragoon," but without the tragic quality of either of these heroines.

There are two basic plots concurrent in this tale. The first one has to do with the Cinderella theme already discussed; the other involves the romantic triangle, in which Margery is the central figure between two suitors. This second plot consists of a series of incidents that reach melodramatic proportions before the story is resolved. Also, this portion of the story satirizes the gothic romance in a way reminiscent of Jane Eyre. Margery, however superficial, struggles, like Jane, to be more and to get more excitement into her life. Her infatuation for the lugubrious Baron is understandable and not unlike Jane's cautiously intriguing first feelings toward Edward Rochester. Margery is young, pretty, and lively, but she lacks Jane's sophistication. The handsome Baron, in his Byronic pose, isolated in his high "summer shelter" is a "fine-framed, dark-mustachioed gentleman," and unlike any man she has seen or will see in her homely village.

He is to her what Rochester is to Jane Eyre, a brooding, elegant presence, with secrets unfathomable, one who fosters

dangerous temptations. But in the Brontë novel we learn what Rochester's special problems are, while in Hardy's story, we never really learn what is bothering the Baron. He remains shadowy and unfocused, and somewhat contradictory. The parallel therefore between him and Rochester is suggestive more than it is a clear depiction of character. The Baron has all the ingredients of being a master villain, a cynic nonpareil in Hardy; but his character is weakened by a conflicting manner.

First, he encourages Margery to come to him whenever he needs her; then, upon learning of her engagement to Jim Hayward, a lime-burner, he warns her to dismiss any connections they may have toward one another. He next employs Jim and learns from him about his intended plans to marry Margery as soon as he has enough money, and subsequently, in secret, he supplies the young people with a household of fine wares. Next, the Baron reverses the "Good Fairy" analogue, when he summons Margery and Jim to his home, where he is ill. They are married before him, so that she no longer remains a threat to him.

About midway in the story, Jim becomes more prominent. As if caricaturing one of his own heroes, Hardy shifts Jim's character from a shallow rustic to a dashing lancer. The shift of emphasis supports the changed condition between him

and Margery. Margery, although Jim's wife, still fancies herself in love with the Baron through "the assumptiveness of woman's reason" (p. 373). To placate the seemingly fatally ill Baron, therefore, she agrees to this union with Jim.

Margery, hinting somewhat of Bathsheba Everdene's treatment of Gabriel Oak, before marrying Jim makes him promise that they will be husband and wife in name only; for him to assert himself as a husband, or to acknowledge to the world that they are married before she desires it to be known, will doom any chances of their future together.

Their predicament is further complicated by misunderstandings on the part of Margery's father and an officious gardener of the Baron's. Margery's father, for one, has taken for granted that marriage between his daughter and Jim is inevitable. But when Margery jilts Jim at the alter before being tricked into matrimony by the Baron, a terrible quarrel erupts between father and daughter, which causes Margery to leave home. Consequently, Tucker feels remorse and guilt, and leaves a path open for her return by snubbing Jim. The gardener, on the other hand, has surreptitiously witnessed the marriage between Jim and Margery, but incorrectly assumes that she has married the Baron. This last miscalculation introduces us to the gardener's widowed daughter, Mrs. Peach, who hopes to

marry Jim herself.

The last quarter of the novella is melodramatic and active. In a sense it is as though we are reading another story, as Hardy seeks to resolve the various narrative complications.

Jim gives up his lime-burning business and becomes a soldier--a ploy to force Margery to acknowledge their marriage. He also hopes to make her jealous by pursuing Mrs. Peach. He succeeds to the point that Margery sends an anonymous note to the unwitting woman advising her that Jim is a married man. This revelation occurs during an outing at the parade grounds, and the shock causes Mrs. Peach to faint. The discarded note is made public and everyone is stunned to learn of Jim's marriage. As others try to revive Mrs. Peach, Jim goes in search of Margery. He learns that she has gone off in the Baron's carriage. He meets Margery's father, who is outraged by the rumor of Jim's marriage. But he is consoled by another rumor that his daughter is herself married to a "nobleman." He thus gives Jim wrong information that sends him off in an opposite direction.

Eventually, at a wayside inn, Jim and the Baron meet. The latter wants to believe Jim is also married to Mrs. Peach. But Jim corrects him and hears that Margery is "where she ought to be," at his home, "by your own fireside" (p. 406). Even

though the two rivals explain their intentions to one another, each attesting to honorable aims on behalf of Margery's happiness, Jim still thinks the Baron's power over Margery is a threat. He gets, therefore, a solemn pledge from the Baron to stay out of their lives forever.

We learn, however, that the Baron's resolution to Jim has been after the fact. Having whisked Margery away from the Soldier's Review, his design for her is elopement. But when "Margery awoke from her reverie," she is confronted with the moment of decision. And the Baron too is forced to make his decision:

> "At a little sea-side nook, where my yacht lies at anchor," he said tentatively. "Now, Margery, in five minutes we can be aboard, and in half an hour we can be sailing away all the world over. Will you come?"
>
> "I cannot decide," she said, in low tones.
>
> "Why not?"
>
> "Because---"
>
> Then on a sudden, Margery seemed to see all contingencies: she became white as a fleece, and a bewildered look came into her eyes. With clasped hands she leant on the Baron. (p. 410)

The decisions are made. Margery will not run off with the Baron, but will go to her husband.

Years later it is learned that the mysterious Baron has once again attempted suicide, and may have succeeded, "but

nobody in Silverthorn was in a position to ascertain the truth" (p. 412).

Margery meanwhile admits to Jim her beguilement of the Baron, in much the same way Car'line Aspent recognized the power Mop Ollamoor had over her. Jim asks her:

> "Suppose he were to suddenly appear now, and say in a voice of command, 'Margery, come with me!' "
>
> "I believe I should have no power to disobey," she returned, with a mischievous look. "He was like a magician to me. I think he was one.... Yet no," she added, hearing the infant cry, "he would not move me now. It would be so unfair to baby." (pp. 412-13)

As with Car'line, whose inner being lay dormant until awakened by the strains of Mop's fiddle, Margery's complacency is equally unconvincing.

Despite the convoluted plot, the fast and loose pace, and countless incidents, the story does have merit. It is not badly written, and Hardy's artistry is conscious enough to tie together apparent disparate incidents so that the reader's interest is maintained. The disappointment in the tale to some critics is predicated on its seeming lack of seriousness.[7] The potentially strong character of the Baron remains indecisive and undefined. Jim is so malleable that he tends to confound those readers who like their characters tractable, or at least, predictable. Still, the incidents in

"Milkmaid," the romantic juxtapositions, the misunderstood intentions, and the farcical by-play of the bemused rustics, are part of the story's strengths. They represent the "adventures" of a young girl whose dull life is enlivened somewhat before settling down with an essentially dull man.

One might say--and this too coincides with critical disappointment in the story--that its length, some seventeen chapters, suggests a higher purpose on Hardy's part than just a "worthless trifle," as Weber says.[8] But the story is light-hearted and meant strictly for pleasure. No message is necessary. Hardy does right in including it among his collected stories. Even if he had not done so, the story, unlike the others discussed in this section, would have been retrieved, read and hailed sooner or later, as a good, lively piece of entertaining reading.

The next four stories have not been collected, for reasons that will be made apparent. The first is a story that appeared in October, 1874, in The New York Times. According to Weber, this tale, "Destiny and a Blue Cloak," was written shortly before Hardy's first marriage, and was done exclusively for that newspaper.[9] It has never appeared in England. The reason Weber surmises for its not appearing there, and for its not being collected by Hardy, is that the plot and certain

character embellishments were later grafted onto characters and into situations that appeared in his 1875 novel, The Hand of Ethelberta.

Whatever the reason, the story appears to have been forgotten by Hardy in later years and this is unfortunate. It is, in all probability, as Weber states, the first short story that Hardy had written for publication. As a first story, it is not badly done. The plot contains elements we have come to associate with nearly all of Hardy's work, especially those humorous aspects that we find even in his most serious fiction.

Essentially, the story concerns a young girl, Agatha Pollin, who uses deceptive means to win the love of Oswald Winwood, the hopeful paramour of Frances Lovill, her friend. Winwood knows Frances only by her blue cloak, and mistakes Agatha for her. After a hasty meeting, Oswald declares his love; Agatha disabuses him only after she too has committed herself. It seems that she knew of Winwood through Frances, and that she purchased a similar blue cloak, so that she might meet Winwood. Oswald disregards the mistake in the passion of the moment. They vow to marry.

Traveling unnoticed on the same van taking them back to their village, however, is Frances, who has overheard their conversation. But she steals away without comment. Winwood meanwhile tells Agatha that before they can marry, he must

first make his way in the world. He leaves Beaminster for a post in India, where he remains for several years building a career. Agatha, in the meantime, lives at her uncle's home. In time the uncle tells her that he intends to marry Miss Lovill himself and leave for Australia. But before he goes he wants her to accept as her husband a rich and silly old man of sixty-five who has fallen in love with her.

Old Lovill, a distant relative of Frances, is repulsed by Agatha. But with all the forces of money, self-interest, jealousy and revenge working against her, Agatha's efforts to avoid the jaunty old bachelor are defeated. Her communication with the absent Winwood, who has amassed a small fortune in India, is thwarted by Frances, now her aunt, the woman she has outwitted for Winwood's love. Outmaneuvered, Agatha finally marries Old Lovill.

While this early story is a romance with an obvious appeal to young people, Hardy's great feeling for theatrical effects, such as we find in "The Three Strangers," "A Mere Interlude," and certain of the vignettes in "A Few Crusted Characters," are present. Not a lot needs to be said about it. Its interest is primarily historical, and reflects Hardy's literary development.

"Our Exploits at West Poley" is purely for the juvenile reader. It is divided into six sections of about twenty

thousand words. The story was written in the summer of 1883, just before The Mayor of Casterbridge. It was sent to the editors of a Boston periodical, Youth's Companion, but for some unknown reason it appeared in another short-lived Boston periodical, The Household, from November 1892 to April 1893.[10]

The tale centers around two teenaged boys who are cousins, Leonard and Stephen. Their adventures involve the exploration of a cave in the Mendip regions of Upper Wessex. While exploring the cave they mischievously divert a local pocket of water, which interrupts the economic life of their village of West Poley. The interruption, however, benefits the neighboring village of East Poley, which heretofore was an arid impoverished community. Thus the conflict in the story is established, and the development of the plot focuses on the boys' efforts to correct the wrong done to their own community at the expense of the rejuvenated East Poley inhabitants.

The appeal of the story is little above what one finds in children's literature. It has elements reminiscent of Mark Twain's Tom Sawyer, but lacks the American author's vibrancy and imaginative facility. Such a commonplace tale as "Exploits," which might have been written by anybody, falters because it lacks the natural linkage between custom and heritage normally associated with Hardy's work.

The remaining two tales, "The Thieves Who Couldn't Help Sneezing" and "Old Mrs. Chundle," are in the tradition of the fairy tale. While each has some of Hardy's distinctive features, such as unusual incident and ironic circumstance, neither is quite in the mainstream of his fiction, although "Old Mrs. Chundle" is more reflective of his characteristic tales than is "Thieves." For example, "Thieves" is exclusively written with children in mind. No subtleties are employed that particularly depict interrelationships between the characters and their environment. While Wessex is the locale, and the "Vale of Blackmore" its specific setting, the story could just as well have been the light-hearted "vale" of any storyteller's imagination.

"Thieves" concerns a Wessex yeoman's son, Hubert, about fourteen years old, who has been waylaid by three robbers in the Blackmore woods. They take his horse, tie him up, and leave him in a ditch. He manages to make his way to a large mansion and finds the place deserted, although the huge dining hall has its table filled with food.

Hubert hears voices, and from his hiding place he recognizes the three thieves. He surmises that the empty dining hall is the result of a scheme by the thieves to trick the people into leaving the mansion so that they can rob the place after the inhabitants have retired for the evening.

The thieves hide in a closet. The ladies and gentlemen return and take their seats, still discussing the misadventure which took them away from their feast. Hubert decides to make his presence known. The people, at first, are suspicious and think he is himself one of the thieves. In an effort to prove his sincerity, Hubert joins them in their merriment and pretends to be a magician, who can "conjure up a tempest in a cupboard." He empties a container of snuff into the closet where the thieves are hiding and in a fit of sneezing they are apprehended. Hubert, consequently, is hailed as a hero.

This tale was originally meant as a Christmas story for boys to be published as one of several stories by others in an 1877 periodical Father Christmas. But only a single issue of this periodical was ever published.[11] Weber sees the story as having some historical value because of the affinity he believes it has with Hardy's novel Under the Greenwood Tree.[12] At best the tale is imitative and lacks any real imaginative force.

The case for "Old Mrs. Chundle" is somewhat different. Unlike "West Poley" and "Thieves," it is significant for its unusual incident and the ironic turn on an old idea--which makes it patented Hardy.

The two characters in the tale are Old Mrs. Chundle and the parish curate, a new arrival in the village. He meets

Mrs. Chundle for the first time one afternoon while out sketching. He is hungry and stops at her cottage where the deaf old woman feeds him. After a minor argument over payment for the meal, they talk and the curate learns that Mrs. Chundle does not attend church because she cannot hear the services. He promises to get her an ear trumpet so that she may hear better. But the ear trumpet is inadequate. The curate installs in the church an elaborate device, a long pipe with an opening at either end which extends from his pulpit to Mrs. Chundle's seat in the pew.

Mrs. Chundle comes to church and finds she likes the "sound pipe." In fact, the contraption so fascinates her that she amuses herself by blowing into it. But her breath reeks with spices and smelly odors from her cooking. These offensive odors carry through the pipe and flush into the curate's face, making it difficult for him to conduct his services. He stuffs his end of the tubing with his handkerchief, thereby reversing the flow of Mrs. Chundle's breath. The odors come out of her end of the pipe and waft throughout the church, to the discomfort of the worshippers. Unable to hear anything, Mrs. Chundle blows hard into the pipe and dislodges the handkerchief, which floats about the church.

The services end, and the curate is so irritated with Mrs. Chundle that he wants nothing more to do with her. While

visiting a neighbor's home one day, he is intercepted by Mrs. Chundle, who tells him how overjoyed she is at being able to hear the services again. The curate, however, is not happy and plans to have the tubing removed.

Some time passes when the curate is urgently summoned to Mrs. Chundle's cottage. Upon his arrival, he learns that she has suddenly died. It appears that she had wanted to tell him how pleased she was with him and with the services because of her ability to hear again as a result of the "sound pipe." He also learns that Mrs. Chundle has bequeathed all her worldly goods to him, who now "holds that her soul is worth saving as well as richer peoples." The curate, guilt-ridden and remorseful, feels "like Peter at the cock's crow"--his heart having turned to stone just when this good old woman needed his help most.

This tale of conflict between personal integrity and clerical hypocrisy is characteristic Hardy. The humor in it complements the underlying seriousness of its theme. It was written between 1880 and 1890, according to Purdy, and was thought to be intended for inclusion in Life's Little Ironies or Wessex Tales. Although it was never published in Hardy's lifetime, it did appear in Ladies Home Journal in 1929.[13] In the same year it was also printed privately as a separate book by Crosby Gaige, with the permission of Mrs. Hardy.[14]

Except for its length, "Old Mrs. Chundle" might have fit well into the framework of Hardy's "A Few Crusted Characters"; it is made from that mold. Indeed, Mrs. Chundle makes quite a "crusted character" in her own right.

We see, finally, how different each of these stories is from the collected tales--except for "The Romantic Adventures of a Milkmaid," which is included among Hardy's collected stories. But the "Milkmaid" apart, one realizes that the children's story is a long-standing highly sophisticated genre. Hardy's contribution to this genre leaves much to be desired. But the fact that he wrote such stories with whatever degree of success is an important part of any study of his work. And these tales, if nothing else, again demonstrate his great versatility and all-encompassing interests that touch every field of creative literature.

Notes

[1] Literary World, XIV (28 July 1883). The anonymous reviewer states, during the story's original serialization, that, "This is a weak, inconsequential, unnatural story. The reader lays the story aside with the feeling that the last mouthful is the least palatable of all" (p. 245).

Carl Weber, Hardy and the Lady from Madison Square, comments that the tale is a "trivial by-product of Hardy's off-period of composition" (p. 236); in his Hardy in America, Weber says, further, that the story is an "incredibly weak and silly [tale] .... Nothing indicates the sad state of literary taste in America at this date better than the success enjoyed by this feeble story" (p. 48).

Herbert J. Muller, "The Novels of Thomas Hardy," Southern Review, 6, says that the story is "banal" because of its pretentious efforts to "exaggerate the humble virtues, [and] romanticizes the simple annals of the poor" (p. 217).

Joseph W. Beach, The Technique of Thomas Hardy, says the tale is a "little story" that "cannot be said to have a theme of any sort. It is, if the truth must be told," he continues, "the most arrant pot-boiler that was ever turned out by tired and harassed writer of novels." He concludes by stating that "there is something brazen in coming to us, the connoisseurs, with such wares." He attributes this "arrant pot-boiler" to Hardy's illness in 1883, which "may be sufficient to explain both the inferiority...and the continual low level of his" tale (pp. 124-27).

Norman Page, "Hardy's Short Stories," Studies in Short Fiction, says that despite its "weaknesses," the story "has a flavor that is sufficiently individual to raise it above the mass of late Victorian magazine fiction." He believes that the story "exhibits...the typically Hardy mingling of disparate elements, realistic and fanciful or fantastic implicit in the title." Page concludes by saying that it is "readable and even more memorable than Weber admits" (p. 78).

Richard Carpenter, Thomas Hardy, equivocates to some extent, by acknowledging how the story is "almost universally deplored by the older generation of critics." But then he attributes this bad feeling among "older" critics to their lack of appreciation for the "typical Hardy blend of apparent realism with obvious unrealism or expressionism." While the

story is "proper to the fairy tale," it is not to be thought of as "realistic." It is "graced only by the most stereotyped characters, and is treated in the light, nonchalant manner which we associate with Under the Greenwood Tree." Yet, he concludes, "it is one of Hardy's most ridiculous stories" (pp. 77-8).

[2] Beach points this out in his negative comments on the story: "Never was more simple and obvious the intention of carrying a plot through seventeen chapters with the greatest amount of change and surprise...Little Red Riding Hood, Cinderella--the baron playing the double role of wolf and fairy godmother" (p. 127).

Nation, 37 (Sept. 1883). The anonymous reviewer notes that Hardy's heroine "has adventures like those in a fairy tale--to a point" (p. 255).

Evelyn Hardy, Thomas Hardy, sees the story as a "fairy tale of the Dorset countryside, whose theme resembles that of 'The Fiddler of the Reels,' [where] we catch for an instant some of the vanished color of the English landscape" (p. 185).

[3] See Chapter VIII, note 7, pp. 193-94; see also Introduction, note 1, p. ix.

[4] F. E. Hardy, The Life, records an entry that Hardy makes in his notebook for February 25, 1883, regarding this tale: "Sent a short hastily written novel to the Graphic for summer number" (p. 158).

Weber, Hardy in America, says (notwithstanding his own negative feelings about the story) that "readers liked it, or were attracted by the title, and bought edition after edition." This "worthless trifle" of a story was so popular that it was pirated and issued "at least ten times." But after thirty years, he--although Hardy felt the story was "not deemed worth reprinting"--did include it among his collected tales in A Changed Man (pp. 48; 301).

Richard Purdy, Thomas Hardy: A Bibliographical Study (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), says it is probable that this pirating of the story caused Hardy to collect it, even though he saw the story as " 'written only with a view to a fleeing life in a periodical, and having, moreover, been altered from its original shape, was not deemed worth reprinting'." Purdy also records Hardy's remarks from a cancelled version of his preface to the 1913 edition of A Changed Man.

In it Hardy says that the stories "would probably have never been collected by me at this time of day if frequent reprints of some of them in America and elsewhere had not set many readers inquiring for them in a volume" (pp. 49; 155-56).

5 Purdy further suggests that even though "Milkmaid" has been altered somewhat to effect the change from the scenes where Tess takes place, there is--despite critical denials--some relationship, however shadowy, between the story and the novel (p. 49).

Weber, Hardy of Wessex, comments on how Hardy, when working out his thoughts for Tess, "planned to write about a milkmaid, not about a girl like Margery Tucker, the milkmaid." But the new conception was to be about a "much more carefully conceived heroine who would combine the fire of Eustacia Vye, the charm of Bathsheba Everdene, the emotional nature of Marty South, and the tender resignation of Elizabeth-Jane.... The new milkmaid would, in short, be a complex creature of heroic stature" (p. 167).

6 Carpenter calls the tale Hardy's "most frankly supernatural tale [even while it] does not indulge in the macabre." He adds that "although [it] is ambivalent in its mingling of the supernatural and the realistic, the overall effect is that the uncanny world has impinged upon the ordinary, the implication being that such things can happen. It goes further than Hardy was wont to go in its hinting that there are unearthly influences available to act upon the mundane world" (His Ital; pp. 77-8). See also note 1.

Ruth A. Firor, Folkways, says that "all through the story runs the suggestion that the Baron is not quite what he seems to be.... Upon his disappearance, [he] becomes the center of a group of dark legends, hinting that he was a limb of the Devil, if not the Evil One himself" (p. 105).

Douglas Brown, Thomas Hardy, says that the Baron "has assumed demonic, though never deliberately hostile, powers" (p. 116).

7 See notes 1, 2 and 4.

8 See Weber, note 4.

[9] Weber, Hardy in America, comments that Hardy sent the story to the editor of The New York Times on September 12, 1874, upon a special request: "It was Hardy's first short story, or at least one of his first short stories." It appeared on Sunday, October 4, 1874. Weber adds that the story is a "typical Wessex tale," which has been reprinted once since 1874. It appeared as a book published by the Colby College Library in 1940, "the year of the Centennial anniversary of Hardy's birth" (p. 25). In Hardy of Wessex, Weber gives a possible reason why story never appeared in England. Hardy was working on his novel The Hand of Ethelberta, and being "unable to make his people of 'gentility' come alive," Weber says, Lord Mountclare, in the novel, not being drawn from real life, Hardy "manufactured him by a hasty touching up of the portrait of the sixty-five-year-old Farmer Lovill in 'Destiny'." He adds that "certain incidents in the plot of 'Destiny' are similarly repeated in Ethelberta." Weber concludes that "this re-use of materials is doubtless the reason, or one of the reasons, why Hardy never collected 'Destiny' and why this story has never been published in England" (p. 98).

[10] Purdy says that the "history of this long story is a curious one." He goes on to relate how Hardy prepared the manuscript for serialization in which the author pledges to the editors that "you may depend upon my using my very best efforts to please your numerous readers; and that the story shall have a healthy tone, suitable to intelligent youth of both sexes." A period of cross-corespondence between Hardy and the editor of Boston's Youth's Companion ensued, to the effect that the story never appeared in that periodical. Hardy gives in to the story's fate by finally writing to the editor, who was evidently not pleased with it, by appealing that, "possibly if you have no space for it at length you may some day think fit to produce it in a somewhat abridged form--it being a story of an imaginative kind suitable for a Christmas number, or such like. Our children here are younger for their age than yours; and possibly the story is too juvenile for your side of the sea. I fancy you may be mistaken in that; but of course I do not know as well as yourselves." Through some strange machinations at the Youth's Companion, Purdy traces the movement of the story to a short-lived "small story-paper," entitled The Household, where it appeared between November 1892-April 1892. In 1952, the story appeared as a book by Geoffrey Cumberland, of the Oxford University Press, with an introduction by Purdy (pp. 301-03).

Weber, in America, suggests that a possible reason for the story's non-appearance in Youth's Companion is that Hardy's reputation for writing seeming "immoral" novels was offensive to readers of this Boston periodical. Even though Hardy had gone through great pains to assure the editors of the wholesome quality of the story for youth, they decided against publishing it (p. 84).

11 Purdy says that "Thieves" appeared without the author's name in the single issue of Father Christmas in London in 1877. He says, however, that "there can be no question of Hardy's authorship, unlikely as it seems, since the title appears as an addition in his own hand, with the comment 'Child's story', on a list of his works drawn up by Mrs. Hardy [about] 1880" (p. 294).

12 Weber, of Wessex, gives some additional publishing details on the story. He says that there is "no copy of Father Christmas in the British Museum, and no copy in the Fitzwilliam Museum at Cambridge where Sir Sidney Cockerell actively collected Hardy items." He adds that the Bodleian Library at Oxford has "the only copy of Father Christmas," and that "the story was published in an edition of one hundred numbered copies by the Colby College Library, December 1942, with a foreward on 'Hardy's First Christmas Story'" by Weber (p. 299). [One of each of these limited privately published copies, i.e., "Thieves," "Exploits," and "Mrs. Chundle," is in the New York Public Library in the Rare Books Division.] In the Weber foreward to "Thieves," he says that when comparing the opening paragraphs of the story and Under the Greenwood Tree, one notices similarities in language and diction. He adds that the story has value not only because of its relation to Greenwood Tree, but for tracing Hardy's "well-known unevenness during his early period, especially around the time of The Return of the Native." See also, in America, pp. 275 and 293.

13 Purdy says that the Colophon of this story places it between 1880 and 1890. He adds that it was "probably intended to be included in the volume entitled Life's Little Ironies or Wessex Tales." He comments further that it is "a discarded short story, never published in Hardy's lifetime." It first appeared in Ladies Home Journal, Philadelphia, in February, 1929 (pp. 267-68).

Weber, in America, comments that "there is reason to think that the publication of this story [in Ladies Home Journal] was not by Hardy's own desire, and his literary executors afterwards destroyed the manuscript" (pp. 96-7).

[14] Purdy says that printing of the story by Ladies Home Journal and by Gaige was "by arrangement with Mrs. Hardy," over the strong objections of her co-executor, Sidney Cockerell, because of the story's inferiority. Purdy believes that the story is based on fact, which Hardy "had from Henry Moule (the original of the sketchy curate) and often repeated" (p. 268).

Chapter X - Final Words

Finally, it would be folly to suggest that Hardy's stories are better than his novels or many of his best poems. Indeed, some of his stories are not actually "stories" at all; as such, some are glaring failures. If one sets a criterion of values between what the story is, a formally structured art form, opposed to a tale--as has been done--one may well concede that the majority of Hardy's stories miss the mark.[1]

Given the nature of this study, one could wish that his stories had been arranged better, although this is not to suggest that at the time of their compilation in 1912 under the umbrella title The Wessex Edition, Hardy would have agreed to the kind of organization I have given them. But notwithstanding the shortcomings of the stories, which include their original arrangement under "minor novels," I dispute the critical persuasion which holds that this or that story is worthless, and therefore would be better off forgotten.

The work of a great writer--and few would deny nowadays Hardy's position among the five or six outstanding novelists of the nineteenth century--undergoes constant reassessment subject to particular tastes at any given period. That Hardy's stories, except in a few instances, have generally been

neglected, is "a pity." [2] To reissue them would not be a vacuous tribute to an already well-established author whose works are still very much read many years after his death. Not to reissue them, along with his lesser known novels and his volumes of verse, will be a great disservice to the future generations whose interests in the man and his work may be attuned to tastes in literature very different from our own. There are some readers today who may be pleasantly surprised that Hardy has written so many short stories; and they may find in them a special delight and satisfaction that is lacking in what passes for short fiction in our time.

Notes

[1] See Chapter VIII, Blunden, note 5, pp. 192-93; see also note 7, pp. 193-94.

[2] Irving Howe, Thomas Hardy, comments in his discussion of Hardy's short stories that the fact his stories are "little read is not a scandal, it is merely a pity" (p. 75).

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