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Images of alienation and isolation in Thomas Hardy's short fiction.

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Images of Alienation and Isolation in Thomas Hardy's Short Fiction

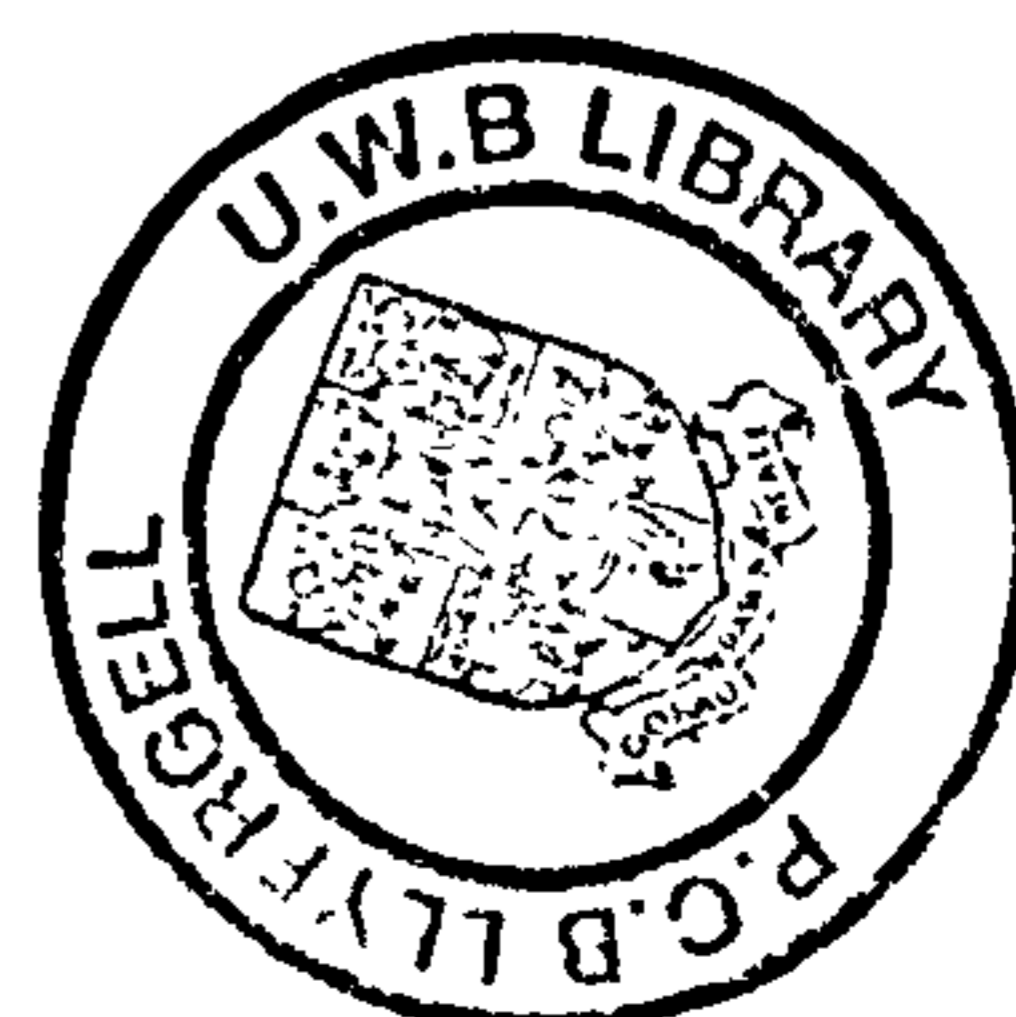
by

Mohammed Abdel Halim Sayed Ahmed

**In fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree
of Doctor of Philosophy in
The University of Wales**

**English Department
University of Wales, Bangor**

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Abstract

The thesis studies the whole range of Hardy's short stories, arguing that the distinctive core of Hardy's writing in this form is a profound sense of human alienation and loneliness.

The opening chapter considers the factors that gave rise to the development of the genre in the 1880s and 1890s, and Hardy's stories are compared to these contemporary stories, noting the popularity of stories set in traditional, rural environments, especially the "Celtic fringes" far from the urban world which many readers inhabited. Attention is given to the traditional modes of story-telling adopted by Hardy; the appropriateness of the storyteller's "speaking voice" to the subject matter is discussed. Hardy's stories are seen as exemplifying Frank O'Connor's characterisation of the short story as the genre which expresses the experience of the "submerged population group" and the figure of the isolate or exile.

The second chapter seeks to identify biographical factors which might have contributed to a vision of human loneliness, and these are related to contemporary intellectual developments. Particular motifs, such as the alienated returning native, are noted.

The third chapter focuses on the power of place in Hardy's imaginative world, the ways in which landscapes and settings enact the theme of alienation and isolation.

The fourth and fifth chapters consider the alienating effects of class consciousness in the stories, especially through its effects on love and marriage. The tensions here are seen as being exacerbated by the ways Hardy's society constructs women; the stories are frequently studies of the plight of women, trapped in a society which constrains or disregards their natural (including their sexual) impulses.

The final chapter considers the way in which the stories show individuals struggling to live their lives in a world which no longer makes sense and considers Hardy's use of the conventions of the supernatural to dramatise his vision of humans alone in a world governed by chance.

For

My Great Mother

Fatma Mohammed Faraag

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
CHAPTER ONE:	Thomas Hardy And the Late-Nineteenth-Century Short Story	1
CHAPTER TWO:	Thomas Hardy: The Lonely Imagination	42
CHAPTER THREE:	The Lonely Landscape: Setting in Hardy's Short Stories	80
CHAPTER FOUR:	The Loneliness of Class-Consciousness	113
CHAPTER FIVE:	The Loneliness of Gender: The Caging of Erotic Feeling	190
CHAPTER SIX:	An Uncanny World: The Loneliness of Hardy's Metaphysical Vision.	246
CONCLUSION:		329
LIST OF SOURCES CONSULTED:		333

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A NOTE ON TEXTS AND ABBREVIATIONS

References to Hardy's four collected volumes are to the texts that appear in Thomas Hardy: Collected Short Stories. The New Wessex Edition, Introd. Desmond Hawkins, Notes F. B. Pinion (1977; London: Macmillan, 1988). References to Hardy's excluded and collaborative stories are taken from: Thomas Hardy's An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress and Other Tales, ed. Pamela Dalziel (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994). References to the individual collections of Hardy's stories will be incorporated into the text by the following list of abbreviations:

<u>Wessex Tales:</u>	(<u>WT</u>)
<u>A Group of Noble Dames:</u>	(<u>GND</u>)
<u>Life's Little Ironies:</u>	(<u>LLI</u>)
<u>'A Changed Man' and Other Tales:</u>	(<u>CM</u>)
<u>An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress and Other Tales:</u>	(<u>Indiscretion</u>)

CHAPTER ONE

Thomas Hardy And The Late-Nineteenth-Century Short Story

In the period from about 1874 until 1899, Thomas Hardy wrote and published over fifty short stories.¹ "Destiny and a Blue Cloak" was published in the New York Times in October 1874, with his regular publication of short fiction beginning in 1879 with "The Distracted Preacher"; the last stories, "Enter a Dragoon" and "A Changed Man", were published in 1899 and 1900 respectively. Published in a range of the huge number of periodical magazines then available on both sides of the Atlantic, thirty-seven of the stories were collected, often after significant revision, in four volumes: Wessex Tales (1888), A Group of Noble Dames (1891), Life's Little Ironies (1894) and A Changed Man and Other Tales (1913).² These four volumes were collected in one volume by Hardy in the New Wessex Edition in 1912.³ In addition, a fifth volume contains previously uncollected and

1. In 1865, Hardy published "How I Built Myself a House" in Chamber's Journal, but this was just a sketch, not a fully-developed fictional story.

2. This study will use the following edition throughout the text: Thomas Hardy, Thomas Hardy: Collected Short Stories. The New Wessex Edition, Introd. Desmond Hawkins, Notes F. B. Pinion (1977; London: Macmillan, 1988). References to this edition will be included in the text. For a thoroughly detailed analysis of the facts of publication, and accurate descriptions of Hardy's both individual stories and in volume forms, see Richard Little Purdy, Thomas Hardy: A Bibliographical Study (1954; Oxford: Clarendon, 1968) 57-156.

3. A measure of Hardy's concern for his short stories is reflected not only in the ways in which he revised them but the care he took over his collections. For example, he notes in the Preface of 1894 to Life's Little Ironies that "'An Imaginative Woman' originally stood in Wessex Tales, but was brought into Life's Little Ironies as being more nearly in its place The two stories named 'A Tradition of Eighteen Hundred and Four' and 'The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion', which were formerly printed in Life's Little Ironies, were also transferred to Wessex Tales, where they more naturally belong". See Harold Orel, ed., Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings (1966; London: Macmillan, 1967) 31. Henceforth referred to as Personal Writings.

and collaborative stories.⁴

However, despite the significant volume of work represented by Hardy's short stories, as a corpus of work they have received strikingly little critical attention, especially when compared to Hardy's novels and his poetry. Some full-length studies of Hardy largely ignore the stories altogether, while the more numerous critical articles which do discuss Hardy's short fiction tend to discuss certain individual stories. In 1967 Helmut E. Gerber observed that "Criticism of Hardy's short fiction is shamefully sparse",⁵ while more recently Toby C. Herzog has noted that "For too long Thomas Hardy's short stories have suffered from critical indifference";⁶ although Kristin Brady published her excellent book-length study in the same year as Herzog's article, the overall critical situation remains essentially unchanged.⁷

Those who have written critically of Hardy's stories might be broadly divided into two camps. The first group are generally dismissive of the stories, seeing them as of a far

4. Again, this study will use the following edition throughout and will be included in the text: Thomas Hardy, An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress and Other Stories, ed. Pamela Dalziel (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994). References will be given in the text abbreviated as Indiscretion.

5. Helmut E. Gerber, ed., The English Short Story in Transition: 1880-1920 (New York: Pegasus, 1967) 508.

6. Toby C. Herzog, "Hardy's 'Fellow-Townsmen': A Primer for the Novels," Colby Library Quarterly 18,4 (1982): 231. On this point on Hardy's short stories in particular, see also, Valerie Shaw, The Short Story: A Critical Introduction (London, New York: Longman, 1983) 218-19, and on the short story in general, see also Thomas H. Gullason, "The Short Story: An Underrated Art," Studies in Short Fiction 2 (1964): 17; Gregory Fitzgerald, "The Satiric Short Story: A Definition," Studies in Short Fiction 5 (1968): 354; and Barry Pain, The Short Story (London: Martin Secker, 1914) 8.

7. See Kristin Brady, The Short Stories of Thomas Hardy: Tales of Past and Present (London: Macmillan, 1982).

lower order of achievement than Hardy's longer fiction. Trevor Johnson, for example, in his study of Hardy's work decides that "Hardy's full attention wasn't often engaged on them", while even as sympathetic a reader of Hardy as Irving Howe can write: "[T]hat Hardy's stories are little read is not a scandal, it is merely a pity; most of them, serviceable products for magazines, are not worth salvaging".⁸ Another distinguished critic of Hardy's poetry, Samuel Hynes -- for all his willingness to incorporate some of them in a selection of Hardy -- is equally scathing of the majority of stories, dismissing some of them as "having no place in the history of the form [and] were written to pay the butcher",⁹ while in his study of the late-nineteenth-century short story in England, Wendell V. Harris views Hardy's work in the genre as "Late examples of the Victorian tale in its more lax and careless form".¹⁰

However, there is another body of criticism which is more positive. Among them is Samuel Chew who praises the stories in general and the Wessex Tales in particular, mainly for their successful "employment of the marvellous and the fantastic".¹¹ Douglas Brown, while still seeing them as "slighter successes" than the novels, sees them as "memorable and distinguished by-products of his art" and admires "their energy ... [and] their absorbing narrative invention".¹² Albert Guerard makes a point which is much to the purpose of the

8. See Trevor Johnson, Thomas Hardy (London: Evans, 1968) 153, and Irving Howe, "A Note on Hardy's Stories," The Hudson Review 19 (1966): 259-60.

9. Thomas Hardy, Great Short Works of Thomas Hardy, ed. Introduction Samuel Hynes (New York: Harper, 1967) 23.

10. Wendell V. Harris, "English Short Fiction in the Nineteenth Century," Studies in Short Fiction 6,1 (1968): 47.

11. Samuel C. Chew, Thomas Hardy: Poet & Novelist (1921; New York: Russell, 1964) 51.

12. Douglas Brown, Thomas Hardy (London: Longmans, 1954) 115-16.

present study when he praises the stories', "incorrigible sympathy for all who are lonely and all who long for happiness",¹³ while Norman Page, in defending the stories against the view that they are merely "negligible potboilers", argues that:

They show very strikingly the range of his art and his exceptional capacity for mingling disparate types of fictional convention; they stand in a significant relationship to the major novels written during precisely the same period; and they exhibit in miniature some of the complex problems of composition and revision that make Hardy's text a territory full of interest and by no means yet exhaustively charted.¹⁴

This present study not only takes such a judgement of Hardy's achievement in the short story as its starting point but seeks to add to the exploration and charting of that achievement.

One factor in the paucity of steady critical study devoted to Hardy's short stories is perhaps the critical insecurities which attach to the genre, the lack of critical and theoretical attention which, even now, has been devoted to the short story, especially when compared to the novel.¹⁵ There is a fundamental lack of common ground as regards terminology and definitions and this has inhibited critical writing on the work of many major writers in the form -- whether primarily known as novelist, like Wells, Lawrence, Forster, or as story writers, like Le Fanu, Bates or Pritchett. Susan Lohafer observes that "whatever the reason, the short story has always eluded any but the most tautological definitions", while

13. Albert J. Guerard, Thomas Hardy (1949; New York: New Directions, 1964) 51.

14. Norman Page, "Hardy's Short Stories: A Reconsideration," Studies in Short Fiction 11 (1974): 76-7.

15. For attempts to establish several theories and definitions of the genre see for example, Dominic Head, The Modernist Short Story: A Study of Theory and Practice (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) 1-36; Malcolm Cowley, "Storytelling's Tarnished Image," Saturday Review 25 (1971): 25-46, and William Saroyan, "What is a Story?," Saturday Review of Literature 11 (1935): 401-12.

one of the best known critics in the field, Valerie Shaw, writes that "the genre as a whole seems constantly to resist universal definition".¹⁶ Even the central terminology -- story, tale, sketch, fable, anecdote, etc. -- is insecure; as one of the form's best-known twentieth-century practitioners, H. E. Bates, has observed, the short story "has an insistent and eternal fluidity that slips through the hands".¹⁷

The curious thing is, of course, that the story, along with the narrative poem, has the longest literary history within human culture: tale telling has existed, it seems likely, as long as communities have existed, stories and legends being exchanged around fires or over meals and handed down orally through the generations. Some of these have existed from the dawn of literary culture: The Story of Sinuhe, or The Shipwrecked Sailor was written down in Egypt in the second millennium B.C.,¹⁸ and some stories in the Old Testament and in the Apocrypha must be almost as old. The tradition of the narrative tale -- with its antedecedents in Chaucer and in European sources like Boccaccio -- continues to exist in the eighteenth century, although marginal to the energetic development of the novel. The stories of The Arabian Nights were published in English in the eighteenth century, an aspect of Romantic orientalism, but the taste for the exotic, for a world far from the actualities of the life of the English, mainly middle-class, readership has, in various forms, continued to be a significant element in the appeal of the short story in English, albeit

16. See Susan Lohafer, Coming To Terms with the Short Story (Baton Rouge, London: Louisiana State UP, 1983) 7, and Shaw 6.

17. H. E. Bates, "The Modern Short Story: A Retrospect," Short Story Theories, ed. Charles E. May (Athens, Ohio: Ohio UP, 1976) 75.

18. See Ian Reid, The Short Story (London: Methuen, 1977) 15-16.

sometimes put to didactic purpose (as in Johnson's Rasselas, 1759).

But if the short story was pressed to the margins of English fiction in the eighteenth century, the situation did not much improve in the early part of the nineteenth century; as Walter Allen has suggested, "the nature of the nineteenth-century novel in England was such as to make it very difficult for the short story ... to flourish or even to exist".¹⁹ In the early part of the century, there seems to have been relatively little scope for the publication of original short stories in the periodicals which existed, the tendency being for the publication of detachable extracts from novels or of "miscellanies" of previously-published material, including eighteenth century fiction, deemed morally appropriate for a readership which included young ladies. The founding of Blackwood's Magazine in 1817 was a landmark, and provided a continuous and respectable outlet for short fiction through the nineteenth century. As Wendell V. Harris has pointed out, such short fiction as was published in the first half of the century, in Blackwood's or elsewhere (including annual collections and "giftbooks"), can largely be divided into a number of main areas: tales of moral purpose, including the work of Hannah More and Maria Edgeworth, tales of political economy, including the work of Harriet Martineau, and, interestingly, tales that are built on the particular life styles and customs of specific non-metropolitan areas, mainly on the Celtic fringes and often with an element of the supernatural.²⁰ This aspect of the short story, an element which continued through the century and is ultimately relevant to the work of Hardy, includes works such as Edgeworth's Castle Rackrent: An Hibernian Tale (1800), the work of James Hogg (The Brownie of Bodsbeck and Other Tales, 1818 was followed by

19. See Walter Allen, The Short Story in English (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981) 11.

20. Harris, "English Short Fiction" 9-14.

three other collections) and of John Galt (Annals of the Parish, 1821); "Wandering Willie's Tale", in Scott's Redgauntlet (1824), sometimes subsequently published separately, appealed to the same taste. The tradition of tale-telling in Ireland -- a particularly vital force in this type of story -- is represented, for example by the work of William Carleton (Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry, 1830-33) and Anna Maria Hall (Sketches of Irish Character, 1829); the latter contained an introduction addressed to her fellow writer, Mary Russell Mitford: "I am desirous of introducing you to an Irish Village You are not to behold the people and their dwelling, like those in your own 'sunny Berkshire' surrounded by all the blessings that independent feelings and well-regulated minds can only give; but if you look for filthy cabins and a miserable peasantry, alike strangers to industry and contentment, you will be equally mistaken".²¹ But it was in that very difference from the familiar culture of England that such stories' appeal lay, of course, an element of the exotic Other within Britain.²²

The founding of Household Words and All the Year Round in mid century provided further outlets for short fiction, including work by some of the period's leading writers, Wilkie Collins, Elizabeth Gaskell and Dickens himself, while George Eliot published short fiction in Blackwood's and Cornhill Magazine in the 1850s and 1860s. While this alerts one to the danger of over-generalising about the English short story in the period, it also reminds us that the short story was still existing on the margins: the central work of these writers

21. Quoted in Harris "English Short Fiction" 17.

22. For an account of popular fiction set in Wales, although in the novel rather than the short story, see for example, Francesca Rhydderch, "Dual Nationality, Divided Identity: Ambivalent Narratives of Britishness in the Welsh Novels of Anna Maria Bennett," Welsh Writing in English: A Yearbook of Critical Essays 3 (1997): 1-17.

was of course going on elsewhere. While Brander Matthews was perhaps being excessive -- and inaccurate -- when he contended that "It is the three-volume novel which has killed the Short-Story in England",²³ V. S. Pritchett makes a pertinent point when he writes, much more recently, that the English "preferred to graze on the large acreage of the novel and even tales by Dickens or Thackeray or Mrs Gaskell strike us as being unused chapters of longer works".²⁴ With attention mainly being focussed on the wide landscapes allowed by the three-decker novel, there was still limited scope for more restricted locales. Until late in the century it remained the fact that it was the authors of these three-volume novels -- their sales often increased by their serialisation in periodicals -- who were "the best paid of literary labourers".²⁵

The radical change in the fortunes of the short story in Britain, from which Hardy was ultimately to benefit, came about, however, through a confluence of changes in that market and other economic, rather than literary, factors. Harold Orel has pointed to changes in the taxation of paper as one factor which ultimately changed the market for original short fiction. The Stamp Act, dating back to 1712, had been used as an effective way of controlling and regulating the press -- meaning primarily newspapers and pamphlets -- during the early years of the century; given the rate of this duty (two shillings on every edition of the pamphlet, for example, with an additional tax on advertisements),²⁶ it was

23. Brander Matthews, The Philosophy of the Short-Story (New York, London: Longmans, 1912) 60.

24. V. S. Pritchett, The Tale Bearers: Essay on English, American and Other Writers (London: Chatto & Windus, 1980) 164.

25. Matthews 56.

26. Harold Orel, The Victorian Short Story: Development and Triumph of a Literary Genre (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986) 4 - 5.

more financially viable to increase the size of a publication into a periodical. Moreover, the fact that the tax was levied on news material and current affairs, encouraged the development of periodicals aimed more at entertainment or general edification rather than at contemporary events.²⁷ While these conditions encouraged the development of a certain type of periodical, the removal of the tax after 1855 saw the removal of a significant market restraint and the consequent increase in the number of such periodicals in the latter half of the century. This was enhanced by technical developments within the paper manufacturing and print industries during the century: the invention of a new paper-making machine in 1801 cut the cost of paper by more than fifty per cent, as well as improving the quality of the paper produced. Other developments in paper manufacture followed. The invention of hot metal composing machines -- Mergenthaler finally perfected a linotype machine in 1885 -- and developments of photogravure reproduction of illustrations, along with the mechanisation of the presses themselves, transformed the economics of publishing: by the end of the century a periodical running anywhere between 32 and 192 pages could be printed in thousands of copies in less than an hour.²⁸ Not only did this create for the first time the mass market for newspapers -- in 1901, Orel estimates, there were more than 2,500 newspapers being published in the U.K., with a fifth of them being published in London²⁹ -- but the proprietors of some of these papers were seeking to diversify their publications and to develop new markets. George Newnes founded the astonishingly successful populist periodical Tit-Bits in 1881 (by the end of the first year it was selling 100,000 copies per

27. Orel, The Victorian Short Story 5.

28. Orel, The Victorian Short Story 185.

29. Orel, The Victorian Short Story 186.

issue).³⁰ Even more importantly for our present purposes, a decade later he founded The Strand Magazine, which was aimed at a more middle-class audience and was ultimately to be at the forefront of the publication of short fiction through the end of the century, alongside a new range of magazines which were responding to the favourable market situation, including Macmillan's Magazine (1859-1907), the Cornhill Magazine (founded in 1860), Temple Bar Magazine (1860-1906), Longman's Magazine (1882 - 91) and Blackwood's Magazine (which dated from earlier in the century).³¹

Of course, the readership for such periodicals had also increased, given the effects of Forster's Elementary Education Act of 1870, which finally recognised education as a public service: existing Church schools received increased grants from the public purse and locally-elected boards were empowered to establish schools, funded in part by local rates. In 1880 school attendance became compulsory. Other developments followed, including the opening of new university colleges across the country, and the net result was a significant and rapid increase in literacy with a consequent increase in the potential readership for books, periodicals and newspapers.³² Moreover that readership contained an increasing proportion of people with a disposable income which allowed them to purchase books and periodicals: the expansion of trade, especially within the Empire, and the growth

30. Orel, The Victorian Short Story 187.

31. For an acute study of these magazines and similar contemporary ones, see for example, Walter Graham, English Literary Periodicals (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1930).

32. The education provided was of course to be in English, which had significant consequences in Ireland and in Wales. The use of English in the classrooms of Wales, regardless of the language of the home, coupled with the cultural impact of non-Welsh speaking labour flooding into the industries of South Wales, bought into being a significant English-language literature, one of whose main expressions, after the turn of the century, was the short story. See Glyn Jones, The Dragon has Two Tongues (London: Dent, 1968).

of industrial output in the second half of the century was creating an increasingly affluent commercial middle class.

The new publishing situation is noted, and its significant deftly summed up, in a piece in a journal called The Young Woman, in 1892:

There is no more startling phenomenon in the life of today than the enormous increase of journals and newspapers. We have now reached the point where the full effect of national education is being felt. Everyone can read. Books have become cheaper and cheaper. The entire intellectual life of the nation has received an enormous quickening. Hence journals play a part in national life wholly undreamed of in the days when the realm of letters was governed by The Edinburgh Review and Quarterly.³³

It is interesting to find such a comment in a magazine aimed at the young, female reader, interesting but not, on consideration, surprising. For, within the increasingly affluent middle classes, wives and daughters had, of course, both the leisure and the education to read books and magazines. However, as well as the increase of sales that this particular sector of the market represented, it also acted as a mediator on the type of material published. Given that these periodicals and books were entering the middle-class home, it was expected that they did nothing to challenge the prevailing codes of respectable moral behaviour. There could be no candid treatment of sexual relations of course; treatment of such matters as adultery or illegitimacy -- as time went on they could not be totally ignored -- had to be treated with tact and discretion, and with a clear moral message. Attempts to question prevailing mores -- and those mores were of course challenged increasingly by the 1890s -- inevitably caused controversy, as Hardy found to his cost when he portrayed Tess Durbeyfield as a victim and as "a pure woman" rather than as a Fallen Woman. The

33. Quoted in Clare Hanson, Short Stories and Short Fictions, 1880-1980 (London: Macmillan, 1985) 11.

pressures -- the tensions between public attitudes and the author's wish to portray public behaviour and private feelings honestly -- remain part of the context in which Hardy and his contemporaries produced their fiction, with public attitudes being reinforced by the circulating libraries (a significant part of the market) refusing to publish books which suggested any whiff of scandal, and by periodical editors equally anxious about sales.

Hardy felt these pressures acutely as he regarded the pain which Mrs Grundy's attitudes inflicted on thinking, feeling human beings; one recalls that his up-bringing in rural Dorset, for all its church-going respectability, would have brought him into contact with attitudes which were more relaxed towards what would have been seen as natural impulses and accommodated by the community (one remembers Tess's mother's words, after her discovery of her daughter's being a maiden no more: "'Tis nater, after all, and what do please God'" (88)). Middle-class respectability is part of a new modern world, with its origins outside Dorset. Repeatedly Hardy deplores the necessity to suit his material to the demands of the reading public. As he writes in his essay "Candour in English Fiction" in 1890:

The dilemma ... confronts [the writer]; he must either whip and scourge these characters into doing something contrary to their natures, to produce the spurious effect of their being in harmony with social forms and ordinances, or, by leaving them alone to act as they will, he must bring down the thunders of respectability upon his head, not to say ruin his editor, his publisher and himself.

What he often does, indeed can scarcely help doing in such a strait, is, belie his literary conscience, do despite to his best imaginative instincts by arranging a dénouement which he knows to be indescribably unreal and meretricious, but dear to the Grundyist and subscriber. If the true artist ever weeps it probably is then, when he first discovers the fearful price that he has to pay for the privilege of writing in the English language -- no less a price than the complete extinction, in the mind of every mature and penetrating reader, of sympathetic belief in his

personages.³⁴

A number of his stories, like his novels, undergo changes, with the endings of "The Distracted Preacher" and "The Romantic Adventures of a Milkmaid" being altered (these will be discussed in detail at a later point in the thesis).

But what were those readers reading in the new periodicals in the last decades of the century? How had the situation of the short story changed? Given the volume of magazines now available which published fiction, there was undoubtedly more scope for publishing short fiction from the 1880s onwards. By the 1880s, for example, Hardy was publishing individual stories (which constituted the later 1888 Wessex Tales volume) -- in some British and American periodicals. For instance "The Three Strangers" in Longman's Magazine in March 1883, and in America in Harper's Weekly also in March 1883. "The Withered Arm", Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, in January 1888. "Fellow-Townsmen" was first printed in the New Quarterly Magazine, April 1880 and, in America in Harper's Weekly in May 1880. "Interloper at the Knap", in The English Illustrated Magazine in May

34. Orel, Personal Writings 130. These were, indeed, the words of the mature, successful writer. At the beginning of his career he sounds more tractable, though equally aware of the difficulties he faced: on 18 February 1874 he wrote to Leslie Stephen: "the truth is that I am willing and indeed anxious, to give up any points which may be desirable in a story when read as a whole, for the sake of others which shall please these who read it in numbers. Perhaps I may have higher aims some day, and be a great stickler for the proper artistic balance of the completed work, but for the present circumstances lead me wish merely to be a good hand at a serial". See Richard Little Purdy and Michael Millgate, ed. The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, 7 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978-88) vol. 1 28. Henceforth referred to as Collected Letters. On this point see also, Audrey C. Peterson, "'A Good Hand at a Serial': Thomas Hardy and the Art of Fiction," Victorian Newsletter 46 (1974): 24, and John Peck, "Hardy's Novel Endings," Journal of Eighteen Nineties Society 9 (1978): 10.

1884.³⁵ At the same time a major shift was taking place in the publication of novel-length fiction in England. The triple-decker novel "had pampered the English taste for leisurely, discursive fiction" for generations.³⁶ But now not only were many of the great authors who had graced that form no longer alive, but market forces were again intervening, as the circulating libraries reviewed their situation:

The venerable tradition of the three-decker at 31s. 6d. -- dating back to the first decade of the Waverley Novels -- died undramatically in 1894, when Mudie's and W. H. Smith's decided that 10s. 6d. a volume was more than they wished to pay.³⁷

The decline and ultimately the demise of the three-volume novel not only altered readers' expectations as to the range of the novel -- no longer that "large acreage" -- but also meant that the new periodicals, in the absence of serialisation of large-scale novels, had space to publish more original short fiction.

As in any periodical, but especially one with such a strong sense of change as marked the close of the century, it is dangerous to attempt to generalise; but one can suggest trends in the short story of the 1880s and 1890s, and these provide a useful and occasionally very revealing context in which to consider Thomas Hardy's short fiction. Helga Quadflieg has pointed to the way in which two major tendencies in writing in the period -- crudely "aestheticism/symbolism/decadence" and "realism/naturalism" -- converged in their emphasis on "impression" and "suggestion", the former tendency as a result of its cultivation of the intense and ephemeral and of form before content (accepting Pater's concept of the work of literature as a precious gem), while the realists/naturalists

35. See Purdy, A Bibliographical Study 30, 58-60.

36. Shaw 5.

37. Orel, The Victorian Short Story 186.

considered literature as an experimental consideration, in condensed form, of the bête humaine, caught in significant or "psychological" moments.³⁸ Clearly such writers would be drawn to the short story, given its potential for precision and compression, as a form. Relatedly, instead of the panoramic social concerns of the triple-decker novel, the concerns of the practical, outer world, short story writers begin to opt for economic, suggestive fictional pieces that are "structured around mood rather than event" with settings perhaps being drawn less to provide a social or economic backdrop than to act as "objective correlatives" for states of mind or feelings.³⁹ (This latter technique is one which, as will be discussed in a later chapter, was used with particular effectiveness by Hardy.) Such techniques could economically present a heightened moment of emotional or psychological significance, what Nadine Gordimer has aptly termed "the moment of truth";⁴⁰ such an emphasis on particular moments of feeling or small but revealing episodes or events was of course fundamentally developed after the turn of the century in the Modernists' concern with shifts of awareness, with Woolf's moments of insight and Joyce's "epiphanies", some of the latter's short stories in Dubliners being centered on such moments. In this concern with the feelings and shifts of mood of a character, younger writers looked not only to the short fiction of European writers like Chekhov "and those French writers who had learned their

38. Helga Quadflieg, "The Short Story," The 1890s: An Encyclopaedia of British Literature, Art and Culture, ed. G. A. Cevasco (New York: Garland, 1993) 552-53.

39. Hanson, Short Stories and Short Fictions 7.

40. Nadine Gordimer, "The International Symposium on the Short Story," Kenyon Review 30 (1968): 459.

Poe, but also from the Americans and especially from Poe himself".⁴¹ Poe it was who had argued as long ago as 1842, in reviewing a volume of Hawthorne's stories, that the pivotal property of the short story lies in the "unity of impression", the creation of "a certain unique or single effect".⁴²

Thus unlike the lengthy Victorian novel, with its panoramic view of the external world of society, the short story of the period epitomizes an "emphasis on concentration",⁴³ or what Kipling later called the ability to express the meaning "in one phrase ... less than a dozen words",⁴⁴ so that concentration and compression come to be among the hallmarks of the technique of short story writing at the time. With a terminal climax or an abrupt ending, these writers opt for dramatising only a mere brief episode -- although maybe representing a longer state of affairs -- rather than a sequence of events.

Given the tendency towards greater concentration on personal feeling, on mood, even on shifts of awareness, it is not unsurprising to see some evidence in the short stories of the 1880s and 1890s of a move away from the voice of the omniscient narrator, which had dominated the Victorian novel, towards a less assured and/or more personal, more subjective narrator. These vary in tone from the bluff but uncomprehending voice of Conan Doyle's Dr. Watson to the unnamed first-person story-tellers in a number of Hardy's stories. Such narrators guarantee the story's credibility and authenticity, as well as,

41. Joseph M. Flora, "Introduction," The English Short Story 1880-1945: A Critical History, ed. Joseph M. Flora (Boston: Twayne, 1985) 14.

42. Quoted in Matthews 78.

43. John Bayley, The Short Story: Henry James to Elizabeth Bowen (Brighton: Harvester, 1988) 36.

44. Rudyard Kipling, Something of Myself (1937; London: Macmillan, 1964) 72.

symptomatically, dramatizing a loss of secure authority, a point to which discussion will return in considering Hardy's short stories. At the same time, of course, in this tendency -- it is by no means true of all stories or all authors, of course -- away from the omniscient author, the short fiction of the late nineteenth century again anticipates "the formal base from which modernist short fiction was to develop",⁴⁵ in its shift -- in Joyce, Mansfield and Woolf, towards such techniques as the free indirect style.

Again, a shift towards a concern with mood, "impression", and feelings as against an emphasis simply on event/plot has implications for the overall structure of the story, an almost inevitable move away from the Aristotelian concern with the story's having a beginning, middle and end and towards a more open ending, or a shift of perception which still involves continuity rather than closure. (Though again, to generalise is risky: there are still stories, notably those of O. Henry, after the turn of the century which depend for their effects on a sudden surprising twist, often based on coincidence, which results in closure.⁴⁶)

An interesting and related point is made by Valerie Shaw when she suggests:

At every stage of its development the short story reveals affinities with the style of painting dominating the period in question The impact of many modern short stories resembles the effect of looking at an impressionist canvas because it leaves a sense of something complex yet unfinished, a sensation which vibrates in the reader's or spectator's mind and demands that he participate in the aesthetic interchange between the artist and his subject.⁴⁷

We remember of course that Impressionism is not, in fact, a Modernist technique but

45. Hanson, Short Stories and Short Fictions 14.

46. See Reid 60 and Cay Dollerup, "Concepts of Tension, Intensity and Suspense in the Short Story Theory," Orbius Litterarum: International Review of Literary Studies 25 (1970): 315.

47. Shaw 13.

essentially a late nineteenth century one.

Again, the short story in the 1880s and 1890s is so rich and various that one is aware of exceptions to almost every attempt at generalization. But it is at the same time useful, by way of providing a context for Hardy's short stories, to attempt to make some deductions about the stories that were appearing alongside them in the pages of the periodicals. That very word "deductions" takes us of course to the pages of Strand Magazine and to Arthur Conan Doyle's celebrated stories of Sherlock Holmes. Holmes has become a mythic figure and so has his London of hansom cabs and fogs; much of his appeal today is nostalgic but we might consider what it was that appealed so much to contemporary readers when Holmes appeared in the Strand, in "A Scandal in Bohemia" in 1891. Holmes was not the only fictional detective to appear in the Strand, of course, that magazine also published Arthur Morrison's stories of "Martin Hewitt, Investigator" in the 1890s, as well as the investigatory "Stories from the Diary of a Doctor" by L. T. Meade and Clifford Halifax and several investigative stories by Grant Allen. Meanwhile The Ludgate Monthly was publishing C. L. Pirkis's "The Experiences of Loveday Brooke, Lady Detective" (1893); Baroness Orczy's "Mysteries of Great Cities" were published in The Royal Magazine in 1902 and Clarence Rook's "The Stir Outside the Cafe Royal", featuring Miss Van Snoop, was published in The Harmsworth Magazine in 1898. There were many other such detective heroes, and heroines.⁴⁸ They offered the reader, of course, adventure and excitement; they also offered the reader a world which made sense, a world in which

48. See for example, Alan K. Russell, ed., Rivals of Sherlock Holmes (New Jersey: Castle Books, 1979) and Hugh Green, ed., The Rivals of Sherlock Holmes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971).

mysteries and uncertainties could be solved, in which effects could be logically traced back to causes. This was, however unconsciously, reassuring in a world which was, increasingly, not making as much sense as it once was: a world in which, even if God were not dead, then authority and security were increasingly being challenged at home by unionists, socialists and women, and abroad by rivals to Britain's imperial power. One might argue, in other words that the detective story allowed not only an escape into a world of adventure for the reader who perhaps did a mundane nine-to-five job (or a woman who did not even have this) but also an escape into a world which was subtly reassuring.

In the market economy of magazine sales, of course, the desires of the reader counted for much and, on the whole, it would seem that an element of escape was one thing that many readers desired, rather than the vivid "presentation of a slice of life"; although there were, of course, short stories which dealt with contemporary issues, the contemporary reader was notably keen "for reports on the vivid forms of life 'out there'",⁴⁹ reports from worlds different to the one the reader inhabited, more adventurous, more exotic, more exciting, more intriguing. These stories might be set in locations which were remote in time -- back in times which were more heroic and adventurous than the streets of contemporary, bourgeois London, or lives lived according to more traditional rhythms than those of the new machine age -- or they might be remote in location, in the exotic worlds of imperial adventure or much closer to home. In parts of the British Isles, most notably in the westerly fringes, the art of the story-teller, usually in an oral form, had deep roots and this tradition flowered anew in the period under consideration. Here were stories both non-urban, even

49. Flora, "Introduction" XVI.

exotic in setting, telling of lives lived according to more traditional, unchanging values. Irish writers, writing out of "their own local conditions",⁵⁰ or rehearsing versions of stories which "stick closely to the kind of story with which they were familiar from oral tradition",⁵¹ found a new market for expressing their "air of Irish Isolation".⁵² Not, of course, that such stories were by any means mere expressions of rural simplicity; the rhythms of Irish culture could be expressed in very sophisticated ways, by, for example, Wilde and by Yeats in his Celtic stories. Nor was Ireland the only source of writing about a world which was relatively close at hand, within Britain and yet fascinatingly "other": William Sharp (1885 - 1905) published, under the pen-name "Fiona Macleod", tales of Celtic mysticism and peasant romance, set in his native Scotland and collected in such volumes as Pharais (1893) and The Mountain Lovers (1895). The fiction -- short stories and novels -- of Allen Raine (Anne Adeliza Puddicombe, 1836 - 1908) -- set in the villages of rural West Wales, was immensely popular in the last decade of the nineteenth century; her sales for novels like A Welsh Singer (1897), A Welsh Witch (1902) and Queen of the Rushes (1906) sold in huge numbers and so did her posthumous collection of short stories All in a Month (1908), all of which had appeared in magazine form, sometimes in more than one place, during her

50. Sean O'Faolain, The Short Story (London: Collins, 1948) 23.

51. Harris, "English Short Fiction" 18. For a thorough examination of the pervasiveness and impact of oral tradition in Irish literature, particularly the short story see for example Vivian Mercier, "The Irish Short Story and Oral Tradition," The Celtic Cross: Studies in Irish Culture and Literature, ed. Ray B. Browne (Lafayette, Indiana UP, 1964) 98-116.

52. H. E. Bates: The Modern Short Story: A Critical Survey (London: Thomas Nelson, 1941) 212.

life-time.⁵³ Alongside Raine in the contemporary magazines appeared a number of otherwriters, many of them women, usually Welsh by origin but often living outside Wales and publishing for the English market: writers such as Anne Beale (Seven Years for Rachel, or Welsh Pictures sketched from life, 1886) Gwyneth Vaughan, and Bertha Thomas (whose stories were published in magazines such as Cornhill, Fraser's and The National Review and were collected in Picture Tales From the Welsh Hills, 1912). A recent anthology, A View across the Valley: Short Stories by Women from Wales, c. 1850 - 1950, indicates how little such short story writing (and even the writing which succeeded it after the turn of the century and into the 1930s) engaged the social, economic and political realities of Wales in the period: all of the stories are set in small rural communities and the characters are rarely far from the archetypal ("He was a tall, well set up young fellow, swarthy and sun-burnt, like a typical Cymro").⁵⁴

Again, it is striking how many of the stories in this anthology from the years around the turn of the century are coloured by supernatural or at least by the superstitions and rituals of the country people, raising the possibility of the supernatural. The emphasis on the mysterious, the occult, is woven into the texture of other "Celtic fringe" writers; it is there in Yeat's Irish Fairy and Folk Tales (1880) and The Celtic Twilight (1893), in the tales

53. On Allen Raine, see, for example, Sally Jones, Allen Raine (Cardiff: U of Wales P, 1979); John Harris "Queen of the Rushes: Allen Raine and her Public," Planet 97 (Feb/March 1993): 64-72, and Katie Gramich's Introduction to Allen Raine, Queen of the Rushes (Cardiff: Honno, 1998). Harris points out that by 1911 Hutchinson were claiming that Raine's total sales were over two million, with sales of A Welsh Singer nearing 400,000 and The Bookman ranked her amongst the four most popular fiction writers of the day, with Marie Corelli, Hall Caine and Silas Hocking.

54. Mallt Williams, "David," A View Across the Valley: Short Stories by Women from Wales, c. 1850-1950, ed. Jane Aaron (Cardiff: Honno, 1999) 14.

of "Fiona Macleod" and a number of others. Quite apart from the presence -- or imagined presence -- of supernatural belief among the rural peoples of Ireland, Scotland and Wales, it is of course much easier to write a plausible story about faeries, ghosts and supernatural happenings in the mysterious landscapes of the Celtic countryside, in the presence perhaps of ruins and decay,⁵⁵ than in the streets of contemporary London or Birmingham. The ghost or supernatural story was another dimension of imaginative escape (and the popularity of the supernatural story, in its various forms, continued of course after the turn of the century, especially in the work of M. R. James and Algernon Blackwood).

This production of stories about regional cultures and/or communities remote and isolated from economic and industrial centres at the same time echoes a characteristic of the short story which was remarked on by Frank O'Connor in his study of the form, The Lonely Voice: the way it frequently articulates the life and experience of what O'Connor calls "a submerged population group".⁵⁶

I am suggesting strongly that we can see in [the short story] an attitude of mind that is strongly attracted to submerged population groups whatever these may be at any given time -- tramps, artists, lonely idealists, dreamers, and spoiled priests. The novel can still adhere to the classic concept of society, of man as an animal who lives in a community, as in Jane Austen and Trollope it obviously does; but the short story remains by its very nature remote from the community - romantic, individual, and intransigent.⁵⁷

55. For developments of the portrayal of settings during this period and onwards see for example, Roger Ebbatson, Lawrence and the Nature Tradition: A Theme in English Fiction 1859-1914 (Atlantic Highlands, N. J.: Humanities P, 1980), and Michael Squires, "Scenic Construction and Rhetorical Signals in Hardy and Lawrence," D. H. Lawrence Review 8 (1975): 125-64.

56. Frank O'Connor, The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story (London: Macmillan, 1963) 18.

57. O'Connor 20-1.

For O'Connor, the short story, in its fragmentariness, its concentration on the discrete or disconnected episode, its tendency towards mood and impression rather than the closure of plot, lends itself to the articulation of the marginalized, the isolated and the lonely. Thomas H. Gullason, writing contemporaneously with O'Connor, comes to a strikingly similar conclusion, that "the novelist has been called the 'long-distance runner', and he is not lonely. The short story writer has been called a 'sprinter', and he is lonely".⁵⁸ Ian Reid shares O'Connor's perspective on the short story: "The short story seemed especially suitable for the portrayal of regional life, or of individuals who, though situated in a city, lived there as aliens".⁵⁹ In other words the short story in general -- and we can see the evidence of this in the particular period under consideration, the period in which Hardy was writing and publishing his short fiction -- has been construed by a significant number of critics as essentially "a form of the margins", a form which is itself, and which frequently deals with, what Clare Hanson sees as the "ex-centric", that which is "not part of official or 'high' cultural hegemony", be that a marginal group or an individual outside his/her community.⁶⁰ Hanson extends O'Connor's perspective to include later developments in the form, on both sides of the Atlantic; the short story is for her a form which lends itself to

losers and loners, exiles, women, black writers who for one reason or another have not been part of the ruling 'narrative' or epistemological framework of their society [It is] the chosen form of the exile -- not the self-willed emigré, but the writer

58. Thomas H. Gullason, "The Short Story: An Underrated Art," Studies in Short Fiction 2 (1964): 31.

59. Reid 24. Relatedly Shaw observes that "the traveller would constantly be crossing invisible lines, finding himself without warning in unfamiliar circumstances; it is the position in which many short-story writers want to put their readers, imaginatively at least" (75).

60. Hanson, ed., Re-reading the Short Story 2.

who longs for a return to a home culture which is denied him.⁶¹

One notes among Hanson's list one group, one "submerged population" or "ex-centric" group, which is defined not by geography but by gender. The years leading up to the close of the nineteenth century saw, of course, a significant challenge by women to the way their role was constructed by a society in which men had the ultimate economic, political and social power. If we see the short story as a form which seems frequently to have given expression to the experiences of the marginalized, then it comes as no surprise that one of the forms in which the emergent "New Woman" found her voice was the short story. While a number of women writers contributed to The Yellow Book in the 1890s -- Ella D'Arcy, Frances E. Huntley, Netta Syrett, Evelyn Sharp (who published six stories there), perhaps the most famous single volume of stories was George Egerton (Mary Chavelita Dunne's) Keynotes (1893) the success of which caused its publisher, John Lane to launch a line of fictional works under the title of the Keynote Series.⁶² At the same time more mainstream journals than The Yellow Book also published short stories on the "Woman Question" by women writers (as well as some by men); this was not without controversy, of course:

Perhaps what most shocked the public of the 1890s was not, in itself, the increasingly detailed accounts of casually irregular liaisons or the purchased love of a night, but rather that fiction that presumed to chronicle married life as something other than an uninteresting but vaguely sacred aftermath of the exciting game of getting a man and a woman to arrive at the altar together. The shocked disgust of these readers devoted to the comfortable reticences of earlier Victorian fiction was provided ample provocation, for the unhappy marriage, accompanied by the attendant shadow

61. Hanson, ed., Re-reading the Short Story 2-3.

62. On Keynotes, see George Allan Cate's essay in Cavasco, ed., The 1890s.

of adultery, became the most common single theme of The Yellow Book and The Savoy and soon insinuated itself into other channels of short story publication.⁶³

Here of course, was a form of the short story in which issues in the contemporary society were engaged, often in a contemporary urban setting. Often but not always: Olive Schreiner's challenging vision of the struggle of women was, in her short fiction, expressed more obliquely in the form of fables, parables or "dreams".⁶⁴

Thomas Hardy's own fiction, of course, repeatedly engages the issues of contemporary marriage and the situation of women and these concerns find some of their most telling expression in the short fiction, in stories such as "An Imaginative Woman" (1893), and "On the Western Circuit" (1891); Hardy's position on women in these stories and others will be discussed at length in a later chapter in the thesis.

To return to Hanson's definition: "[It is] the chosen form of exile -- not the self-willed emigré, but the writer who longs for a return to a home culture which is denied him". It is a definition which is strikingly relevant to Hardy, the man from rural Dorset, with lower-class connections, who finds success in literary London and, though he can return geographically, to live at Max Gate, he can never ultimately return to the rural community of his youth, a community which is, by the end of the century, changing out of all recognition. Poignantly, as will be discussed, the motif of the (thwarted) return of the native has particular resonance for Hardy. In other words, given his cultural up-rooting, and the loss of faith which accompanied it, fundamental to

63. Harris, "English Short Fiction" 61.

64. These were collected as Dreams (1890) and Dream Life and Real Life (1893); others were collected posthumously as Stories, Dreams and Allegories (1923).

Hardy's compulsion to write is a sense of aloneness, a sense of alienation that almost inevitably drew him to write short stories. These stories repeatedly have at their creative core themes and settings which express a profound and inescapable awareness of human loneliness.

As we have already seen, Hardy's short stories have frequently been undervalued even by critics who regard the novels highly. Even Evelyn Hardy can write dismissively:

Like a foreigner speaking an alien language, or a man uncertain of his bearings, he is often wordy, or moves over a larger area than that required to reach his destination Hardy regarded his short stories as novels in miniature He evidently did not regard [them] as independent literary forms.⁶⁵

Relatedly A. F. Cassis sees the stories as the awkward products of an author who is primarily a novelist. The stories often have:

Slow openings characterized by generalizations more proper to the novel than the short story.⁶⁶

Millgate asserts that Hardy himself "made little attempt to weed any of [the stories] out", and that this is a measure of his overall "low opinion of them".⁶⁷ Certainly there is evidence that Hardy, perhaps like most writers, felt that some of the stories were less than successful, especially some of those in A Changed Man: "I heartily wish I could snuff out several of them",⁶⁸ a comment which was presumably relevant to "What the Shepherd Saw" (CM), of

65. Evelyn Hardy, Thomas Hardy: A Critical Biography (London: Hogarth, 1954) 183-84.

66. A F. Cassis "A Note on the Structure of Hardy's Short Stories," Colby Library Quarterly 10 (1974): 291.

67. Michael Millgate, Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist 1971; London, Macmillan, 1994) 353.

68. Collected Letters, Vol. 4 300.

which he writes that it is "pretty bad I think".⁶⁹ On the other hand, Hardy at several points took considerable pains in revising his short stories, which seems to run counter to Millgate's assertion of Hardy's lack of concern for his short fiction. In 1893 he is writing to Florence Henniker: "I feel more inclined just now to write short ones".⁷⁰

Hardy seems, however, to have developed no definite theories about short story technique (we might note, of course, that neither did he develop any profound theories about the novel, especially given the theorizing, from Lubbock, James and others during the time in which he was writing). Even James himself "used the term 'tale', 'story' and 'nouvelle' quite unsystematically",⁷¹ and Hardy

used the term story, tale, and novel interchangeably, and appears to have made no strict theoretical distinction between the novel and short story as literary genres. For him, 'worth telling' ... was the single criterion for good fiction, and form was more a matter of shape than of length.⁷²

Brady's hint here that Hardy was concerned with "shape", that he was perhaps more concerned with matters of narrative technique in the short stories than he has sometimes been given credit for, is a point to which we will return. However, it is clear that Hardy was by no means directly responsive to narrative experiment in fiction in the latter half of the nineteenth century; by the time that Hardy starts writing his short stories, Flaubert's

69. Collected Letters, Vol. 4 293. See also his letter of 25 September 1904 to Florence Hanniker, Vol. 3 135.

70. See Collected Letters, Vol. 2 43.

71. Shaw 20.

72. Brady, The Short Stories of Thomas Hardy 1.

Madame Bovary (1856), for example, had not only caused a sensation on the continent with its so-called immorality, but had also shown new ways of presenting a character's thoughts, by what became known as "le style indirect libre". In England, Joseph Conrad, a friend of Hardy, published Almayer's Folly (1895) which made maximum use of several indirect methods of presentation. Harold Orel writes that:

Thomas Hardy's insistence on older more traditional modes of narrative became, in the 1890s, a stubborn refusal to accept experimentation for its own sake, after all his novel writing career had largely ended before he began writing his short stories, when he was over fifty years old. But Hardy, like Dickens and Trollope, was writing for a specific market of readers, and the kinds of fiction he wrote were influenced -- inevitably -- by his experiences with editors and periodicals during the previous two decades.⁷³

Here we do need to be discriminating. Orel is uncharacteristically inaccurate: Hardy had not, of course, finished writing his novels when he began writing his short stories.

Moreover, when he did begin writing his stories, in the 1870s, Hardy was a man in his thirties not in his fifties and, as Orel implies, rather set in his ways. Clearly, however, Orel is right to draw attention to Hardy's "traditional modes of narrative". Unlike the novels "in which the presence of the author is an important element in our experience ... [and] where the author is participant, undergoing the experience of the book with the characters",⁷⁴ in the stories we frequently hear the voice of a constructed story teller, either overtly or implicitly, speaking in the first person:

73. Orel, The Victorian Short Story 12.

74. Ian Gregor, "What Kind of Fiction did Hardy Write?," Essays in Criticism 16 (1966): 291. See also, Daniel R. Schwarz, "The Narrator As Character in Hardy's Major Fiction," Modern Fiction Studies 18, 1 (1972): 155-97.

The tale is usually told, or re-told, by a speaker addressing an audience that forms a natural or social community. Hardy modifies this method by employing an omniscient narrator, but one whose voice soon reveals itself to be that of a traditional teller of tales. It is a voice leisurely in rhythm, with flourishes of comment and digression, as if quite confident that the audience will enjoy not merely the matter of the narrative but also its incidental flourishes and charms.⁷⁵

Again, however, it might be suggested that this makes the voices of Hardy's tellers sound more of a piece than they actually are; there is a greater variety of tone than this summary suggests. And we should note another effect of this use of the narrative voice: it is a single human voice speaking, often recollecting and retelling events which have (supposedly) happened in the past. In other words it is a voice which does not have the ex-cathedra authority of the omniscient narrator. It is by definition a subjective voice, a lone voice giving its view of events which have happened in the flow of time, a process out of which the speaker himself speaks. It is a perspective which loans itself very appropriately to stories about human aloneness and vulnerability.

In this sense one might, of course, argue that Hardy is already pushing towards the isolated, vulnerable consciousness that we see in Modernist fiction, especially in the work of Joyce and Woolf (and we remember Conrad's use of the first person narrator in Heart of Darkness); however, while the sense of alienation may have similar origins, we do not get in Hardy's fiction, of course, the attempt to present a mimetic version of the narrator's stream of consciousness, of the fragmentariness which characterizes Modernist narrators like J. Alfred Prufrock or Leopold Bloom. In fact, Hardy's movement, in the short fiction, away from the omniscient narrator which is still dominant in English fiction in the nineteenth century, presumably has its roots not in modern experiment but in personal familiarity with

75. Irving Howe, "A Note on Hardy's Stories," The Hudson Review 19 (1966): 262.

local tradition: in the oral tale-telling of his home district in Dorset. (One notes the conscious presence of the narrating voice is there in many of the stories but not in the novels.) Indeed there was perhaps an element of nostalgia for the telling of tales and local anecdotes, familiar from his early years in Bockhampton and Stinsford, in Hardy's storytelling methods; as he evokes that landscape and those people in the stories, the narrating voice, at the same time, comes out of, is at times overtly nostalgic for, that bucolic world, even as it registers change and insecurity. Again, the employment of such associations might have been made easier by Hardy's lack of formal university education, though at the same time he would, as a reader, be aware of gradual use of new narrative techniques, for example in the stories being published in contemporary magazines.

Hardy's own pronouncements about fiction writing in general and his own techniques in particular have not encouraged reviewers and commentators on his work to consider him as anything other than as a rather technically naive teller of tales; he himself for example can, in his 1892 Preface to Tess of the D'Urbervilles, characterize his work as that of

a mere tale-teller, who writes down how the things of the world strike him, without any ulterior intentions whatever, has overlooked, and may be pure inadvertence have run foul of when in the least aggressive mood.⁷⁶

In the light of such an account of his fictional method, the fiction can be considered by critics as having been

conceived as a *told (or sung)* story, or at least not as a literary story, that 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 a great skill in A Few Crusted Characters and less successfully in A Group of Noble Dames, but, furthermore, that

76. See Orel, Personal Writings 28. See also Joseph J. Reilly "The Short Stories of Thomas Hardy," Catholic World 128 (1929), who describes Hardy as a "masterful teller of tales" (407).

this habit of mind is a rather unconscious element in Hardy's art [Hardy's is] a world in which typical ballad heroes and heroines can flourish with a thoroughly rationalized "mythology" to sustain them.⁷⁷

Davidson is right, of course, to draw attention to the way in which in some groups of stories Hardy's narrator is an actual character, relating his story to other characters who form a group, and who will each tell a story in turn; Hardy is assuming the reader's familiarity with the tradition represented by Boccaccio's Decameron and Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales and confirming his sense of the short story as being, in Jorge Luis Borges's words, "an oral genre, a sudden fervour of conversation, not something written".⁷⁸

How "unconscious" or otherwise was Hardy's narrative method in other stories that those mentioned by Davidson, can of course be only a matter for speculation; nor can we tell what, conscious or otherwise, were Hardy's intentions. But we can observe that the effects of his story telling methods are, and his use of the voice of the tale teller is frequently highly successful. As well as presenting a lone, vulnerable human voice, as we have suggested, and also creating a unity between method and subject matter -- the traditional tale teller telling tales set in -- from the urban reader's perspective -- a traditional rural environment, that voice can also serve to give a convincing sense of authenticity: these events really happened because the teller has known the people involved, or knows of people who did know the protagonists (they are stories current in the community) or the graves of the protagonists are in the local graveyard, have been seen by the teller and might be seen by the listener. This, for example, is the voice of the narrator of "The Three

77. Donald Davidson, "The Traditional Basis of Thomas Hardy's Fiction," The Southern Review 6 (1940): 168.

78. Jorge Luis Borges, "A Note on Bernard Shaw," Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings, ed. Donald A. Yeats and James E. Irby (New York: New Directions, 1964) 215.

Strangers" (WT):

Fifty years ago such a lonely cottage stood on such a down, and may possibly be standing there now Three miles of irregular upland, during the long inimical seasons, with their sleets, snows, rains, and mists, afford withdrawing space enough to isolate a Timon or a Nebuchadnezzar. (7)

Here the reader gets all the details from a keen-eyed narrator who, like a local historian, knows the life and history of this remote place, establishing an air of authenticity and thus credibility towards the tale from the outset. (At the same time this is not a naive rustic figure; the narrator manifests his book-learning and thus gains some authority by his references to Shakespeare and to the Old Testament.) Again, the veracity of the tale -- despite the oddness of the events -- is assisted by the narrative voice, and by the feeling that this is perhaps a tale which has been related -- and perhaps is being related -- to a fireside audience; the very oddness of the events are what makes the tale worth telling.

A similar narrative method is used in "A Tradition of Eighteen Hundred and Four" (WT). Here the story is told by a first person narrator, but his narrative "frames" the story itself, which is told by Solomon Selby; again, the situation is, overtly this time, an ostensibly often-related story being retold to a company. The story opens as follows:

The widely discussed possibility of an invasion of England through a Channel tunnel has more than once recalled old Solomon Selby's story to the mind.

The occasion on which I numbered myself among his audience was one evening when he was sitting in the yawning chimney-corner of the inn-kitchen, with some others who had gathered there, and I entered for shelter from the rain. Withdrawing the stem of his pipe from the dental notch in which it habitually rested, he leaned back in the recess behind him

"My father, as you mid know, was a shepherd all his life, and lived out by the Cove four miles yonder, where I was born and lived likewise"(28)

Thus the narrative is authentically and locally set before the actual story is told: thereafter Solomon relates with an air of authority how he lived as a boy near Lulstead Cove and

helped his father who was a shepherd; one night, out walking the shore with his soldier uncle, he sees, by the light of the moon, two French officers walking the shoreline with maps; to his horror the uncle recognises one of them as "the Corsican ogre" (32), Bonaparte himself. The story ends with Bonaparte and the other officer departing silently from the shore in a boat, and the uncle returns to camp to tell his officers what he has seen. The voice of Solomon, as mediated by the unnamed narrator, giving "the direct testimony of his own eyes", turns the "improbability"⁷⁹ of the story's incidents into a credible and indeed more resonant tale, suggestive of an "underlying truth".⁸⁰ Moreover, this particular story, perhaps symptomatically, suggests that the view of Hardy as responding almost unconsciously to the oral traditions of his background is far from being the whole truth:

A curious question arose in Hardy's mind at this date on whether a romancer was morally justified in going to extreme lengths of assurance -- after the manner of Defoe -- in respect of a tale he knew to be absolutely false. Thirty-seven years earlier, when much pressed to produce something of the nature of a fireside yarn, he had invented a picturesque account of a stealthy nocturnal visit to England by Napoleon in 1804, during the war, to spy out a good spot for invasion. Being struck with the extreme improbability of such a story, he added a circumstantial framework describing it as an old local tradition to blind the reader to the hoax.⁸¹

In other words, the narrative methods he uses, albeit rooted in the oral tradition, have been deployed quite consciously to achieve a desired effect.

The first person narrator is also used in "The Melancholy Hussar of the German

79. See the 1919 Preface to Wessex Tales, Orel, Personal Writings, in which Hardy interestingly writes: "Great was his surprise several years later to be told that it was a real tradition. How far this is true he is unaware" (24).

80. Brady, The Short Stories of Thomas Hardy 391.

81. See Florence Emily Hardy, The Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840-1928 (London: Macmillan, 1962) 391. Henceforth referred to as Life.

Legion" (WT), serving both to underline, again, the authenticity and therefore the effectiveness of the story and also to accentuate the theme of loneliness in the tale that he relates. Again, in the opening sentence of the story, we get the actuality of setting, observed at first-hand and in the present tense, by the narrator:

Here stretch the downs high and breezy and green, absolutely unchanged since those eventual days. A plough has never disturbed the turf, and the sod that was uppermost then is uppermost now. Here stood the camp; here are distinct traces of the banks thrown up for the horses of the cavalry, and spots where the midden-heaps lay are still to be observed. (35)

The presence of the forty-seven-year old narrator, who, he tells us, heard the story originally from the female protagonist, Phyllis Grove, herself, when she was seventy-five and he was "a lad of fifteen" (35), again gives credibility to the story. Moreover, the narrator's manipulation of time -- and the fact that he, too, is a single human voice speaking at one place, at one point in time -- adds to the poignancy of the tale, a tale of the chance meeting of two lonely people in this location years ago but, subject to the vagaries of chance, doomed to be parted. They exist now only in the human memory of the community, as the subjects of a story. In other words, the telling of a narrative itself is a human construction, against the flow of time, of which Hardy was so acutely aware:

It was nearly ninety years ago. The British uniform of the period, with its immense epaulettes, queer cocked hat Ideas have changed; invention has followed invention. Soldiers were monumental objects then It is necessary to add that the echoes of many characteristic tales, dating from the picturesque time, still linger about here ... some of them I have repeated; most of them I have forgotten; one I have never repeated, and assuredly can never forget. (35)

And the point is echoed at the epic end of the tale: "The older villagers, however, who know of the episode from their parents, still recollect the place where the soldiers lie.

Phyllis lies near" (51). The story ends with the actuality of location with which it opened

and with the same sense of authenticity assumed by the first-person narrator: "There is no memorial to mark the spot [where the hussar's body was buried], but Phyllis pointed it out to me" (51).

In other stories the narrator is less overt; indeed the first person "I" or "me" does not occur. And yet one does have a strong sense of narrating voice telling his story from a position of actuality and authenticity, as if he knew the place and the events. In "Fellow-Townsmen" (WT), for example, the narrator tells us in the second paragraph of the story that:

During a certain damp evening five-and thirty years ago, before the twilight was far advanced, a pedestrian of professional appearance, carrying a small bag in his hand and an elevated umbrella, was descending one of these hills by the turnpike road when he was overtaken by a phaeton.

"Hullo, Down - is that you?"
said the driver of the vehicle, a young man of pale and refined appearance. "Jump up here with me, and ride down to your door." (79)

The story is distant in time, like all good communally-narrated stories, and yet it is not set in the wholly fictional, fairy-tale world of "once upon a time", but in this world at a specific time and place. And when Barnet returns to his homeland after twenty one years, the narrator carefully re-creates Barnet's loneliness by again setting it in a specific, and authentic, location:

Twenty-one years and six months do not pass without setting a mark even upon durable stone and triple brass: upon humanity such a period works nothing less than transformation. In Barnet's old birthplace vivacious young children with bones like india-rubber had grown up to be stable men and women (115)

Towards the end of the story the narrator shifts his focus to Lucy's lonely life after rejecting the marriage proposal of the returnee, Barnet. Indeed like an oral tale-teller he imaginatively identifies with her predicament:

Lucy sorrowfully took back her note, went home, and resolved to wait. She did wait -- years and years -- but Barnet never reappeared. (124)

Again, in "Interlopers at the Knap" (WT), we have a narrator who sets the scene for the events with the compelling historical accuracy of the indigenous Wessex inhabitant, who knows the topography and the pattern of the roads (and thus of local patterns of commercial traffic and social movement) at first hand, while at the same time he suggests from the outset something of Charles Darton's forthcoming ordeal and subsequent alienation:

The north road from Casterbridge is tedious and lonely, especially in winter time. Along a part of its course, it connects with Long-Ash Lane, a monotonous track without a village or hamlet for many miles, and with very seldom a turning. Unapprized wayfarers who are too old, or too young, or in other respects too weak for a distance to be traversed, but who nevertheless, have to walk it, say, as they look wistfully ahead, "Once at the top of that hill, and I must surely see the end of Long-Ash Lane!" But they reach the hilltop, and Long-Ash Lane stretches in front as mercilessly as before. (125)

The authenticity of the speaker's knowledge is underlined by his use of the present tense (as it is in the case of the first-person narrator in "The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion"): "it connects ... Long-Ash Lane stretches". And the voice again shows Hardy's constant sense of time, continuity and, above all, change, the sense of the past's being actually inscribed on the landscape and still visible:

They were travelling in a direction that was enlivened by no modern current of traffic, the place of Darton's pilgrimage [was] an old-fashioned village Yet this neglected lane had been a highway to Queen Elizabeth's subjects and the cavalcades of the past. Its day was over now, and its history as a national artery done for ever. (126-27)

Thus, Hardy's use of a narrating voice, either in the first person or in the third person, creates a variety of effects: it is not just a naive, and nostalgic, re-creation of the

tale-telling he remembered from his boyhood. At times it is extremely subtle in its contribution to the overall effect of the story being told. But at the same time we do not find in Hardy's stories the "moments of significance" or portrayal of inner states of feeling which, as we have seen, some short story-writers were beginning to develop in the 1890s and which look forward to the more radical experiments of the Modernists. However, Hardy's characters are by no means merely the puppets of plot events, however much they are at the mercy of chance and contingency in Hardy's world. Nor are the characters the simple or archetypal inhabitants of the world of the ballad, however much Hardy's narratives might seem to echo that world at times. The characters of some of the stories do in fact manifest states and shifts of feeling, often vividly and convincingly dramatized: the thwarted imaginative energies of Ella Marchmill in "An Imaginative Woman" (LLI) (and, although we never actually see him, the similarly frustrated young poet, Robert Trewe, in the same story), the sense of loss and emptiness that Barnet experiences in "Fellow-Townsmen" (WT), and the aching loneliness that the exiled Madam V___ feels in "A Committee-Man of 'the Terror'" (CM).

But the fact remains that the dominating impression left by Hardy's stories, especially on a reader of those stories in the journals of the 1890s, was that of the voice of the oral story-teller, relating stories directly out of a rural community, rooted in a rich, vividly-evoked countryside remote in distance and, it seemed, in time from late-nineteenth-century, urban England. And while that rural way of life existed -- or had existed in Hardy's youth -- its literary manifestation was ultimately a carefully constructed one, as he indicates in the "General Preface to the Novels and Poems of 1912":

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 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.⁸²

It is this immaculate and imaginatively-consistent creation of a bucolic "Wessex" which constitutes his "sphere of authority", and for much of his lifetime its original, the actuality of Dorset, was remote from London.⁸³ This coupled with the sense of these tales being ostensibly "old fashioned",⁸⁴ coming out of an old and remote culture, clearly appealed to an increasingly urban audience in precisely the way that the tales of rural Ireland, Scotland and Wales did in the same period. In other words "Wessex" was highly marketable, a fact of which Hardy was not unaware:

To make a live historical study, breath and blood should be moving, a proportion of the material should be overheard as it were coming down by oral tradition, or picked out of private letters of the time. Better still, if it could be dug for by cross-examination of ancestral ghosts.⁸⁵

And, again like the stories from the Celtic regions, there could be ghosts, ancestral or otherwise, in such a remote setting: folk traditions, superstitions, even the supernatural itself simply added to the stories' appeal; the macabre events of "The Withered Arm" (WT), the apparently supernatural, mesmeric powers of "The Fiddler of the Reels" (LLI), the gothic stormy setting of "A Tryst at an Ancient Earthwork" (CM), these would have been much to the taste of the contemporary magazine reader.

82. Orel, Personal Writings 45.

83. Orel, The Victorian Short Story 100-1.

84. Allen, The Short Story in English 12.

85. Quoted in Brady, The Short Stories of Thomas Hardy 46.

At the same time, as will be discussed in a later chapter, the strange, unpredictable, illogical events of the supernatural tale, with its echoes of the world of the ballad, were an effective way of articulating and dramatizing the human situation in a mindless, illogical universe. And this was a very contemporary awareness: Hardy may not have been a radical innovator as far as technique was concerned, but his view of the world -- whether the late-nineteenth-century reader of an individual story always fully realised it or not -- was disturbingly contemporary: a world in which humankind was no longer God's special creation, but was alone an indifferent world -- and alone in its awareness of the fact. In other words, these seemingly traditional stories, apparently escapist in their setting, are ultimately very modern in their perspective. Thus, Irving Howe's comment is a perceptive one:

His writing, at its most distinguished, fuses the traditional and the modern, the customs of the past and the anxieties of the present. Though this complexity and amplitude of perspective, Hardy was able to brush past the moralism which had almost asphyxiated official nineteenth-century England; and that is one reason he continues to live for us in a way that other, more 'solid' writers do not.⁸⁶

At a social level, Hardy's stories are again in line with the concern in contemporary short fiction with the situation of women and the nature of contemporary marriage. His awareness of the pains associated with entrapment in an unhappy marriage, and the arbitrary nature of contemporary marriage laws, must at some level have been sharpened by the estrangement within his own marriage to Emma Hardy. The concern in the short story with incompleteness, with fragmentariness, as Valerie Shaw suggests, means that

Marriage in the short story is seldom the token of hope and renewed social harmony it is in the live of romantic comedy which descends from Shakespeare through

86. Howe, "A Note on Hardy's Stories" 261.

centuries of drama and fiction. When courtship does have a happy outcome in short fiction it tends to have something offbeat about it.⁸⁷

Shaw is writing about the short story in general, but it is a view which has particular resonance for the stories of Hardy: as will be discussed in a later chapter, Hardy's treatment of love and marriage is far from being in the tradition of happy romantic resolution. Even those relationships which do result in marriage -- and many of them do not -- are in many cases sources of further restlessness, even isolation.

Clare Hanson, in her persuasive book on the short story writes that:

The formal properties of the short story -- disjunction, inconclusiveness, obliquity -- connect with its ideological marginality and with the fact that the form may be used to express something suppressed/repressed in mainstream literature.⁸⁸

This sense of "ideological marginality", the sense of "something suppressed/repressed" is at the heart of Hardy's concerns in his short fiction. At the level of his social settings, as has already been noted, his fiction delineates the disruption of the cohesion of the agricultural communities, the breakdown of the old bucolic culture, the passing away of traditions, which might be read as romantic to the urban reader, but which were of marginal concern to the cultural and economic forces which held sway within late-nineteenth-century England. At the same time the displacement of this older rural culture by a more mechanical and commercial urban-based culture and metropolitan ways of thinking, involved for Hardy the suppression of modes of feeling, of natural impulses, which made the contemporary society a less humane place, especially where the expression of personal and sexual feelings were concerned, and these were concerns which could indeed be in "mainstream literature" only

87. Shaw 219-20.

88. Hanson, ed., Re-reading the Short Story 6.

with difficulty, as was painfully manifested for Hardy by the critical reaction to Tess of the d'Urbervilles and, even more acutely, to Jude the Obscure.

But it was out of the acute awareness of change, of discomfort both social and existential, from this sense of being out of sympathy with, and on the margins of, the dominant forces and values of his culture that Hardy creates his art:

The very collapse of standards, conventions and values, which has so bewildered the impersonal novelist, has been the making of the story writer who can catch any piece of life as it flies and make his personal performance out of it.⁸⁹

Hardy's concerns, though, are not just with the social situation, in Wessex or in England as a whole; while his novels and stories obviously have resonance and drama by being set in rural England at a particular time, Hardy's is a genuinely universal concern with the human situation, with human suffering, with human passion and human loneliness; in this, as John Bayley suggests, the short story is, again, a particularly appropriate and effective mode of expression:

To a far greater degree than longer fictions, the short story can combine the universal and particular in a short space, so that each enhances the other, and each lends the other, for the reader's benefit, an immediate authority of recognition.⁹⁰

The universal recognition at the core of Hardy's short fiction is that of human loneliness, the portrayal, by means of stories set in a particular marginalised culture, of a universe in which humanity itself was a "marginalised community".

89. Pritchett 113.

90. Bayley, The Short Story 188.

CHAPTER TWO

Thomas Hardy: The Lonely Imagination

The mid-nineteenth-century Britain into which Thomas Hardy was born and had his boyhood was a rich, economically dynamic country, whose political influence, endorsed by its military power, stretched, like its Empire, around the globe. And yet, in part because of that very success, based upon Britain's virtual invention of fundamental industrial processes, forces of change and instability were already building energies which would ensure that British society, even as it flourished materially, experienced pressures and dynamic shifts which were subsequently to be experienced by the whole of western capitalist culture, as the modern world, and modern states of minds evolved. The packing of workers into urban areas, many of them workers uprooted from a rural existence, slowly built up pressures which challenged and, with characteristic British gradualism and compromise, ultimately changed for ever the class structures of Britain, though it took a couple of generations, from Chartism, through unionism and socialism and the founding a new political party to do so. The relations between the sexes, again in part as a result of Britain's very economic success and the resultant growth in middle-class wealth, also began to shift in the second half of the century: middle-class women were no longer willing to accept the role of adornment to the drawing room, placed on the pedestal, but at the same time imprisoned there.

Most profoundly of all, the very "scientific discovery",¹ which underpinned Britain's industrial success, inexorably began to challenge the very foundations on which the ethics

1. Jerome Hamilton Buckley, The Victorian Temper: A Study in Literary Culture (London: Frank Cass, 1966) 8.

of British society and its social structure were based. Now scientific and technological discoveries, ate away at what had been philosophical certainties about the nature and origins of humankind, a flow of ideas of which Darwin's On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection (1859) was a massive tributary. To social instability -- for all that Britain had avoided the fate that had befallen other countries in Europe in 1848 -- was added the bewildering vision of a world based not on divine order but on randomness and chance, the possibility that humanity existed not in a universe in which it had a special place but one which has no "conscious power either good or bad".²

It is, of course, impossible to date and track precisely what were gradual and largely unfocused shifts of consciousness and patterns of thought through the second half of the nineteenth century. But what we can see in the writing of the period is perhaps an increased sense of disparity between handling "the problems of man in society" and tackling "realms of personal emotion".³ Romanticism had explored the inner world of the individual, had begun to see the individual as not merely a social being, a lady or a gentleman, as had the case in most preceding literature in the eighteenth century, but as a psychological and sexual being, as a subject indeed of natural impulses, albeit in a natural universe that was the creation of, and the habitation of, a spiritual reality. Now, while mid century writers like Gaskell and Disraeli scrutinized the new social and economic pressure which Britain was experiencing, later writers increasingly seem to be aware of man's acute vulnerability in a

2. See Raymond Chapman, The Victorian Debate: English Literature and Society, 1832-1901 (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968) 330.

3. David Daiches, A Critical History of English Literature, vol. 2 (London: Secker & Warburg, 1960) 1064.

hostile world. While in the early Charles Dickens, for instance, evil can be identified and defeated and virtue can triumph -- Fagin is punished and Oliver is taken into the security of the bourgeois family -- by the time of Bleak House (1852) evil is more systematic, less easily identifiable even as the individual is enmeshed within it; the end is supposedly a happy one, but to achieve happiness the individuals have to escape the city which is the heart of the social, judicial and economic systems and create a new, private place elsewhere. One of George Eliot's main themes, especially in Middlemarch is the way in which the individual is not a free agent, that he/she has to make compromises, to adjust his/her individual drives and ambitions to the requirements of the external, social world. By the last decades of the century the division between the individual and a world which no longer could be assumed to have an underlying spiritual order, which indeed might have no pattern at all, was an acute one; Conrad's heroes have to define their own existence in a universe which disregards them, and Modernist novelists would "look within"⁴ to find the only source of certainty. But the loneliness of the individual whose experience is explored by Conrad and the Modernists who followed him, is present in the writers of the late nineteenth century, as the protagonist increasingly feels himself alienated and isolated in a society which seems impersonal as it becomes all the more urban, and in a natural universe which operates entirely according to its own indecipherable processes.

While these developments and changes had their origins far from rural Dorset, there was no escaping them. And given his particular origins and background, Thomas Hardy was particularly vulnerable to their isolating impact. That background, the upbringing and

4. Virginia Woolf, "Modern Fiction," Collected Essays, vol. 2 (London: Hogarth P, 1966) 106.

cultural environment which Hardy experienced in Dorset, is given the setting of his unique fictional vision, a crucial factor. Immediately, however, in seeking to investigate the relation between Hardy and his early environment, one confronts a particular problem. While all autobiographies, especially perhaps those of writers, are by definition highly subjective and selective, that of Hardy, a private, even secretive man, is particularly so. Dictated to his second wife during his lifetime and published over her name only after his death, The Early Life of Thomas Hardy: 1840-1891 and The Later Years of Thomas Hardy: 1892-1928,⁵ do not only obfuscate their authorship and suppress details of his later life; it is such a carefully-constructed version of his own life as to well-deserve Robert Gittings' opinion of it as "almost deliberate deception".⁶

In particular, the struggles of the inner life are carefully veiled; in the words of Richard Carpenter:

The hopes, fears, sufferings, creative ecstasies that any artist undergoes are conspicuously missing; what we have are chatty anecdotes of people he met and places he visited with some interspersed comments, on writing, art and life.⁷

However, the very nature of this obscurantist autobiography is in its way revealing. For instance, as J.I.M. Stewart has observed:

5. Both volumes are collected as The Life of Thomas Hardy: 1840-1928. Richard Little Purdy has called the work an "innocent deception" and he has observed that "The Early Life of Thomas Hardy is in reality an autobiography. Though Mrs Hardy's name stands on the title-page, her work was confined to a few editorial touches, and the writing is throughout Hardy's own The Later Years of Thomas Hardy was largely written by Hardy himself under the same circumstances as The Early Life It was not carried beyond the year 1918, however, which may give some clue to the date of composition, and the four concluding chapters are Mrs Hardy's work". Purdy argues that "though Mrs Hardy often spoke of revising and compressing the whole work, she never did so". See Purdy, A Bibliographical Study 265-73.

6. Robert Gittings, Young Thomas Hardy (1975; London : Penguin, 1978) 15.

7. Richard Carpenter, Thomas Hardy (New York: Twayne, 1964) 18.

The entire reticence here of The Early Life of Thomas Hardy may well suggest to us the existence of a phase of mental and spiritual tension which he judged too private for exhibition in a biography.⁸

However, while it is perhaps unsurprising for "an old man looking backwards at what it had pained him to recall"⁹ to suppress facts about his early life, and while we cannot go to the Life for a reliable documentation of facts, certainly about Hardy's inner life, the volume does inevitably give fascinating material which would otherwise be unavailable to us. Moreover, it does tell us something about Hardy, at least Hardy in later life, in the way he portrays himself, in the way he constructs in the text the figure of a man who was from his earliest days isolated, reticent, in many respects alone in his society. While we could assume only with careful critical scepticism that this was actually true of the young Hardy's emotion, what we can suggest with greater confidence is that this is how the elder Hardy felt and how, looking back, he chose to trace the development of his personality and imagination, the imagination which created, and manifests itself in, the short stories and novels.

The tone of separateness and aloneness is set from the very beginning of the Life, with Hardy's idiosyncratic account of his own birth which took place, he tells us, on "a lonely and silent spot between woodland and heathland";¹⁰ the birth, of course, took place in the sturdy cottage at Higher Bockhampton, in a scattered but far from isolated community. And yet the sense we get from Hardy's phrasing is of something rather different, of exposure, vulnerability and isolation, set moreover in the kind of bleak rural landscape

8. J.I.M. Stewart, "The Major Novels," The Genius of Thomas Hardy, ed. Margaret Drabble, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976) 57.

9. See Johnson, Thomas Hardy 10-11.

10. Life 3.

which, as we shall see, repeatedly expresses in the short stories and the fiction the characters' own alienation.

Hardy portrays a child marked by vulnerability in an uncertain world and hostile circumstances in his account of the actual birth, which was presumably a tale based on family tradition:

Had it not been for the common sense of the estimable woman who attended as monthly nurse, he might never have walked the earth. At his birth he was thrown aside as dead till rescued by her as she exclaimed to the surgeon, 'Dead! Stop a minute: he's alive enough, sure!'¹¹

The vulnerability, the oddness -- and also perhaps the "specialness" -- of the child is expressed in another story which Hardy selects for the reader, an almost Biblical episode:

Of his infancy nothing had been handed down save the curious fact that on his mother's returning from out-of-doors on hot afternoon, to him asleep in his cradle, she found a large snake curled up upon his breast, comfortably asleep like himself.¹²

Martin Seymour-Smith's Hardy comments elaborately on this particular episode in which

Hardy "is seen as initially so intimate with the holder of poisonous and forbidden knowledge, the devil, as to sleep 'comfortably' with him".¹³ One also notes that Hardy suggests this is the only story of his infancy to have been retained by the family, which perhaps seems unlikely.

Hardy's relations with his parents are worth examining, in that they were inevitably to exercise their influence on his emotional make-up and work. As Douglas Brown puts it: "In later years Thomas Hardy turned to his parents ... they were fast-rooted in an older and

11. Life 14.

12. Life 14-15.

13. Martin Seymour-Smith, Hardy (London: Bloomsbury, 1994) 13.

more stable world".¹⁴ The dominant influence of his mother Jemima, whom he described as a woman who "read omnivorously",¹⁵ acts upon him as the seed-bed of his detachment and personal alienation. Indeed, the dominant personality "of Hardy's mother, is widely reflected in his reference to the family cottage "as his mother's rather than his father's house".¹⁶ Jemima's most valuable contribution to her son's writing career as a novelist, is that she acted as an invaluable reservoir of reminiscence, legends of the countryside, local and rural legends of life and tragedy, which perhaps contributed to his creation of "a sombre view of fate",¹⁷ upon which he drew throughout his career as a writer. Among the books given to him by his mother -- and which might have helped to shape Hardy as "a solitary introspective boy",¹⁸ -- were Dryden's translation of Virgil's Aeneid, Dr Johnson's Rasselas and Saint Pierre's Paul and Virginia (the last, of course, a narrative of maternal nurturing and simple rural values). From such gifts, it would seem that, from the outset, the mother, dominant in the family, had educational and social ambitions for her son.

The mother's keen interest in, and her great emotional commitment to, the young boy making him "her companion",¹⁹ presumably left its lasting influence on him as a self-effacing and vulnerable boy. Such episodes, carefully recollected in the Life of course,

14. See Brown, Thomas Hardy 2.

15. Life 14.

16. Michael Millgate, Thomas Hardy: A Biography (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1982) 20.

17. Gittings 26.

18. Gittings 39.

19. Gittings, Young Thomas Hardy 27.

as Jemima's taking the young Hardy with her to London "for protection",²⁰ would have increased, in Hardy's own words, the boy's "admiration for his mother",²¹ and consequently his impressionability and his emotional reliance upon her. Indeed this extreme portrait of love and mutual devotion is clearly reflected in his novel The Return of the Native, as well as in such poems as "In Tenebris III".

She who upheld me and I, in the midmost of Egdon together,
Confident I in her watching and ward through the blackening heather,
Deeming her matchless in might and with measureless scope endued.²²

But, manifestly one needs to ask who in such a relationship is "protecting" whom.

Commenting upon the influence of the mother upon the sensitive boy, Millgate writes:

But Hardy was at the same time damaged ...
by so extreme an emotional dependence upon his
mother, by his early and perhaps inevitable surrender
to her all-encompassing influence and direction.²³

A mother so apparently anxious for -- at this point -- her only son to develop successfully is likely to "protect" him from what she would determine as inappropriate influences in the local community, including his contemporaries.

Less obvious, yet still apparent, is the impact of Hardy's father upon him. Indeed, the father famously endowed the young boy with an early passionate attachment to music,

20. Life 17.

21. Gittings, Young Thomas Hardy 29.

22. James Gibson, ed., The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy, the New Wessex edition (London: Macmillan, 1976) 169. Henceforth referred to as Gibson.

23. See Millgate, A Biography 22-3.

to which Hardy in turn responded with ecstatic sensitivity, a response which he carefully emphasised in the Life:

He was of ecstatic temperament, extraordinarily sensitive to music, and among the endless jigs, hornpipes, reels, waltzes and country-dances that his father played on an evening in his early married years, and to which the boy danced *a pas seul* in the middle of the room, there were three or four that always moved the child to tears, though, he strenuously tried to hide them This peculiarity in himself troubled the mind of 'Tommy' at a phenomenon to which he ventured not to confess.²⁴

Indeed, the involuntary flow of his tears,²⁵ and his subsequent attempt to hide them, suggest also the susceptibility and sensitivity of the boy and also his introversion. In Hardy's version of his life, signs of his refusal of involvement with other people were apparent at his early boyhood.

His father, the inheritor of a whole tradition of musical ballads and oral tales, shared these with the family, and with his imaginative son, narratives of the supernatural, of rural violence and the macabre. These, together with his mother's tales, Gittings suggests: "had a deep influence on the morbidity sensitive boy ... [and] would sink into [his] imagination".²⁶

Hardy himself lugubriously recalls:

My father saw four men hung for being with some others who had set fire to a rick. Among them was a stripling of a boy of eighteen Skinny. Half-starved. So frail, so underfed, that they had to put weights on his feet to break his neck. He had not fired the rick. But with a youth's excitement he had rushed to the scene to see the blaze Nothing my father ever said to me drove the tragedy of life so deeply into my mind.²⁷

24. Life 15.

25. Compare "The Fiddler of the Reels" (LLI), where Car'line Aspent's unflagging tears flow at Wat Ollamoor's plaintive tunes (497).

26. Gittings, Young Thomas Hardy 38.

27. Quoted in Brady, The Short Stories of Thomas Hardy 28.

The association of his father with an awareness of the world's potential for injustice and arbitrary cruelty is suggested in another recalled episode:

Also he remembered ... being in the garden at Bockhampton with his father on a bitterly cold winter day. They noticed a fieldfare, half-frozen, and the father took up a stone idly and threw it at the bird, possibly not meaning to hit it. The fieldfare fell dead, and the child Thomas picked it up and it was as light as a feather, all skin and bone, practically starved. He said he had never forgotten how the body of the fieldfare felt in his hand: the memory had always haunted him.²⁸

Again, presumably such an episode did make a complex impact on the sensitive boy. But more tellingly perhaps is the way the mature Hardy has come to see this incident as an epiphany revealing the painful nature of the natural world, to which even one's closest relatives can contribute.

It could be argued that such awareness of the nature of the world meant for the boy an early end of innocence. Repeatedly, the image Hardy presents us with in The Early Life is of a boy withdrawn from the world in which he lived, and the people who surrounded him:

One event of the date or a little later stood out, he used to say, more distinctly than any. He was lying on his back in the sun, thinking how useless he was, and covered his face with his straw hat. The sun's rays streamed through the interstices of the straw, the lining having disappeared. Reflecting on his experiences of the world so far as he had got, he came to the conclusion that he did not wish to grow up. Other boys were always talking of when they would be men, he did not want at all to be a man, or to possess things, but to remain as he was, in the same spot, and to know no more people than he already knew (about half a dozen). Yet this early evidence of that lack of social ambition which followed him through his life was shown when he was in perfect health and happy circumstances.²⁹

We cannot know if this is how Thomas Hardy felt as a youth, what the passage does tell us, though, is of the regret, the sense of uprootedness which in retrospect he wishes he could

28. Life 444.

29. Life 15-16.

have avoided, felt by the mature Hardy. Again, we must remind ourselves that this version of his younger life is as carefully constructed by Hardy as that of one of his characters, say Jude; in fact in that novel we find a direct anticipation of this particular "act of detachment",³⁰ accentuating a refusal of confrontation with maturity and responsibility on Jude's part as he gazes helplessly and evasively through the interstices of his straw hat, wishing to remain where he is:

Growing up brought responsibilities, he found. Events did not rhyme quite as he thought. Nature's logic was too horrid him to call for As you got older, and felt yourself to be at the centre of your time, and not at a point in its circumference, as you had felt when you were little, you were seized with a sort of shuddering, he perceived. All around you there seemed to be something glaring, garish, rattling, and the noises and glares hit upon the little cell called your life, and shook it away and warped it.

If he could only prevent himself growing up! He did not want to be a man.³¹

It is a remarkable, painful moment of self-consciousness and individual vulnerability. The same sense of reluctance to engage the world is present in the bitter experience of the lonely child, sequestered under the tall green bracken, in Hardy's poem "Childhood Among the Ferns":

The sun then burst, and brought forth a sweet breath
From the limp ferns as they dried underneath:
I said: 'I could live on here thus till death';

And queried in the green rays as I state:
'Why should I have to grow to man's estate,
And this afar-noised World perambulates?'³²

30. J. Hillis Miller, Thomas Hardy: Distance and Desire (Cambridge: Belknap P of Harvard UP, 1970) 3.

31. Thomas Hardy, Jude the Obscure, ed. Patricia Ingham (1895; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985) 13. All future references are to this edition and will be included in the text.

32. Gibson 864.

The image Hardy creates is of a boy detached from the throbbing atmosphere of the boyhood world of school; a boy who "loved being alone".³³ This sense of aloneness is further manifested in his "passion for solitary reading [which] was noted by other pupils at both his schools"³⁴ in much the same way as the involuntary reluctance he reveals when "boys would volunteer to accompany him on his homeward journey to Bockhampton",³⁵ an impulse of withdrawal and retreat stemming from the fact that "the intensity of his inner life was such that often the world became an irritation".³⁶ Hypersensitive to the world and people around him, the boy's sense of -- and desire for -- solitude becomes all the more acute. Millgate observes:

The attitude of uninvolved spectatorship which so often characterises the narrative voice in his novels is in part a reflection of his early situation as a sickly, solitary boy -- often at home because of his weakness, his lack of friends, and his mother's protectiveness -- and the constantly repeated experience of sitting by, silent and unnoticed, while his parents and their relatives and friends sang, played, joked and talked together, singing the old songs, telling the old stories of the local past, trotting out the scraps of inherited wisdom and credulity, drawing upon the resources of their colourful and vigorous local speech, with its long-learned fatalism and self-protective humour.³⁷

Indeed, this sense of passivity and vulnerability may account partly for his hypersensitive predilection "to avoid being touched by his playmates".³⁸ This unwelcoming exposure to life and people aggravated the boy's early defensive reticence and the acute sense of privacy,

33. Life 24.

34. Gittings, Young Thomas Hardy 43.

35. Life 24-5.

36. Sheila Sullivan, "Friends and Critics 1840-1928," The Genius of Thomas Hardy, ed. Margaret Drabble (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976) 32.

37. Millgate, A Biography 42.

38. Life 25.

that accompanied him through his life.

Thus, by birth and early upbringing Hardy turned out to be a sensitive, alienated loner, and these were qualities which remained present into adulthood, and permeate his writings. In spite of his self-enclosure, however, one early "romantic" relationship appears to have penetrated the young Hardy's shell of detachment. The young boy caught the attention of Julia Augusta Martin, the childless wife of the owner of the nearby Kingston Maurward estate; she gave him books and encouraged his education. Her affection for the young boy seems to have been considerable; she was "accustomed to take [him] into her lap and kiss [him] until he was quite a big child" and he "quite reciprocated her fondness".³⁹ While the precise nature of Mrs Martin's feelings is unclear, it seems that the emotions of the growing boy were profound; in old age Hardy remembers his response as being "that of a lover";⁴⁰ he remembered also "the thrilling frou-frou" of her four grey silk flounces when she used to bend over him".⁴¹ Evelyn Hardy suggests that it was Mrs Martin who "next to his mother, influenced the young Thomas Hardy more than any other".⁴² But the response of Mrs Hardy was predictable; she was, suggest Gittings, quite determined "to wile her impressionable son away from a rival emotional influence".⁴³ She removed her son from Mrs Martin's school and sent him to a school in Dorchester in 1848. But the impact this relationship made on his life is clear from the way Hardy remembers it even in his old age,

39. Life 19.

40. Life 19.

41. Quoted in Millgate, A Biography 47.

42. Hardy, A Critical Biography 26.

43. Gittings, Young Thomas Hardy 28.

recollecting Mrs Martin as a woman "to whom he had grown more attached than he cared to own".⁴⁴ For the first time in his life the affection of a woman was cut across not only by female rivalry but associated with class difference. It seems likely, indeed inevitable, as Millgate suggests, that Hardy associated Mrs Martin with "elegance, a voluptuousness of dress and person, that were altogether new to his experience".⁴⁵ This association of incompatibility between an admired woman and his lower class situation -- whatever the exact nature of Hardy's actual relationship with Mrs Martin and the precise nature of its ending -- provides the germ for another significant source of alienation and loneliness:

Like so many of Hardy's attachments, the relationship loomed larger in his imagination than elsewhere, but there seems little doubt that much of the autobiographical intensity which went into his first novel, The Poor Man and the Lady, derived from his feeling for Mrs Martin and his sense that they had been separated by hostile forces which had nothing to do with their own emotions but everything to do with conventional attitudes towards age, religion and class.⁴⁶

Indeed, in his adolescent years, Hardy seems specifically to have associated romantic feelings with separateness and distance. He also appears to have been peculiarly susceptible emotionally. The Life refers to an episode when he was fourteen when he fell "madly in love" with a pretty girl who passed him on horseback. He glimpsed her, a total stranger, only twice more, once with her father and once more riding. But apparently, he took "more than a week getting over this desperate attachment".⁴⁷ There is an ironic tone in that last phrase, clearly, but obviously Hardy did remember this fleeting episode: the woman on

44. Life 19.

45. Millgate, A Biography 47.

46. Millgate, A Biography 48.

47. Life 25.

horseback figures almost emblematically as a motif of possibility, loss and separation. The following year, Hardy's emotions were aroused by Louisa Harding, the daughter of the largest landowner in Stinsford parish. But, again, the relationship remained undeveloped: Louisa was supposedly forbidden to speak to this ordinary village boy,⁴⁸ and Hardy never uttered more than "Good evening to her", although he continued to admire her from afar, even travelling to Weymouth to gaze on her, while she was at a boarding school and attending the church in there.⁴⁹ Once again romantic feelings are associated with distance, mainly created by class difference but exacerbated by Hardy's shyness. And again the relationship left its mark since not only is the episode recalled in the Life, but the figure of Louisa seems to haunt a number of Hardy's poems, even in his old age. She is there in "To Louisa in the Lane", "The Passer-By", perhaps in "Transformations" ("the fair girl long ago/whom I often tried to know" is now in the grave "entering this rose"),⁵⁰ and in "Louie" (1913). She is buried in Stinsford churchyard, near Hardy's dead wife: "Long two strangers they and far apart; such neighbours now!".⁵¹ Again love, or at least infatuation, is associated with process, memory, and finally loneliness.

In 1856, when he was sixteen, Hardy joined the Dorchester office of John Hicks as an apprentice architect. It was a period which also seems to mark the future development of Hardy's idiosyncratic view of the world. In August of that year he witnessed the public execution of Martha Brown, sentenced to death for murder, an episode "in which stark

48. Gittings, Young Thomas Hardy 49.

49. Life 26.

50. Gibson 472.

51. Gibson 772.

horror and sex were inextricably mixed",⁵² one much commented upon by biographers and remembered vividly by Hardy himself in his eighties.⁵³ But perhaps even more revealing is Hardy's account of a second execution which he witnessed two years later (clearly Martha Brown's execution had not deterred Hardy's curiosity for the macabre), that of a murderer named James Seale:

An unusual incident occurred during his pupillage at Hick's which, though it had nothing to do with his own life, was dramatic enough to have mention. One summer morning at Bockhampton, just before he sat down to breakfast, he remembered that a man was to be hanged at eight o'clock at Dorchester. He took up the big brass telescope that had been handed on in the family, and hastened to a hill on the heath a quarter of a mile from the house, whence he looked towards the town. The sun behind his back shone straight on the white stone facade of the goal, the gallows upon it and the form of the murderer in white fustian, the executioner and officials in dark clothing and the crowd below being invisible at this distance of nearly three miles. At the moment of his placing the glass to his eye the white figure dropped downwards, and the faint note of the town clock struck eight. The whole thing had been so sudden that the glass nearly fell from Hardy's hands. He seemed alone on the heath with the hanged man, and crept homeward wishing he had not been so curious.⁵⁴

Gittings argues that "Hardy is distressed not only by the event nor the moral and social ideas connected with it, but by his own sensations at the moment, and his own isolation".⁵⁵

This seems an accurate reading of the episode, as reconstructed by Hardy in the Life. Again it is presented as a kind of epiphany, an emblem not only of his isolation from the crowd of onlookers closer to the scene, but of his *own* individual vulnerability in a natural universe in which such things occur. Toru Sasaki argues that the disturbance Hardy felt "was aroused

52. Seymour-Smith 41.

53. See Seymour-Smith 32-3; Gittings, Young Thomas Hardy 58; and Millgate, A Biography 63.

54. Life 28-9.

55. Gittings, Young Thomas Hardy 61.

by Hardy's curious sense of identification with Seale".⁵⁶ Hardy says he felt "alone on the heath with a hanged man", alone, that is, in a world of indifferent process and, in an unfocussed way perhaps, somehow sensing a potential situation in which he might be guilty and punishable. Again whatever the exact impact at the time, what is so striking is the way in which the moment has been remembered, and presumably morbidly dwelt on, by Hardy after the event.

Fascinated by the sense of the "macabre", coupled with "his deep attraction to death and dissolution",⁵⁷ associated with the ritual of execution, Hardy seems to have been preoccupied with presenting such episodes, not only in Tess, but in the short stories as well, most directly in "The Withered Arm" and "The Three Strangers". In his preface to Wessex Tales, Hardy apologises to his readers saying:

An apology is perhaps needed for the neglect of contrast which is shown by presenting two stories of hangmen and one of a military execution in such a small collection ... But to the former, in the neighbourhood of country-towns hanging matters used to form a large proportion of the local tradition; and though never personally acquainted with any chief operator at such scenes, the writer of these pages had as a boy the privilege of being on speaking terms with a man who applied for the office, and who sank into an incurable melancholy because he failed to get it, some slight mitigation of his grief being to dwell upon striking episodes in the lives of those happier ones who had held it with success and renown.⁵⁸

Hardy's preoccupation with the issue of execution is also reflected in his poem "On the Portrait of a Woman about to be Hanged". However macabre the scene may seem to

56. Toru Sasaki, "Viewer and Victim in Desperate Remedies: Links between Hardy's Life and his Fiction," Thomas Hardy Journal 10,1 (1994): 80. Gittings suggests that Hardy "treasured the moment morbidly, since it is surely the basis for one of the weirdest incidents in ... Desperate Remedies". See Gittings, Young Thomas Hardy 61.

57. Hardy, A Critical Biography 59.

58. Orel, Personal Writings 21.

be, Hardy seems in part fascinated by the fact of a woman being executed, and by her physical presence, again reminiscent of Martha Brown's execution: he is fascinated too by a woman being capable of the passionate acts for which she is paying the ultimate price:

Comely and capable one of our race,
Posing there in your gown of grace,
Plain, yet becoming;
Could subtlest breast
Ever have guessed
What was behind that innocent face,
Drumming, drumming!⁵⁹

It is also explicitly women's socially-forbidden passion that leads to the scaffold in "A Trampwoman's Tragedy"; if all humans were vulnerable in the Universe in which Hardy found himself, women, especially passionate women, it seems, were especially so.

1862 saw Hardy's move to London to continue his training with Arthur Blomfield, the church architect. The impact on the reserved, vulnerable yet intelligent and imaginative young man from the West Country is not difficult to imagine. For the first time he had access to the pleasures of London culture, to art galleries, opera, and the latest books as well as to social activities; but for such an uncertain young man, the experience was perhaps at times an acutely uncomfortable one. Indeed, as Millgate argues, Hardy "was lonely in London, confined and wearied ... [having] no one upon whose reassurance and good advice he could constantly depend".⁶⁰

Interestingly, it is at precisely this point that Hardy began to write poetry: in other words his first creative work comes not only at a time of rootlessness and insecurity but he examines his feelings, tries to come to terms with his situation through writing. Moreover,

59. Gibson 780.

60. Millgate, A Biography 92.

the fact that the magazines to which he sent these first writings rejected them can have done nothing for his self-confidence, either as a writer or as a man. There seems a strong likelihood, then, that it is to these early years in London that Hardy is referring when he writes some twenty years later, to Edmund Gosse: "As to despondency, I have known the very depths of it -- you would be quite shocked if I ever tell you now many weeks and months in bygone years I have gone to bed wishing never to see daylight again".⁶¹ A diary entry written on 2 June 1865 confirms his mood at this time:

My 25th birthday. Not very cheerful. Feel as if I had lived a long time and done very little. Walked about by moonlight in the evening. Wondered what woman, if any, I should be thinking about in five years' time.⁶²

As his birthday marks the passage of time, Hardy's loneliness here seems to show itself, unsurprisingly perhaps give his age, as in part a specifically romantic longing. In the Life, perhaps symptomatically, Hardy recalls one particular "macabre experience" which occurred to him during his period at Blomfield's: he was sent, prior to the construction of the new railway line, to supervise the process of digging up some of the graves at St Pancras. This would have been stressful to any twenty-six year old; but the experience clearly, and predictably, haunted the melancholic young Hardy and it is vividly recollected in the Life:

There after nightfall, within a high hoarding that could not be overlooked, and by the light of flare-lamps, the exhumation went on continuously of the coffins that had been uncovered during the day, new coffins being provided for those that came apart in lifting, and for loose skeletons; and those that held together being carried to the new ground on a board merely.⁶³

Hardy's mood is caught in the poem "The Two Men" which is dated 1866, in which the two

61. See Collected Letters, Vol. I 167.

62. Life 50.

63. Life 44-5.

young men's hope and ambitions fade ("He saw his projects wholly marred/And gloom and want oppressed him hard"),⁶⁴ and they end in adjacent graves. The episode itself directly inspired "The Levelled Churchyard" and the sardonic "In the Cemetery" with its vision of human vulnerability and futility:

'You see those mothers squabbling there?'
Remarks the man of the cemetery.
'One says in tears' "'Tis mine lies here!"
Another, "Nay, mine, you Pharisee!"
Another, "How dare you move my flowers
And put your own on this grave of ours!"
But all their children were laid therein
At different times, like sprats in a tin.

'And then the main drain had to cross,
And we moved the lot some nights ago,
And packed them away in the general loss
With hundreds more. But their folks don't know,
And as well cry over a new-laid drain
As anything else, to ease your pain!'.⁶⁵

Hardy, it seems, not only did not feel at home in London; he felt, as it were, homeless in the world, his personal feelings of alienation giving rise to reflections and intimations of a more universal human aloneness: "The world does not despise us; it only neglects us",⁶⁶ he wrote in May 1865. It was a period not only of hard work, but of wide reading and the diary entry indicates how deeply the emotional experience of fashionable London: "Life as a science of climbing",⁶⁷ and his reading had undermined the Christian faith

64. Gibson 79.

65. Gibson 480. Indeed, the beautifully evocative image of humanity's victimisation and insignificance in this poem is very much reminiscent of an image of John Galsworthy's, which describes humanity as "dozens of faces in rows as of sardines set upon their tails in a huge sardine box". *Maid in Waiting* (London: Heinemann, 1931) 277.

66. *Life* 48

67. *Life* 53.

in which he had been brought up in Stinsford.

As early as 1860, encouraged by his intellectual mentor, Horace Moule, Hardy began to be exposed to the full force of the intellectual gales which were blowing within English intellectual life. He read Mill and Huxley and Darwin's Origins of Species, and once he was in London, away from the props of familiarity, the beliefs of his youth began to collapse. The intellectual perspectives of his writing, sceptical, sardonic and painful, were formed during these years, as will be discussed in detail in a later chapter.

Indeed, these five years in London, from 1862 to 1867 drained Hardy's strength, leaving him both physically and mentally exhausted. Debilitated by his deteriorating health, enervated by the absence of interest in things around him, and the lack of quietude of his early boyhood, he decides to return to Dorset in July 1867; a return which appalled his friends and relatives who were "shocked at the pallor which sheeted a countenance formerly ruddy with health".⁶⁸ The probability is even by this point, as he resumed his work at Hicks's Office in Dorchester, that his experience of London, of its pace, its style, its cultural and intellectual life, quite apart from his shifts of belief, had given him an intellectual outlook and a life-style somewhat alien to Dorchester, even more its surrounding rural culture. Indeed Hardy's continued visits to London would suggest as much. He kept up his links with literary friends in London, and during his intermittent visits would spend time at the Victoria and Albert Museum in South Kensington, the tranquillity of which he felt conducive to his writings.⁶⁹ It was in this same period that he took his first steps towards a

68. Life 53.

69. Millgate, A Biography 78.

career in literary life -- which at this period meant London -- when he sent his first novel, The Poor Man and the Lady, to Macmillan, only to have it rejected by their reader, the novelist George Meredith, for the satirical tone it adopted towards middle-class London and towards Christianity. Already isolating ambivalences are in evidence: Hardy is attracted to aspects of London, and growing away from the values of his upbringing and home area, and yet he is still sufficiently outside the social routines of fashionable London to be sceptical of it.

Hardy continued both his architectural career and literary aspiration until he met and fell in love with Emma Lavinia Gifford at St. Juliot, Cornwall, in 1870, while restoring the local church. Though their initial attraction and Cornish courtship seems -- and presumably was -- romantic, it was inevitably the source of further inner tension, further separation from the familiar rhythms and assumptions of his youth and home. While part of Emma's attraction was presumably her social status, comfortably within the middle class and superior to his own family background, and especially the working-class relatives of his mother, that very class difference created a rift between him and his mother and the sisters with whom he had once been so close: the son being perhaps afraid of the image they would present, none of the Hardy family was invited to the wedding, in London in 1874; the associations and dangers attaching to secret weddings in Hardy's short fiction will receive attention at a later point in the thesis. The marriage itself, later to bring its own isolating pressures, thus began in awkwardness and added to Hardy's uprooting from his past. These pressures, coupled with the sensitivity and detachment we have already noted in Hardy's boyhood, seem likely to have driven him even more into a self-protective, solitary mind-set. These tendencies, it seems likely, were exacerbated by a period of illness in 1880-81 --

Hardy suffered from an internal haemorrhage -- while he was writing A Laodicean. This entailed that Hardy be kept in bed, with his feet being raised above the level of his head for a prolonged period of time; an alternative to avoid an operation.⁷⁰ Undoubtedly, the period of the six months detention in bed took its toll and adds to his acute feelings of sequestration and aloneness from the world of outside. Entries of his diary to this period clearly reveal his loneliness in his bedroom in London. One of the more revealing is that of 31 January 1881:

Incidents of lying in bed for months. Skin gets fair, corns take their leave: feet and toes grow shapely as those of a Greek statue. Keys get rusty; watch dim, boots mildewed; hat and clothes old-fashioned; umbrella eaten out with rust; children seen through the window are grown taller.⁷¹

Interestingly, on his recovery from his six months illness, Hardy thinks again of a second return, to his native soil, to Dorset, when the married couple now rent a house in Wimborne, in Dorset leaving London de novo, behind his back. In 1881, he writes:

During the latter part of May they searched in Dorset, having concluded that it would be better to make London a place of sojourn for a few months only in each year, and establish their home in the country, both for reasons of health and for mental inspiration, Hardy finding ... that residence in or near the city tended to force mechanical and ordinary productions from his pen, concerning ordinary society-life and habits.⁷²

Thus, we note, after a period of particular adversity and social isolation, Hardy seeks a return to his roots in Dorset. But again, the return is far from satisfying, nor is it complete. His attachment to the comforting familiarity of his home district did not prevent him from moving -- though, it would seem, uneasily and with considerable reticence -- in the literary

70. See Life 145.

71. Life 147-48.

72. Life 149

and social circles of the metropolis. Partly encouraged by Emma's appetite for London, Hardy continued visiting, during the social season, exhibitions and dinners, making the acquaintance not only of the rich, the aristocratic and the powerful, as his literary reputation grew, but also the most distinguished literary figures of the day; Leslie Stephen he had known from early days in London and mainly through him Hardy met figures like Robert Browning, Matthew Arnold, Edmund Gosse, and Henry James (the James who would later refer to Hardy in print as "Good little Thomas Hardy", thereby endorsing, and presumably deepening, Hardy's worst fears of condescension should the true nature of his humble family origins be discovered).⁷³ Obviously the world of such figures, and society ladies like Lady Canovan, Lady Portsmouth, Mrs Procter and Mrs Jeune,⁷⁴ the glittering society surrounding the world of opera and theatre through which Thomas and Emma Hardy moved was diametrically opposed to Hardy's humble home and community.

But the preoccupation with the idea of "not having been able when he came to Dorchester to find a house to suit him",⁷⁵ and the consequent sense of instability significantly continued to haunt Hardy until the early 1880s. In 21 March 1882 he writes to the land steward to the Earl of Ilchester: "I am requiring a free hold site on which to build a dwelling-house, & the land of the Earl of Ilchester at Strusford Hill, near Dorchester".⁷⁶ This proved to be Max Gate or "Porta Maxima",⁷⁷ as Hardy calls it in a letter to Edmund

73. See Gittings, Young Thomas Hardy 284.

74. See Millgate, A Biography 161, 290, 242-43.

75. Life 163.

76. Collected Letters, Vol. 1 217.

77. Collected Letters, Vol. 1 217.

Gosse in 25 September, 1890, and to which he later moved in 29 June 1885 with Emma.

Thus, sympathetically Hardy returns (for the third time) back to Dorset and again attempts to put down his roots in his native soil. However, even at this point there is a hint of ambivalence or uncertainty on Hardy's part. In 31 December, 1885, he writes:

This evening, the end of the old year 1885 finds me sadder than many previous New Year's Eves have done. Whether building this house at Max Gate was a wise expenditure of energy is one doubt, which if resolved in the negative, is depressing enough.⁷⁸

But Hardy persevered with the house, Max Gate, built to his own design. The fact that Hardy did design it makes a consideration of its siting and structure worth our attention. Built outside Dorchester in an "isolated"⁷⁹ situation, it has been suggested that it was built "to serve Hardy's solitary needs".⁸⁰ Again, there is something of a paradox: Hardy goes back to his roots and yet not only fails to feel part of the community again, but seeks to keep his distance from it: the sense of seclusion was heightened by the fact that a line of trees was planted such that when they "afterwards grew up" they "shut [the house] in from observation from the high road",⁸¹ doing so, indeed, in a way that made its rooms "dark and depressing".⁸² The fact that the house was in many ways "cramped and inhospitable",⁸³

78. Life 176.

79. F. B. Pinion, Thomas Hardy: His Life and Friends (London: Macmillan, 1992) 198.

80. Timothy O'Sullivan, Thomas Hardy: An Illustrated Biography (London: Macmillan, 1975) 114.

81. Clive Holland, Thomas Hardy, O. M: The Man, His Works and the Land of Wessex (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1931) 108.

82. Quoted in F. R. Southerington, Hardy's Vision of Man (London: Chatto & Windus, 1971) 25.

83. Robert Gittings, The Older Hardy (1978; London: Penguin, 1980) 68.

presumably further isolated Hardy and his wife, by discouraging visitors from coming to stay. Quite how intentional was the latter is a matter for conjecture, but it seems likely that O'Sullivan is right when he suggests that Hardy's feelings "are reflected both in the design of the house and in the pattern of life"⁸⁴ at Max Gate, and the construction "of a brick wall taller than himself",⁸⁵ between the house and the road speaks for itself. Millgate remarks that Hardy "saw such seclusion, enhanced by the comparative remoteness of Dorchester itself as essential to his work",⁸⁶ but -- again -- the very design of the house seems to dramatise a desire to seclude himself not just from possible London visitors but from the kinds of local social interaction which one might have thought a move back to Dorchester to intend. In fact the trees and the walls, Millgate suggests, made "the people of Dorchester ... suspicious of what lay behind those high boundary walls of Max Gate".⁸⁷

And of course the other side of sought seclusion, a desire not to be intruded upon, is loneliness. Indeed those walls surrounding the house suggest the same barriers which in the fiction separate individuals, especially lovers, who long to be together, or keep lonely individuals, who wish to transcend their rootless loneliness by joining some larger identity, from achieving their ends. In Jude the Obscure, for example, Jude who has never really had a home ("It had been the yearning of his heart to find something to anchor on, to cling to; for some place which he could call admirable" (211)), finds his ambition to enter the

84. O'Sullivan 33.

85. Harold Orel, The Unknown Thomas Hardy: Lesser-known Aspects of Hardy's Life and Career (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester, 1987) 15.

86. Millgate, His Career as a Novelist 202.

87. Millgate, A Biography 277.

intellectual life of Christminster barred to him, by walls which are both actual and symbolic:

Only a wall divided him from those happy young contemporaries of his with whom he shared a common mental life; men who had nothing to do from morning till night but to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest. Only a wall - but what a wall. (86)

For all his hope, the sense of aloneness and his being by birth and background an outsider is aggravated within him:

For all the present he was outside the gates of everything, colleges included: perhaps some day he would be inside. Those palaces of light and leading; he might some day look down on the world through their panes. (87)

But it is the barriers that separate lovers, usually the barriers of class and of parents' class ambitions, that are dramatised in visual terms by unrelenting walls. In his novella "An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress" (1878), Hardy repeatedly emphasises the immutable sense of apartness between Egbert Mayne and Geraldine Allenville. For example, as he allows Geraldine to confront her father alone, towards the end of the story, Egbert

watched her crossing the grass and advancing, a mere dot, towards the mansion. In a short time the appearance of an oblong of light in the shadowy expanse of wall denoted to him that the door was open, her outline appeared on it; then the door shut her in, and all was shadow as before. Even though they were husband and wife the line of demarcation seemed to be drawn again as rigidly as when he lived at the school. (Indiscretion 109)

Again, in "On the Western Circuit" (LLI) (1891), the full symbolic import of the wall as a barrier becomes apparent when the two lovers make their way towards home, after their time together at the fair; indeed, the fatal disparity between them in terms of social class is insinuated by the bifurcation of their routes:

When they drew near the door of the wine-merchant's house, a comparatively deserted spot by this time, they stood invisible for a little while in the shadow of a wall, where they separated, Anna going on to the entrance, and her acquaintance returning across the square. (461)

As we shall see in a later chapter, indicating the ways in which settings articulate theme in Hardy, the motif recurs in other stories, most notably in "A Changed Man" (CM) and "The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion" (WT).

The shape and design of Max Gate in many ways seems to exemplify imaginative tendencies which are at the heart of Hardy's response to the world, social and natural, around him.⁸⁸ But we must at the same time recall that it was in many ways a contrary impulse to seclusion, an impulse towards re-rooting and re-integration, that at some level presumably made him move back to his native area, though one needs also to be aware that it was at the same time a retreat from the London society, which Emma seems to have enjoyed rather more than her husband. But if it was an attempt at a homecoming, at healing some of the stresses he had felt, emotionally and intellectually, since leaving Bockhampton, then it was a doomed attempt. Not only had Hardy himself changed from the days of at Bockhampton and Stinsford and at Isaac Last's academy in Dorchester -- the focus of his literary life was inevitably aimed towards London and its publishers and reviewers, far from Dorchester -- but of course the rural culture had changed, and was changing, too. In many senses his search was not just for a place, Dorset, but a time, Dorset in the 1840s, at the time of his youth, and that of course was a home that was long out of reach.⁸⁹ In July 1887

88. Cf. F. B. Pinion, A Hardy Companion: A Guide to the Works of Thomas Hardy and Their Background (London: Macmillan, 1968), when he refers to the significance of the "figurative use of architectural terms in [Hardy's] prose and verse" 185-86.

89. Cf. Norman Page, Thomas Hardy (London: Routledge, 1977): "It is almost as if, having returned to his native soil, he had been anxious to attempt to recover, in minute and circumstantial detail, not only his own past but that of his parents' generation" (14).

-- not an old man, but still a man in his 40s -- he observed that:

It is the ongoing -- i.e., the "becoming" -- of the world that produces its sadness. If the world stood still at a felicitous moment there would be no sadness in it. The sun and the moon standing on Ajalon was not a catastrophe for Israel, but a type of paradise.⁹⁰

If there was "something symbolic about his return to within a few miles of his birthplace",⁹¹ Albert J. Guerard is on less secure ground when he asserts that while Hardy, in his writing, has a concern "with the native's aspirations for ... [a] return to his homeland and roots", this return is "for peace of mind, and where he [the returnee] might enjoy the companionship of 'old associations'".⁹² Certainly the figure of the protagonist returning to his roots, the returning native, is a fascinatingly recurrent one in Hardy, but what it reveals is less a re-establishment of "peace of mind" than restlessness and disappointment, less the achievement of "companionship" than a painful awareness of alienation and loneliness. The obvious example of the returning native is Clym Yeobright himself. Significantly, he returns to his native heath after a sojourn in a fashionable city, not London in his case but Paris. Indeed, his creator places him at the heart of the life of metropolitan luxury and pleasure: the jewellery trade. Clym returns out of total disillusionment with what he sees as the effete and decadent values of the city, determined to establish a school which will educate boys

90. Life 202.

91. Page, Thomas Hardy 13. Cf. Millgate, His Career as a Novelist: "the move to Dorchester and the building of Max Gate must nonetheless be regarded not merely as acts of practical convenience but as symbolic gestures" (201).

92. Guerard, Thomas Hardy 24. The motif of the returning native is a recurring one in literature, for example, in Homer, Dante, Goethe and Wordsworth. For a full examination of the theme of the returning native in the works of Victorian writers, see for example John R. Reed, Victorian Conventions (Athens; Ohio: Ohio UP, 1975) 214-50.

from a rural background like his own in altogether more authentic values. But he is not allowed to re-root in his native soil; he falls foul of Eustacia and her restlessness projects them in another direction.

In Tess of the d'Urbervilles, Tess leaves Trantridge after being seduced by Alec and returns abjectly to her home in the Vale of Blackmoor. What she is aware of is not the comfort of familiarity and companionship but the way what has happened has changed her and thus changed irrevocably her relationship with those things which helped define her; in other words what has happened has changed her sense of who she is and the return serves to emphasize her aloneness:

The incline was the same down which d'Urberville had driven with her so wildly on that day in June. Tess went up the remainder of its length without stopping, and on reaching the edge of the escarpment gazed over the familiar green world beyond, now half veiled in mist. It was always beautiful from here; it was terribly beautiful to Tess to-day, for since her eyes last fell upon it she had learnt that the serpent hisses where the sweet bird sings, and her views of life had been fatally changed for her by the lesson. Verily another girl than the simple one she had been at home was she who, bowed by thought, stood still here, and turned to look behind her. She could not bear to look forward into the Vale.⁹³

Reprimanded by her mother for what has happened, the victim of the community's whispers and gossip, and suffering the pain of her own acute sense of guilt, Tess finds that to be at home is to be all the more alien:

The ghastliness of her momentary pride would convict her, and recall her to reserved listlessness again. And the despondency of the next morning's dawn, when it was no longer Sunday, but Monday; and no best clothes; and the laughing visitors were gone, and she awoke alone in her old bed, the innocent younger children breathing softly around her. In place of the excitement of her return and the interest it had inspired, she saw before her a long and stony highway which she had to tread,

93. Thomas Hardy, Tess of the d'Urbervilles, ed. Juliet Grindle and Simon Gatrell (1891; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988) 81-2. All future references are to this edition and will be included in the text.

without aid, and with little sympathy. Her depression was then terrible, and she could have hidden herself in a tomb. (90)

Less traumatically, though interestingly in the context of this motif in Hardy's work, when Angel Clare returns to his own middle-class family home after his period of contact with a life more natural and spontaneous at Talbothays, he too feels out of place where he might have expected to feel at ease:

Angel sat down, and the place felt like home; yet he did not so much as formerly feel himself one of the family gathered there. Every time that he returned hither he was conscious of this divergence; and since he had last shared in the vicarage life it had grown even more distinctly foreign to his own than usual. (101)

In other words it does not take a dramatic event such as happened to Tess to establish an alienating distance between a character and his/her home district. Grace Melbury has been away to be educated, to receive the polish which will turn her into an eligible young lady. In other words, she has been sent away specially to be changed, to assist her to "get on" in society. She herself does not realise the psychological effect this has had until she returns to her home, dreaming of a happy homecoming to her father, her native woodland and her childhood sweetheart. The change in her is manifested in a dismaying change in her perception of the home that was once so dear to her, seeing it now as old-fashioned and static:

When dinner was over Grace took a candle and began to ramble pleasurably through the rooms of her old home, from which she had latterly become well-nigh an alien. Each nook and each object revived a memory, and simultaneously modified it. The chambers seems lower than they had appeared on any previous occasion for her return, the surfaces of both walls and ceilings standing in such near relations to the eye that it could not avoid taking microscopic note of their irregularities and old fashion. Her own bedroom wore at once a look more familiar than when she had left it, and yet a face estranged. The world of little things therein gazed at her in helpless stationariness, as though they had tired and been unable to any progress without her presence. Over the place where her candle had been accustomed to stand, when she had used to read in bed till the midnight hour, there was still the brown spot of smoke. She did not know that her father had taken special care to keep it from being cleaned off. (47-8)

The motif of the alienated returnee is, significantly, present in some of Hardy's most personal poetry. "The Self-Unseeing" is carefully depersonalised in that the house and the remembered "she" and "he" are not identified; the result is a universalised sense of the irretrievable nature of the past. But if we know that the poem in fact recreates Hardy's memories of his home at Bockhampton, with his mother sitting by the fire-side smilingly watching while the boy dances to the sound of his father's fiddle, then the scene poignantly evokes once again Hardy's own sense of being cut off from his past and the culture in which it was lived. Once again, as in Grace's regarding of her home, the particulars of the cottage are described with painful detail and immediacy:

Here is the ancient floor,
Footworn and hollowed and thin,
Here was the former door
Where the dead feet walked in.⁹⁴

Less directly personal but again vividly evocative of the alienation of the returned native is "The Rover Come Home". After a tumultuous life of distant voyaging, during which the protagonist has faced adversity and hostile natural forces, he returns to the supposed comforts and tranquillity of his home. But once again not only has he been changed by what he has experienced but time has changed the home from what it once was:

He' journeyed through America
From Canso Cape to Horn,
And from East Indian Comorin
To Behring's Strait forlorn;
He's felled trees in the backwoods,

94. See Gibson 166.

In swamps has gasped for breath;
In Tropic heats, in Polar ice,
Has often prayed for death.

.....
And now he's home. You look at him
As he talks by your fireside.
And what is written in his glance
Stressed by such foreign wear,
After such alien circumstance
What does his face declare?
His mother's; she who saw him not
After his starting year,
Who never left her native spot,
And lies in the churchyard near.

Again homecoming results not in ease but in loneliness.⁹⁵

The theme -- the number and vividness of its occurrence is surely indicative of how deeply rooted it was in Hardy's imagination -- is powerfully present in the short stories. In "Fellow-Townsmen" (WT), Barnet's return to Port-Bredy near the end of the story occurs after a long period of suffering and estrangement. Like many of Hardy's returning natives, his quiet homecoming -- "Not a soul had recognised him" (117), is coupled with a pain-filled nostalgia for the past both with respect to figures and places. Thus, fulfilling Lucy's words "I don't know why, but I always thought you would come back to your old town again" (120), Barnet's

Chief interest ... seemed to lie in the names painted over the shop-fronts and on doorways, as far as they were visible, these now differed to an ominous extent from what they had been one-and-twenty years before. (117)

He visits a bookseller's and finds it run by the son of the man Barnet had known, the

95. See Gibson 805-6. Among other poems which celebrate the traumatic homecoming are: "The Revisitation"; "He Revisits his First School"; "A Wife Comes Back"; "Whaler's Wife"; "The Second Visit"; "A Daughter Returns" and "The Wanderer".

father now dead. Lucy the woman he had loved, is alive, but finding her as stubborn as before and refusing his proposal of marriage, the stoic Barnet leaves his home town as quietly as he had arrived, to resume his lonely life elsewhere.

Relatedly, Nicholas's return to his native land and to his lover in "The Waiting Supper" (CM) dramatizes his nostalgic loss and acute alienation:

The first familiar feature that met his eye was a little spot on the distant sky He reached the further verge of the plateau on which he had entered. Ah, there was the valley -- a greenish grey stretch of colour -- still looking placid and serene, as though it had not much missed him. If Christine was no longer there, why should he pause over it this evening? His uncle and aunt were dead, and to-morrow would be soon enough to enquire for remoter relatives. Thus, disinclined to go further, he turned his way to the inn. (614-15)

His proposal of marriage to Christine is met by her procrastination and a characteristically Hardyean concatenation of chance occurrences, preventing their marriage till, years later, their passion has ebbed away. Once again the returnee cannot resume his past life, is left dislocated and alone.

Furthermore, apart from the subtle drawing of the fine-lined patterns that pull so many lives together, the presentation of local sketches in "A Few Crusted Characters" (LLI), reflects Hardy's preoccupation with the predicament of another returned native and the futility of his quest. John Lackland (whose very name suggests his alienation), another returnee, travels by a local carrier-van to his birthplace, after thirty five years of absence, thinking of settling there for the rest of his life. Driven by homesickness and nostalgia, as he travels on the last part of his journey home, he starts asking occupants of the van about tidings and people he used to know before his emigration. For quite some time, Lackland starts to break the ice and establish contact with the passengers, who in turn recount

alternatively tales that for the most part encourage Lackland's ease of mind and suggest a world with which he is familiar. But when Longpuddle is reached, Lackland starts to feel uprooted. For one thing his scattered memories and faint remembrances of the past with its people, aggravates his sense of loneliness. Instead of feelings of belonging, he feels isolated among strangers. After he and the other passengers leave the van, Lackland is left alone, wandering through the streets of Longpuddle that have lost to his unaccustomed eyes the attractiveness and charm of his early boyhood days. Discovering that all his old acquaintances are lying in graveyards, Lackland perceives that "in returning to this spot it would be incumbent upon him to re-establish himself from the beginning, precisely as though he had never known the place, nor it to him" (566).

Imprisoned in his nostalgic past, Lackland feels that his inward needs are not in harmony with Longpuddle's outer life, and he decides to forsake the village, together with his dreams of setting in there. He departs as when he comes: a lonely alien.⁹⁶

Hardy's own return to Dorset, and his erection of Max Gate, is then born of nostalgia, a longing for the past which is indicative of his unease with his present life. The move is, in other words, born of the same sense of dislocation and aloneness which gives rise to, and is manifested in, the writing itself, at the core of which is his acute sense of "the sad passing of the stable rural life, the decay of old customs and of local traditions".⁹⁷ In a

96. Compare Hardy's excellent poem "Welcome Home", which celebrates the bitter disappointment of another returnee, who "Bent upon returning .../To be where my race", only to find that to him his people are strangers, and that among them he becomes a mere lonely wanderer. Having told them of his dream to return, he received a snubbing answer through the window: "Said they, 'come back a long time,/Here had spent his young time,/some such man as you/Good-night. The casement closed again,/And I was left in the frosty lane". See Gibson 573.

97. R. J. White, Thomas Hardy and History (London: Macmillan, 1974) 22.

letter of March 1902, to Rider Haggard, Hardy further expresses his deep lament on old ways of life, his preoccupation with the rapid changes of agriculture and the devastating impact this entails upon the domestic side of life:

Changes at which we must all rejoice have brought other changes which are not so attractive. The labourers have become more and more migratory - the younger families in especial, who enjoy nothing so much as fresh scenery and new acquaintance. The consequences are curious and unexpected. For one thing, village tradition -- a vast mass of unwritten folk-lore, local chronicle, local topography and nomenclature -- is absolutely sinking, has nearly sunk, into eternal oblivion For example if you ask one of the workfolk ... the names of surrounding hills, streams; the character and circumstances of people buried in particular graves; at what spots parish personages lie interred; questions of local fairies, ghosts, herbs, etc., they can give no answer: yet I can recollect the time when the places of burial even of the poor and tombless were all remembered, and the history of the parish and squire's family for 150 years back know.⁹⁸

The point to underline is, of course, that Hardy's concern is not merely that of a local social historian. The way his imagination engages with the detail of what has been lost, even in a letter to an acquaintance, is a measure of how these changes are felt personally by Hardy, how he has lost his bearings in the world. Almost three decades later the personal lack of ease is clearly still present: only four months before he died, in 1928, he wrote:

If he had his life over again he would prefer to be a small architect in a country town, like Mr. Hicks at Dorchester, to whom he was articed.⁹⁹

Perhaps most telling and moving of all is a passage he wrote in his essay The Dorsetshire

Labourer in 1883:

Indeed it is among such [country] communities as these that happiness will find her last refuge on earth, since it is among them that a perfect insight into the conditions

98. Life 312-13.

99. Life 443.

of existence will be longest postponed.¹⁰⁰

The man who had spent so long writing about "rising in the world", and who had himself become so famous, looked back to the simple life of the rural lower classes.

Like a character in his fiction, Hardy's life and death is indeed full of great ironies, wry twists and sardonic strokes of fate. Nor did this end at Hardy's death. Almost emblematically, while Hardy's body was interred in Westminster Abbey -- the great literary figure remains in London -- his heart is removed and buried at Stinsford churchyard: like Sophy Twycott in "The Son's Veto" (LLI) and Sir Williams Hervy in "Lady Penelope" (GND), an acute sense of deracination is finally terminated by interment in the very soil of "Wessex" itself.

Perhaps the most interesting comment on Hardy's death are those lines of his friend Newman Flower, written while visiting Hardy's grave at Stinsford; they are worth quoting:

Lie lone, great heart!
The things you loved were lone.
Some fox, distraught, will stay new-couraged o'er its windy earth,
Sensing a lonely friend.¹⁰¹

Interestingly the final image, however, should be one of Hardy's own. "Nobody Comes" was written on 9 October, 1924 when, in his eighties, he was alone at Max Gate, his second wife being absent in London. What the poem presents however is not just a matter of social aloneness but a vivid sense of the way Hardy feels alienated in a world he does not understand, a world of telegraph wires and motor cars:

100. Orel, Personal Writings 169.

101. See Newman Flower, Just As it Happened (London: Cassell, 1950) 108.

Tree-leaves labour up and down,
And through them the fainting light
Succumbs to the crawl of night.
Outside in the road the telegraph wire
To the town from the darkening land
Intones to travellers like a spectral lyre
Swept by a spectral hand.

A car comes up, with lamps full-glare,
That flashes upon a tree:
It has nothing to do with me,
And whangs along in a world of its own,
Leaving a blacker air;
And mute by the gate I stand again alone,
And nobody pulls up there.¹⁰²

102. See Gibson 743.

CHAPTER THREE

The Lonely Landscape: Setting in Hardy's Short Stories

While one of the most outstanding characteristics of Hardy's world is his portrayal of setting, he is rarely interested in natural settings for their own sake, nor as a mere backdrop to events. As Alexander Fischler has suggested, Hardy's peculiar talent was "for describing country scenes and for creating characters inevitably rooted in their circumstances".¹ In other words, there is a close and intricate relationship between characters and setting, event and location. Gittings suggests one possible source for this perspective:

His father's enjoyment of nature was matched by his mother's extraordinary store of local legend and story. Together they filled Hardy's world with landscape and human dealing, the special blend that was to mark his poems and novels so that emotion and place coalesce unforgettably.²

Indeed, the setting of the events in Hardy's fiction, in the short stories at least as much as the novels, functions to express an *emotional* as well as geographical context for the narrative events. In January 1886 Hardy remarked that:

My art is to intensify the expression of things, as is done by Crivelli, Bellini, etc., so that the heart and inner meaning is made vividly visible.³

That "inner meaning", of course, relates to the human inhabitants of a place, their emotional and psychological situation; ultimately Hardy's concern is always with the human. On 28

1. Alexander Fischler, "Theatrical Techniques in Thomas Hardy's Short Stories," Studies in Short Fiction 3 (1966): 442.

2. Gittings, Young Thomas Hardy 37.

3. Life 177.

September 1877 he remarked that:

An object or mark by man on a scene is worth ten times any such formed by unconscious Nature. Hence clouds, mists, and mountains are unimportant beside the wear on a threshold, or the print of a hand.⁴

This view is endorsed in a later comment, in January 1887,

I don't want to see landscapes, i.e., scenic paintings of them, because I don't want to see the original realities -- as optical effects, that is. I want to see the deeper reality underlying the scenic, the expression of what are sometimes called abstract meanings.

The "simply natural" is interesting no longer.⁵

This sense of human location, frequently in a natural setting which emphasises the human individuals' smallness, vulnerability and isolation, is present at the opening of a number of his works, having an almost cinematic impact. Frequently in his fiction he creates a sweeping or wide-angle, generalized scene first, then he concentrates on a little unit or microcosm within the scene, be it solitary cottage or human individual. For instance, in the opening scene of The Woodlanders, the sense of emptiness and detachment which the setting evokes and impinges upon a solitary wanderer, with a sense of rumination and consideration:

The physiognomy of a deserted highway expresses solitude to a degree that is not reached by mere dales or downs, and bespeaks a tomb-like stillness more emphatic than that of glades and pools. The contrast of what is with what might be, probably accounts for this. To step, for instance, at the place under notice, from the edge of the plantation into the adjoining thoroughfare, and pause amid its emptiness for a moment, was to exchange by the act of a single stride the simple absence of human companionship for an incubus of the forlorn.

At this spot, on the louring evening of a bygone winter's day, there stood a man who had thus indirectly entered upon the scene from a stile hard by, and was

4. Life 116.

5. Life 185.

temporarily influenced by some such feeling of being suddenly more alone than before he had emerged upon the highway.⁶

Near the opening of Tess of the d'Urbervilles, Hardy paints -- he uses the image --

landscape:

The village of Marlott lay amid the north-eastern undulations of the beautiful Vale of Blackmore or Blackmoor aforesaid -- an engirdled and secluded region, for the most part untrodden as yet by tourist or landscape-painter, though within a four hours' journey from London The traveller from the coast who, after plodding northward for a score of miles over calcareous downs and corn-lands, suddenly reaches the verge of one of these escarpments, is surprised and delighted to behold, extended like a map beneath him, a country differing absolutely from that which he has passed through Here in the valley the world seems to be constructed upon a smaller and more delicate scale; the fields are more paddocks, so reduced that from this height their hedgerows appear a network of dark green threads overspreading the paler green of the grass. The atmosphere beneath is languorous Such is the Vale of Blackmoor. (18)

Along the road into this languorous vale walks Angel Clare, to meet Tess, in her white dress and red ribbon, and their lives will thereafter always be entangled. Again, in most of his fiction, Hardy's sense of rudimentarily sweeping enclosure dramatizes and universalizes illuminatingly the story's motif. Auden once observed:

What I valued most in Hardy ... [is] his hawk's vision, his way of looking at life from a very great height To see the individual life related not only to the local social life of its time, but the whole of human history, life on earth, the stars, gives one both humility and self-confidence.⁷

It is that sense of life, of the past, of natural process through time, which is embodied in the

6. Thomas Hardy, The Woodlanders, ed. Dale Kramer (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985)
5. All future references are to this edition and will be included in the text.

7. W.H. Auden, "A Literary Transference," Hardy: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Albert J. Guerard, Twentieth Century Views (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1963) 139-40.

landscape. Indeed, human events, the careers of human individuals, relate to the natural universe in which they are set in a variety of ways. As John Holloway has observed, albeit of the novels, "human life, and indeed human consciousness itself, is wholly subject to the control of Nature ... in Hardy's novels".⁸ And, however much the setting might appear to endorse or reflect the emotions and events of a story, ultimately the natural world does not accommodate human needs and aspirations. There is none of the harmony that exists in Romantic writing, where humans and nature can appear as aspects of one underlying spiritual reality. People in Hardy's fiction are part of a system, but it appears to be purely and simply a natural, material process, which if it has an organizing principle, that principle takes no particular notice of human activity, seems to express utter "indifference to the lot of man".⁹ Human beings are caught amid the mindless, monotonous cycle of life, in a mechanical process which only dwarfs and belittles them. In a letter of 17 May 1902 to The Academy and Literature Hardy explores Nature's inexorability and, from a human perspective, injustice:

Pain has been, and pain is: no new sort of morals in Nature can remove the pain from the past and make it pleasure for those who are its infallible estimators, the bearers thereof. And no injustice, however slight, can be atoned for by the future generosity, however ample, so long as we consider Nature to be, or to stand for, unlimited power. The exoneration of an omnipotent Mother by her retrospective justice becomes an absurdity when we ask, what made the forgone injustice necessary to be Omnipotence?

8. John Holloway, The Victorian Sage: Studies in Argument (1953; London: Archon, 1962) 265.

9. Pinion, A Hardy Companion 175.

So you cannot, I fear, save her good name except by assuming one of two things: that she is blind and not a judge of her actions, or that she is an automaton, and unable to control them: in either of which assumptions, though you have the chivalrous satisfaction of screening one of her sex, you only throw responsibility a stage further back.¹⁰

Even Hardy's controlled use of imagery teems with instances of the weird and the austere which are part and parcel of the baffling nature. The description of the wood in The Woodlanders typifies this overriding mood of gloom, transitoriness and alienation:

On older trees still then these huge lobes of fungi grew like lungs. Here, as everywhere, the Unfulfilled Intention, which makes life what it is, was as obvious as could be among the depraved crowds of a city slum. The leaf was deformed, the curve was crippled, the taper was interrupted, the lichen ate the vigour of the stalk, and the ivy slowly strangled to death the promising sapling. (53)

Human beings are part of the same system, subject to the same implacable laws and processes, as the natural world around them. This shared vulnerability between humans and setting is repeatedly emphasized in the short fiction. Reminiscent of the grandiose introductory portrayal of Egdon Heath, the initial setting of "The Withered Arm" (WT), foreshadows the ensuing theme of alienation. Discarded by her lover, Farmer Lodge, together with her illegitimate son, Rhoda's lonely predicament is suggested right from the outset by her environment:

The majority [of the milkmaids] then dispersed in various directions homeward. The thin woman who had not spoken was joined by a boy of twelve of thereabout, and the twain went away up the field also.

Their course lay apart from that of the others, to a lonely spot high above the water-meads, and not far from the border of Egdon Heath, whose dark countenance was visible in the distance as they drew nigh to their home [T]he cottage was built of mud-walls, the surface of which had been washed by many rains into channels and depressions and left none of the original flat face visible; while here

10. Life 315.

and there in the thatch above a rafter showed like a bone protruding through the skin. (53)

In "A Mere Interlude" (CM), Hardy again dramatizes the situation of human beings as being subject to the implacable processes of the natural world. Deciding to plunge into the sea for a swim, Charles Stow leaves his wife, Baptista Twethen, alone on the shore; as she watches him, his vulnerability is all too apparent:

[Charles Stow] vanished, till, as a small waxen object, she saw him emerge from the nook that had screened him, cross the white fringe of foam, and walk into the undulating mass of blue. (766)

It is the last she sees of her husband. When she next looks, the sea gives only the slightest hint of what has happened:

Not a speck or spot resembling a man's head or face showed anywhere. By this time she was alarmed, and her alarm intensified when she perceived a little beyond the scene of her husband's bathing a small area of water, the quality of whose surface differed from that of the surrounding expanse as the coarse vegetation of some foul patch in a mead differs from the fine green of the remainder. Elsewhere it looked flexuous, here it looked vermiculated and lumpy, and her marine experiences suggested to her in a moment that two currents met and caused a turmoil at this place. (767)

The "mass of blue" has indifferently taken her husband; from now on she will have to face the world and its processes alone.

Weather is one obvious and dynamic aspect of natural process and Hardy transcribes consistently and precisely the peculiar details of the weather, in all its moods and variations. The intrinsic cataloguing of this landscape and word-painting, as well as the tremendous force of the description, not only evokes a particular place and time which stands in relation to the later incidents, but also transcribes acutely the characters' feelings, including feelings of loss, despair and alienation. In "What the Shepherd Saw" (CM), for instance, in addition

to the story's peculiar setting (near a stark and ominous "Druidical trilithon" on the heath), bleakly suited to the ensuing story of human revenge, and suffering, the weird and the inimical are accentuated by the weather and the time of the four nights: "The Christmas moon" shows its "cold face" upon the uplands, which in turn reflect "radiance in frost-sparkles" (407). The ancient ruin locally known as "the Devil's Door" serves as a fitting backdrop for the weird end of the story; it is a ruin which like the humans in the story, but for a far wider span of time, has been subject to natural process and weather: "Each stone had been worn, scratched, washed, nibbled, split, and otherwise attacked by ten thousand different weathers": it is now "silvered over by the light of the moon" (705). In "A Tryst at an Ancient Earthwork" (CM), Hardy again foreshadows the story's main theme by the neat portrayal of a powerful setting, which is ultimately an essential part of the story's effect. The description of weather, together with other sensory details, is vital to the examinations of the story's main theme:

Across the intervening levels the gale races in a straight line from the fort, as if breathed out of it hitherward. 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. In this so-thought immutable spectacle all is change. (694)

Another clear and explicit example of the way the weather reinforces the emotions generated by the human drama comes in Hardy's novella "The Romantic Adventures of a Milkmaid" (CM), a story of a depression, ennui, and alienation, the plot of which stems from the complicated relationship between the simple milkmaid, Margery Tucker, and the mysteriously gloomy Baron Von Xanten. Indeed, the unobtrusive animation of Nature foreshadows the action from the opening paragraph:

It was half-past four o'clock ... on a May morning in the eighteen forties. A dense white fog hung over the valley of the Exe But though nothing in the vale could be seen from higher ground, notes of different kinds gave pretty clear indications that bustling life was going on there Nature had laid a white hand over the creatures ensconced within the vale, as a hand might be laid over a nest of chirping birds. (788)

The interplay between the mindless process of Nature with its rigorous "sense of the unexpected and bizarre",¹¹ and the careers of the human individuals, as they attempt to adjust to the events and entanglements in which life places them, is often extremely subtle. But, repeatedly, the characters' true situation in a universe which appears to care nothing for human endeavour, in which the individual life is often a lonely struggle, is suggested by the environment and its weather: after Barnet re-encounters Lucy in "Fellow-Townsmen" (WT), he experiences a revival of hope, but, the narrator notes:

As he went a sudden blast of air came over the hill as if in contradiction to his words, and spoilt the previous quiet of the scene. The wind had already shifted violently, and now smelt of the sea. (93-4)

"Fellow-Townsmen" has a more urban setting. But in such stories, set not in the heathland or pasture but in the streets and squares of small Wessex towns, Hardy's subtle use of setting to dramatize themes, express emotions and demonstrate human vulnerability and loneliness is still very apparent. "Fellow-Townsmen" is set in "a veritable town with a real mayor and corporation" (79) and Barnet's fate is worked out in its streets and houses, including the new "Château Ringdale" built at his wife's insistence, replacing his old family house, "built by my grandfather ... stout enough for a castle I was born there and have always lived there" (81). In an unhappy marriage, threatened with being uprooted from his home, the

11. Holloway 269.

isolated Barnet is also emotionally ill-at-ease, still in love with Lucy Saville. She now lives alone in a house which itself expresses her situation of impoverished seclusion:

[Barnet] paused before one of the smallest of the detached houses by the wayside, standing in its own garden, the latter being divided from the road by a row of wooden palings. (84)

Barnet's furtive visit, we notice, takes place at dusk, as the town's tradesmen are closing up for the night:

He ... went out of the house, pursuing his way along the glistening pavement while eight o'clock was striking from St. Mary's tower, and the apprentices and shopmen were slamming up the shutters from end to end of the town. (83)

Barnet's loneliness threatens to shut him even further outside the bounds of the community's social and marital conventions. Faced by Lucy's propriety, he is given momentary hope when it appears that his wife has been drowned. He looks from his window to Lucy's house:

Far down the road to the harbour a roof detained his gaze: out of it rose a red chimney, and out of the red chimney a curl of smoke, as from a fire newly kindled. (97)

But it is not to be. Only twenty one years later does he return to the town. Lucy is now a widow, living alone and again in seclusion, in what had been Barnet's new house, now matured and partially overgrown; indeed Hardy's setting portrays Lucy as a kind of sleeping beauty, waiting to be raised by her prince:

[T]he growth of trees and bushes which revealed itself at every step was beyond all expectation: sun-proof and moon-proof bowers vaulted the walks, and the walls of the house were uniformly bearded with creeping plants as high as the first-floor windows There was a stagnation in the dwelling, it seemed to be waiting. Could it really be waiting from him (119).

But when this "lonely old woman" and "lonely old man" (120) finally confront each other, chance -- or life -- does not allow a resolution. She rejects his impulsive offer of marriage; her reconsideration the following day comes too late, and he has left the town: "She did wait -- years and years -- but Barnet never reappeared" (124).

Less elaborately but still effectively the urban setting of "A Changed Man" (CM) again contributes to the dramatization of the story's theme. Maumbry's fate is worked out in the narrow streets of Casterbridge, viewed in long-shot in the opening paragraph. It is these streets, especially the slums of Mixen Lane, that breed the cholera which Maumbry fights and which ultimately kills him:

By Standfast Corner a little beyond the Cross, they suddenly obtained an end view of the lane. Large bonfires were burning in the middle of the way, with a view to purifying the air; and from the wretched tenements with which the lane was lined in those days persons were bringing out bedding and clothing. (584)

When Maumbry does meet his wife in the fresh air of the hill above the town, their emotional estrangement is portrayed by the wall which Maumbry insists on keeping between them for fear of possible infection. Again, the "The Withered Arm", the fate of Gertrude, alienated from her husband by her deformity, is also set in Casterbridge. In seeking a cure by touching the corpse of newly-hanged man, she must first find that hangman; her desperation and isolation are presented as she furtively visits the hangman who lives "in a lonely cottage by a deep slow river flowing under a cliff, on which the prison buildings were situate" (73).

Having explored settings and Hardy's techniques, the rest of this chapter will be dedicated to a closer analysis of Hardy's settings in his short fiction and the role these play in portraying the characters' sense of apartness, separation and alienation; detailed

detailed discussion has been limited to four stories, chosen to show the effectiveness of Hardy's technique: "The Three Strangers," (WT), "The Honourable Laura," (GND), "The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion," (WT), and "The Son's Veto" (LLI).

While, "The Three Strangers" (WT) has been called "an admirably dramatic little story",¹² Kristin Brady views it as "pastoral history" in which "each visual detail, gesture and word contribute to the unravelling of a single mystery".¹³ Part of the enduring power of the story lies in the relation between man and rural setting, between narrative events and dramatic location. Indeed, the very opening paragraph of "The Three Strangers", provides a magnificent overture to the unfolding drama of human transience, and vulnerability. It is as if the immediate landscape is isolated from the rest of the world. Once again, Hardy begins the tale cinematically by describing, from afar and in "longshot", a vast expanse of lonely landscape:

Among the few features of agricultural England which retain an appearance but little modified by the lapse of centuries, may be reckoned the long, grassy and furzy downs, coombs, or ewe-leases, as they are called according to their kind, that fill a large area of certain counties 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.

Fifty years ago such a lonely cottage stood on such a down, and may possibly by standing there now 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. But, in the present case, such a kind of shelter had been disregarded, Higher Crowstairs, as the house was called, stood

12. J.I.M. Stewart, Thomas Hardy: A Critical Biography (London: Macmillan, 1971) 148.

13. Brady, The Short Stories of Thomas Hardy 6.

quite detached and undefended. (7)

Reminiscent of The Woodlanders and The Return of the Native, the very opening as such, foreshadows the theme of alienation, even before any appearance of man in the story.

Everything in the tale is ultimately located in this one spot. The setting is, thus, portrayed carefully to suit the theme of the story: man's insignificance and vulnerability in time and space. William Van O'Connor, comments on the story's cosmic meaning, that it sees "human affairs not as they appear to human participants"; humans together with their concerns come "to dwindle into insignificance".¹⁴

By the portrayal of the lonely cottage as a sustained image that runs from the very beginning of the story till the very end, a centre around which all other images revolve, Hardy succeeds in dramatizing both the social and existential situations of his characters. As a unifying symbol, the cottage is the stage on which all the events take place; it is to this isolated spot that all the main actions in the story come.

The atmosphere of detachment both in time and space is further developed when we learn that Higher Crowstairs remains as "detached and undefended". Side by side with man's vulnerability in this gloomy terrain, the cottage is "exposed to the elements on all sides". Its peculiarly isolated location at "the crossing of two footpaths" (7), is highly symbolic, a place where "contraries intersect, birth and death, freedom and captivity, boldness and timidity, natural violence and rural domesticity, justice and law".¹⁵ In this

14. See William Van O'Connor, "Cosmic Irony in Hardy's 'The Three Strangers'," The English Journal 47 (1958): 250.

15. Fischler 443.

remote spot, in which "long inimical seasons, with their sleets, snows, rains and mists, afford withdrawing space enough to isolate a Timon or a Nebuchadnezzar" (7), man seems to be an easy victim for a remorseless power, or a mere floating speck in a contingent careless universe. Nature, in fact, appears at times not merely inimical, but threatening: "The level rainstorm smote walls, slopes and hedges like the clothyard shafts of Senlac and Crecy" (8). Economically, Hardy evokes not only the battles of men, lost in history, but the very battle for existence; vulnerable and unprotected animals become clear targets for the callous wind -- "such sheep and outdoor animals as had no shelter stood with their buttocks to the wind" -- while little birds are engaged in a ceaseless battle to find shelter "on some scraggy thorn" (8). The struggle for survival in an intransigent universe seems the norm in this place. However, in the heart of this wild spot, man -- resilient, and perhaps necessarily ignoring the full implications of this situation -- is still capable of pleasure, happiness, familiarity, community and renewal:

The night of March 28, 182-, was precisely one of the nights that were wont to call forth these expressions of commiseration Yet never was commiseration for the shepherd more displaced. For that cheerful rustic was entertaining a large party in glorification of the christening of his second girl.

The guests had arrived before the rain began to fall, and they were all now assembled in the chief or living-room of the dwelling. A glance into the apartment at eight o'clock on this eventual evening would have resulted in the opinion that it was as cosy and comfortable a nook as could be wished for in boisterous weather. (7-8)

At another level, the former image testifies to Hardy's ability as a writer to see things as a totality through a strongly evocative web of contrasts, and to find a convincing perspective for the casual happenings of life. Outside is Nature's threatening voice, gloom, precariousness, vulnerability, mist, rain and death; within is comfort, warmth, refreshment, protection, drinks, friendliness, communion and new life: it is a christening party.

But Hardy's description of the interior is, again, not without its darker suggestions: The fire blazes to warm the folk in the cottage, but at the same time it is "a fire of thorns", that cracked 'like the laughter of the fool'" (8). Again, the vulnerability of the humans at their play is manifested when their dances are likened to the dances of the planets:

And so the dance whizzed on with cumulative fury, the performers moving in their planet-like courses, direct and retrograde, from apogee to perigee, till the hand of the well-kicked clock at the bottom of the room had travelled over the circumference of an hour. (10)

Microcosm is set against macrocosm. Instead of exalting man to the status of planets, the analogy detects man's minuteness and his vulnerability, when set against the hugeness, vastness and eternity of the planets outside, whereas the presence of the clock underlines the passing of man's fleeting hours, one after another. The gradual advent of the three strangers, calling at shepherd Fennel's cottage, completes the story's unfolding theme of man's alienation. Into this isolated setting comes a lonely ambiguous figure: Timothy Summers, a "lonely pedestrian ... from the direction of the distant town" treads with caution through "the sad wan light", like a person "who mentally feels his way" (10). When he first approaches the cottage "the rain came down, or rather came along, with yet more determined violence" (10), a thing which makes Timothy seek shelter "under the pent-roof" (11). It is indeed on account of "the absence of all notes of life" anywhere other than the cottage, that Timothy decides to knock and seek refuge (12). Thus, right from the very beginning, Timothy's vulnerability and insecurity is hinted at. Attempting to break the ice, become familiar with the occupants of the house and hide his real identity, Timothy sits at the chimney corner and "stretche[s] out his legs and his arms with the expansiveness of a person quite at home" (13). Not only does Timothy adapt himself to his setting, but his

intelligence makes him understand the forthcoming danger as well. Hearing the knock of the second stranger at the door he "took up the poker and began stirring the brands as if doing it thoroughly were the one aim of his existence", by way of showing his familiarity to the household as one of them (14).

The first meeting between Timothy and the hangman, described as a one of a type radically different" is a striking one indeed, for Timothy's act of offering the hangman the family mug which "did not belong to him" (15), is a subtle act, in which the mug itself becomes a highly evocative symbol:

They nodded to each other by way of breaking the ice of unacquaintance, and the first stranger handed his neighbour the family mug -- a huge vessel of brown ware, having its upper edge worn away like a threshold by the rub of the whole generations of thirsty lips that had gone the way of all flesh, and bearing the following inscription burnt upon its rotund side in yellow letters:-

THERE IS NO FUN
UNTILL i CUM (14)

The passage celebrates the continuation of the past; the mug is a unifying symbol of man's past and memories, for it underlines eternity of time, contrasted with the limited life of the individual man or woman. Man's life and death vanish away trifingly and the immortality of the mug still records the past with its passing generation, the present with its guests and dancers, and the future generation as symbolized by the child who is being christened.

While the villagers assist Timothy, having come to realize his critical situation because he possesses their own peculiar qualities of "courage, resourcefulness, shrewdness, and composure",¹⁶ they feel antipathy for the hangman who demeans them as "simple minded souls" that are easily "stirred up to anything in a moment" (23). After he has

16. James L. Roberts, "Legend and Symbol in Hardy's 'The Three Strangers'," Nineteenth-Century Fiction 17 (1962): 192.

revealed his odious calling -- "for my customers I tie and take them upon high" (17), -- the rustics associate him with "The Prince of Darkness" (20).

The brief appearance of the third stranger (Timothy's brother), precipitates Timothy's escape, back into the wilderness outside, pursued ultimately by a search party, chasing him across a landscape which makes no concessions to human codes: they confront matters of human life and death:

They descended in all directions down the hill, and straightaway several of the party fell into the snare set by Nature for all misguided midnight ramblers over this part of the cretaceous formation. The 'lanchets', or flint slopes, which belted the escarpment at intervals of a dozen yards, took the less cautious ones unawares, and losing their footing on a rubbly steep they slide sharply downwards, the lanterns rolling from their hands to the bottom, and there lying on their sides till the horn was scorched through. (23)

As the men plunged into the valley which proves to be "a grassy, briery, moist defile" (23), the sequestration, wildness and isolation of the setting are explicit and emblematically hinted at by "a lonely ash, the single tree on this part of the coomb, probably sown there by a passing bird some fifty years before" (23-4). Indeed, one is made to feel that had it not been for the chance passing of a bird fifty years ago, this place would have been utterly devoid of any sign of life. The setting thus renders all their actions futile and insignificant; at the end they catch the wrong fugitive (Timothy's brother), pressed against this single tree "as motionless as the trunk itself" (24), and as vulnerable and isolated.

"The Three Strangers" thus tells of a bizarre and coincidental coming together of the three men, reminiscent of the strange convergence of the insects in "An August Midnight," coming together "at this point of time, at this point in space".¹⁷ Indeed, the entire episode

17. See Gibson 147.

narrated in the story is isolated not only in space, the lonely cottage on the down but in time: the episode is narrated as having taken place "fifty years ago", during "the night of March 28, 182- (7). But the event is but a moment in the vast span of the process of time in this region. The cottage is old and, after the events related in the story, time and process continue:

The grass has long been green on the graves of Fennel and his frugal wife; the guests who made up the christening party have mainly followed their entertainers to the tomb; the baby in whose honour they all had met is a matron in the sere and yellow leaf. But the arrival of the three strangers at the shepherd's that night, and the details connected therewith, is a story as well known as ever in the country about Higher Crowstairs. (27)

Like many other tales in Wessex Tales, "The Three Strangers" has the quality of an orally-related tradition, a story remembered in the community because of its oddness, remembered indeed like a ballad, having the timelessness and curiosity of the events in a ballad, isolated in space and in time.

"The Honourable Laura" (GND) is a story of sexual betrayal and unhappy alliance. The drama of the main characters stems from the uncontrollability of their own impulses and their consequent disloyalty. This story of marital incompatibility, elopement, and isolation is presented in and through a detailed, vivid and ultimately symbolic setting. The dramatic episodes following the elopement of Laura Northbrook with the opera singer Signor Smittozzi and the ensuing betrayals and estrangements are dramatized in the lonely settings which Hardy creates. The setting is sombre and bleak from the outset:

It was a cold and gloomy Christmas Eve. The mass of cloud overhead was almost impervious to such daylight as still lingered; the snow lay several inches deep upon the ground, and the slanting downfall which still went on threatened to considerably increase its thickness before the morning. The Prospect Hotel, a building standing near the wild north coast of Lower Wessex, looked so lonely and so useless at such

a time as this that a passing wayfarer would have been led to forget summer possibilities, and to wonder at the commercial courage which could invest capital, on the basis of the popular taste for the picturesque, in a country subject to such a dreary phases. (353)

It is a self-contained, dreary setting which isolates man, again making him feel vulnerable and small. The coldness and dreariness of the weather which is "totally opposed to all that tempts mankind from home" are accompanied by the cliffs, creeks, and headlands which are beautiful in August but which are now "stern angular outlines", "bleak and forbidding". The bleak austerity of the nearby "townlet" with its "grimy dirtiness" (353), also reflects the vast impassivity, inertia and obscurity of the setting. In contrast with the welcome it gives in the bustling summer season, the hotel's front door is locked, and fortified by a sand-bag, underlying and emphasizing "the sealed and chrysalis state" (353) of this empty hotel.

Inside the hotel, the acute sense of sequestration and isolation of the only inhabitants, the manager and waiter, is emphasized. Not expecting any resident, the hotel's owner ambles around "with his hands in his pockets", thinking deeply of "losses that winter idleness entailed on his regular profession" (353). Opening the visitor's book which is "closed and pushed back against the wall" the landlords discovers that "not a name had been entered there since the 19th of the previous November" except that of a man who "[has] not been asked to enter at all" (354). The other solitary occupant in this lonely hotel is a coffee-room waiter, who instead of the fastidiously elegant attire which he puts on in summer, is now changed into "unrecognisable shape," wearing instead "corduroys and hobnailed boots" (353), having no residents to wait upon.

It is through this vivid setting that Hardy finds scope for examining the physical and spiritual isolation of his characters. Into this dreary scene, Hardy introduces the escaped wife, Laura, and her lover, Signor Smittozzi as very vulnerable figures whose "open

basket-carriage" is viewed by the landlord not only as a "solitary object" and as "a black spot on the distant white" but also described as immensely "unsuited to such a season and weather" (354). The subsequent dramatic arrival of Lord Quantock (Laura's father) and Captain James Northbrook (Quantock's nephew), on the scene, dramatizes the situation of the two fugitives as "a lady under age, without experience -- child-like in her maiden innocence and virtue - until Signor Smittozzi "plied ...[his] vile arts" (358).

A further dimension is dramatically added to our perception of Laura's situation by James Northbrook's "sudden demeanour" of authoritative address to Laura and his disclosure of their hidden matrimony (359), a disclosure which reveals among other things the true nature of Laura's plight. She had lived lonely and in "want of society" (360) in her father's house; "the loneliness and dreariness of that establishment" (360), is both a cause of, and in turn expresses, Laura's situation and her emotional frustration. It is in this situation that Smittozzi, unaware that she is married, had found her. Presumably her dreary life in the house was what had attached her to Northbrook in the first place, for the secrecy of the marriage and his failure to take her away mean that her feelings for him soon cool: "I wished I could get out of the mess I was in" she says (300).

The ensuing duel between Smittozzi and Northbrook is, again, set in a landscape appropriate to the dramatic emotion and the events which have given rise to them, a setting which echoes the hostility and gloom of the opening:

The outlook here was wild and picturesque in the extreme, and fully justified the many praises, paintings, and photographic views to which the spot had given birth. What in summer was charmingly green and gray, was now rendered weird and fantastic by the snow.

From their feet the cascade plunged downward almost vertically to a depth of eighty or a hundred feet before finally losing itself in the sand, and though the stream was but small, its impact upon jutting rocks in its descent divided it into a

hundred spirts and splashes that sent up a mist into the upper air. A few marginal drippings had been frozen into icicles, but the centre flowed on unimpeded. (363)

The Gothic setting is one utterly in keeping with the melodramatic acts of betrayal and deception with which the story is concerned. The energy and power of the waterfall expresses the uncontrolled passion of the human actions, but the landscape also dwarfs these human beings. They are not ultimately in control of their own fate.

Isolated and alienated after the apparent death of her husband -- supposedly drowned in the river -- and the disappearance of her father back to his home, Laura expresses her acute sense of vulnerability and insecurity when she tells Smittozzi "I am quite abandoned by them -- and they'll forget me, and nobody cares about me anymore!" (364). Laura's lack of self-confidence and her inability to take a decision at this stage is clearly marked in her response to Smittozzi's invitation to continue their escape. Her retort "I agree to anything" (364), clearly reflects her sense of emotional turmoil and helplessness. At the same time, her half-suppressed suspicion of Smittozzi's being her husband's murderer markedly aggravates her excruciating sense of alienation so that "a curious fearfulness is audible in her voice" (365). Laura has utterly lost her moral bearings, her desperate flight with Smittozzi, again in the carriage which renders them vulnerable to the elements, ends in their becoming lost in the snow-covered lane, all distinctions obscured, all directions uncertain: having abandoned the main road, they lose their way literally, as they have lost their way morally and spiritually.

It is at this point that Laura leaves Smittozzi: she literally and morally takes another direction. But initially she is totally isolated in a silent hostile environment:

Here she stood in hiding under one of the large bushes, clinging so closely to its umbrage as to seem but a portion of its mass, and listening intently for the faintest sound of pursuit. But nothing disturbed the stillness save the occasional slipping of

gathered snow from the boughs, or the rustle of some wild animal over the crisp flake-bespattered herbage. (366)

But she succeeds in scrambling back to the hotel, back to society and to moral security; the turn shows the beginnings of her moral recovery. The "repentant Laura" (367), has changed markedly and resumes her serious responsibilities. She nurses her husband; but when he recovers his health, he will not forgive her and goes abroad. After her father's departure Laura's "double bereavement" (370), aggravates her burden and sets off a prolonged period of depression. Burdened with guilt, she is even more blighted with loneliness than before her marriage. And again Hardy expresses her psychological condition by the physical situation in which he places her. The vastness of the setting around her fails to add the slightest note of happiness nor provides for her emotional and spiritual growth:

Around lay the undulating park, studded with trees a dozen times her own age; beyond it; the wood; beyond the wood, the farms. All this fair and quiet scene was hers. She nevertheless remained a lonely repentant, depressing being, who would have given the greater part of everything she possessed to ensure the presence and affection of that husband whose very austerity and phlegm -- qualities that had formerly led to the alienation between them -- seemed now to be adorable features in his character. (370)

Indeed, Hardy does not stress Laura's being a runaway so much as her status as a repentant wife, who admirably puts an end to a rakish phase of emotional irresponsibility (albeit born of desperation) and who begins a new period of maturity, responsibility and marital duty towards a man whom she has once jilted, only to be ultimately defeated by powers greater than her own: rejection, social ostracism, anxiety and then despair. Laura is crushed and blighted with "mental troubles" which when added to the dreary "weight of years", turns her into a "lonely mistress" (371).

The story threatens to end as it began. It opened at the hotel on "a cold and gloomy Christmas Eve" (353). Now the climax echoes this:

Christmas promised to be rather wet and cold and the trees on the outskirts of Laura's estate dropped monotonously from day to day upon the turnpike-road which bordered them. (371)

But the return of her husband and their reconciliation removes her loneliness. Forgiveness brings happiness -- and community, again subtly indicated in the setting -- as the house is transformed:

A few days more brought Christmas, and the forlorn home of Laura Northbrook blazed from basement to attic with light and cheerfulness. Not that the house was overcrowded with visitors, but many were present, and the apathy of a dozen years came at length to an end. (373)

Laura has paid with twelve years of loneliness for her impulsiveness -- though that, we notice, was itself a response to emotional unfulfillment and loneliness -- before forgiveness is given.

Though "The Honourable Laura," which constitutes the final story of the larger volume A Group of Noble Dames, ends happily, the volume itself ends on a note of isolation. Apart from the social barriers among "the benighted members of the Field-Club" (373), Hardy's peculiar imagery of "a single pirouetting flame" existing on the "top of a single coal" and that of "the bones of the ichthyosaurus" (374), are for the most part to convey the atmosphere of loneliness inside the museum which is at one with the setting outside:

It was quite dark without, except in the immediate neighbourhood of the feeble street-lamps, and before a few shop-windows which had been hardily kept open in spite of the obvious unlikelihood of any chance customer traversing the muddy thoroughfares at that hour. (373)

"The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion" (WT), is another poignant story of human waste and isolation, vividly reflected in its settings, and like "The Three Strangers" told by a narrator who remembers the story, having a sense of its location in time as well as space. The story again opens with the setting of the scene:

Here stretch the downs high and breezy and green, absolutely unchanged since those eventful days. A plough has never disturbed the turf, and the sod that was uppermost then is uppermost now. Here stood the camp; here are distinct traces of the banks ... At night, when I walk across the lonely place, it is impossible to avoid hearing, amid the scourings of the wind over the grass-bents and thistles, the old trumpet and bugle calls, the rattle of the halters; to help seeing rows of spectral tents and *impedimenta* of the soldiery. From within the canvases come guttural syllables of foreign tongues, and broken songs of the fatherland; for they were mainly regiments of the King's German Legion that slept round the tent poles hereabout at that time. (35)

This remote place of "secluded old manor-houses and hamlets", of solitary hills "where a stranger had hardly even been seen" (35), is the location not only of the hussar camp, but also of Phyllis Grove's lonely life. Imprisoned -- like Laura -- in her father's dull house, and secluded from any acquaintance, Phyllis is a prisoner in a world which, however lush and pastorally beautiful, is nevertheless for her a loveless world, void of any human contact:

Before that day of the [York Hussars' arrival] scarcely a soul had been seen near her father's house for weeks. When a noise like the brushing skirt of a visitor was heard on the doorstep, it proved to be a scudding leaf; when a carriage seemed to be nearing the door, it was her father grinding his sickle on the stone in the garden for his favourite relaxation of trimming the box-tree borders to the plots. A sound like luggage thrown down from the coach was a gun far away at sea; and what looked like a tall man by the gate at dusk was a yew bush cut into a quaint and attenuated shape. There is no such solitude in country places now as there was in those old days. (36)

Indeed, these visions constantly tantalize her and accentuate her feelings of loneliness.

What adds to Phyllis's isolation, is the seclusion of her neurotic self-enclosed father, whose

"Parental affection seems to be quite dried up" (43); he spends most of his days brooding and becoming "irritable with the lapse of time, and the increasing perception that he had wasted his life in the pursuit of illusion" (36). Dr. Grove deprives Phyllis perversely and oppressively of a warm familial tie; she is starved emotionally. Her father orders her not to "set foot outside [the] garden-fence without ... permission" (41). Her isolation from human contact results in her being unable to relate easily to others, "so shy that if she met a stranger anywhere in her short rambles she felt ashamed at his gaze, walked awkwardly and blushed to her shoulders" (36). Her sense of imprisonment "in her father's house [which] was growing irksome and painful" is made worse by the fact that she is "not a native of the village like all the joyous girls around her" (43); she is in fact cut off socially as well as spatially.

The complete removal of all social communications, and her limited experience of the world around her, together with her emotionally-starved nature, make her an easy victim and susceptible to any romantic illusion. The first transitory relationship thus occurs in her life when "her hand most unexpectantly [is] asked in marriage" by a thirty-year-old bachelor Humphrey Gould (36), a proposal that is described as "a brilliant move for one in her constrained position" (37). But Gould's several postponements of their wedding, and his prolonged absence in Bath, is to Phyllis a negligence that is awkward, if not painful" (37). The absence of man for whom Phyllis has "a genuine regard" but "not much passion", renews in her heart "an indescribable dreariness" (38).

Little wonder, then, that Phyllis falls for the German Hussar, Matthäus Tina, who appears to her, significantly, as "a solitary figure" (39), walking absentmindedly on the other side of the wall, possessed by "a chronic home-sickness" (40). His sense of anguish which

arises from his leaving of "a lonely mother at home with nobody to cheer her", accentuates "the gloom of [his] exile" (40). Though physically he lives in the camp, spiritually he belongs to his native land and his home. Matthäus's inward struggle and self-division is clearly echoed when he complains to Phyllis, "If my dear land were here also, and my old parent, with you, I could be happy as I am, and would do my best as a soldier" (43).

Being "infected" by Matthäus's "own passionate longing for his country, and mother, and home" (43), Phyllis finds in him a means of romantic release, as much as an echo of the spiritual and emotional longing, which she herself feels. That their short-lived love transcends the limitations of language, reflects acutely that, in addition to their mutual sense of solitude, they share a yearning for communion and belonging:

Phyllis used to say that his English, though not good, was quite intelligible to her, so that their acquaintance was never hindered by difficulties of speech. Whenever the subject became too delicate, subtle, or tender, for such words of English as were at his command, the eyes no doubt helped out the tongue, and -- though this was later on -- the lips helped out the eyes. In short this acquaintance, unguardedly made, and rash enough on her part, developed and ripened. Like Desdemona, she pitied him, and learnt his history. (39)

Though their courtship is not hindered by barriers of language, her situation -- alone but pledged to another -- still inhibits her; the wall expresses her alienation:

The stone wall of necessity made anything like intimacy difficult; and he had never ventured to come, or to ask to come inside the garden, so that all their conversation had been overtly conducted across this boundary. (40)

Her situation seems likely to be made even more difficult by the unexpected return of her fiancé, Gould, but his brief story, and his revelation that he is married to another, focuses her emotions on Matthaüs all the more intensely. (We notice that Gould's gift to her is a mirror: when he is gone, she will be able to stare only at herself).

The tragic climax of the story is foreshadowed by terms in which Hardy now describes the "well-known corner", where Phyllis usually meets Matthäus:

Every blade of grass was weighted with little liquid globes, and slugs and snails had crept out upon the plots. She could hear the usual faint noises from the camp, and in other direction the trot of farmers on the road to the town, for it was market-day. She observed that her frequent visits to this corner had quite trodden down the grass in the angle of the wall, and left marks of garden soil on the stepping-stones by which she had mounted to look over the top. (49)

The morning scene of Matthäus's execution for desertion -- viewed in "longshot" both by the narrator and by Phyllis -- is again bleakly vivid, clouded with "fog and mist" (49).

Phyllis's viewing-point is from within the garden wall, apart and cut off from the scene below:

As the volley resounded there arose a shriek from the wall of Dr. Grove's garden, and someone fell down inside; but nobody among the spectators without noticed it at the time. (50)

The description echoes the solitary scene of the beginning with its symbolic implications for the girl; once again Phyllis is left by herself, inside the wall. Born in and of loneliness, this short-lived love is destined to end in utter isolation. Her cry is for the lost happiness and the unfulfilled intention. By Matthäus's death, Phyllis has lost not only her romantically ideal lover, but also the only tie that might have taken her out of the walls of her bleak days. The story ends on a note of alienation which the setting emphasizes: foreigners when alive, Matthaüs and his friend are buried "near the wall", in an alien land "with no memorial to mark the spot" (51).

Indeed, like "The Three Strangers", the story ends in a graveyard, for again the story has the air of an oral story, remembered, because of the tragic peculiarity of the event. In a

way the tale takes its origin from local gossip that Hardy himself supposedly heard. Hardy's deep interest in the story is recorded in his first early preface of 1896 to Life's Little Ironies:

A story-teller's interest in his own stories is usually independent of any merits or demerits they may show as specimens of narrative art; turning on something behind the scenes, something real in their history, which may have no attraction for a reader even if known to him -- a condition -- by no means likely "The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion" has just such a hold upon myself for the technically inadmissible reasons that the old people who gave me their recollections of its incidents did so in circumstances that linger pathetically in the memory; that she who, at the age of ninety, pointed out the unmarked resting place of the two soldiers of the tale, was probably the last remaining eyewitness of their death and interment; that the extract from the register of the burials is literal, to be read any day in the original by the curious who recognize the village.¹⁸

Again, the story, thus, revolves round an event isolated not just in place, but in time. At the opening the isolated downs, plough, and the banks "are still to be observed" although the episode occurred, the narrator says: "nearly ninety years ago" (35). There is indeed a continuity in both time and process, for finally the narrator tells us:

The older villagers who know of the episode from their parents, still recollect the place where the soldiers lie. Phyllis lies near. (51)

"The Son's Veto" (LLI), is said to have been considered by Hardy as being his best short story.¹⁹ It is primarily a study of a woman whose life of unhappiness and misery are mainly caused by her marriage to a person who is superior to her both in class and social prestige. This simple parlour-maid, Sophy Twycott, is forced to leave the limited rural world of her little village Gaymead to live in London with her new husband. Sophy's "little tragi-comedy" (404), starts immediately after her union with Mr. Twycott, a union "which

18. Orel, Personal Writings 30.

19. Pinion, A Hardy Companion 91.

hardly a soul knew of" since, although he had fallen in love with her as she nursed him through an illness, in doing so he realizes "he had committed social suicide" (406), having married so far beneath his rank. And so he takes his wife away from the place in which she was brought up and the community she knew, to the relative anonymity of the city. In moving to London, the couple abandon

their pretty country home, with trees and shrubs and glebe, for a narrow, dusty house in a long, straight street, and their fine peal of bells for the wretchedest one -- tongued clangours that ever tortured mortal ears (406).

In this grim, unnatural setting, away from her companions and community, her bloom fades: "her once apple cheeks waned to the pink of the very faintest" (407). The grim streets become an emblem of her emotional condition.

Her isolation is made even worse after the death of her husband. We notice he is buried in a place "where, if all the dead it contained had stood erect and alive, not one would have known him or recognised his name" (407). Her daily life in her "semi-detached villa" (407), consists of long hours of isolation, breeding melancholy, gloom and brooding, in a society mostly unsuited to her:

Here she now resided, looking out upon the fragment of lawn in front, and through the railings at the ever-flowing traffic; or bending forward over the window-sill on the first floor, stretching her eyes far up and down the vista of sooty trees, hazy air, and drab house-façades, along which echoed the noises common to a suburban main thoroughfare. (407-8)

Her alienation, by class, by upbringing and education, from any social contact in this London suburb is accentuated by the fact that her mobility is limited by the result of an earlier accident; she cannot walk far. Her alienation is made worse by her memories of her

home, the aptly-named Gaymead; all through the story Sophy is torn and divided between her present urban setting and her nostalgic longing for her lost rural origin:

Her life became insupportably dreary; she could not take walks, and had no interest in going for drives, or indeed, in travelling anywhere. Nearly two years passed without an event, and still she looked on that suburban road, thinking of the village in which she had been born, and whether she would have gone back -- O how gladly -- even to work in the fields. (408)

The strain of the prolonged imprisonment of this "child of nature" (408), tells upon her nerves, so much so indeed that she becomes sleepless with anxiety and depression. Into her restlessness and frustration, Hardy brings the scene of the early morning procession of vehicles loaded with vegetables from the rural villages, being taken to Covent Garden market. The sleepless Sophy first glimpses the procession from her window. From a distance, the scene becomes panoramic, suggestive of the fertility of the countryside, and having a revitalizing effect on Sophy who finds in it "a sense of familiarity and home",²⁰ and whose tormented state is to be eased at this particular moment:

She often saw them creeping along at this silent and dusky hour -- wagon after wagon, bearing green bastions of cabbages nodding to their fall, yet never falling, walls of baskets enclosing masses of beans and peas, pyramids of snow-white turnips, swaying howdahs of mixed produce -- creeping along behind aged night horses, who seemed ever patiently wondering between their hollow coughs why they had always to work at that still hour when all other sentient creatures were privileged to rest. Wrapped in a cloak it was soothing to watch and sympathize with them when depression and nervousness hindered sleep, and to see how the fresh green-stuff brightened to life as it came opposite the lamp, and how the sweating animals steamed and shone with their miles of travel. (408-9)

The impact indicated in the passage is one of growth. Steadily the description transforms the "vacant thoroughfare" into a lively scene for Sophy (408). The vegetable carts with

20. Noorul Hasan, Thomas Hardy: The Sociological Imagination (London: Macmillan, 1982) 126.

their dense greenery become a life-giving rural element haunting the dreariness of both the setting and Sophy's nostalgic soul. Evocations of freshness, vivacity, tenderness and renewal emanate from "the fresh green-stuff", which "brightens to life as it comes opposite the lamp" (409) in the dawn and radiate upon Sophy's life. This touching and powerful portrait apparently had its origins in Hardy's own life. In a note of 7 July 1888, Hardy writes: "One o'clock a.m. I got out of bed, attracted by the never-ending procession [of market-carts to Covent Garden] as seen from our bedroom windows, Phillimore Place. Chains rattle, and each cart cracks under its weighty pyramid of vegetables".²¹ Although the note does not mention Hardy's emotional reaction to the carts, the feelings which resonate through the story suggest that Sophy's joy and renewal at these messages from the rural communities had its origin in her creator's own profound sense of restlessness in the anonymity of London.

Though the scene evokes in Sophy exhilarating recollections of the lovely idyllic world of Gaymead, the procession of carts emphasizes her sense of isolation, and nostalgia, particularly when the horses which "steamed and shone with their miles of travel" (409) remind her of her distance from Gaymead and of her own disability and inertia. Sophy is indeed trapped between two extremes arising from the same setting: the happy yet ephemeral view of the bucolic procession of the morning and the stifling view of the "empty wagons, hardly noticeable amid the ordinary day-traffic, passing down at some hour before noon" (409), reflecting the lonely tedium of this lonely widow.

Almost inevitably, Sophy's old flame, Sam Hobson from Gaymead, makes his

21. Life 210.

appearance, as he rides upon "a wagon-load of potatoes" (409), which forms a part of the daily idyllic procession. This ostensibly unromantic situation has, of course, a profound impact on Sophy. His close relatedness to the scene and what it evokes, evokes in Sophy, particularly in her "now dismal situation", a nostalgic reflection whether "life in a cottage with him would not have been a happier lot than the life she had accepted" (409), and evokes in her pangs of estrangement and homesickness. She tells Sam when they finally meet, "I long for home -- our home! I should like to be there, and never leave it, and die there" (410).

Temperamentally, Sam Hobson, too, belongs to the same rural setting, although he no longer lives at Gaymead; he has started a business "at Aldbrickham, the county-town of their native place" which sells fruits and vegetables, since he himself "did not care for London work" (412). In attempting to get Sophy out of her seclusion, Sam invites her to join him in travelling to Covent Garden. Sitting over the cabbages, and inhaling the country fresh air, revives Sophy; "the air and Sam's presence" not only reminds her of her homeland, but makes her feel at last that she has "something to live for in addition to her son" (411). As she explains to Sam, "I am so lonely in my house ... and this makes me so happy" (411). It is through Sam's short trips with Sophy that their old love that was born in Gaymead, is now resurrected in a suburban setting. The adamant refusal of her son, himself now training to be a priest, to countenance what he sees as a socially disastrous marriage thus brings Sophy to the point of breakdown. The once-vigorous love is now suffocated by snobbery, class consciousness, physical disability and renewed isolation.

Sophy's solitary confinement becomes all the more acute and her lameness becomes "more confirmed"; the dreary "southern thoroughfare" again projects her sense of

imprisonment (415). Unable to achieve her long-lost dream of returning to her motherland, and torn between two concepts of love (son and lover), Sophy is walled in once again in her semi-detached villa. Feeling isolated from her son, Randolph, who despite everything is still to her "a dear boy" (410), and from her former lover, Sophy lives, and ultimately dies, utterly alone; the son and the lover are the only witnesses of her funeral procession, the two men who have been the poles of her misery:

From the railway-station a funeral procession was seen approaching; it passed [Sam's door] and went out of the town towards the village of Gaymead. The man, whose eyes were wet, held his hat in his hand as the vehicles moved by; while from the mourning coach a young smooth-shaven priest in a high waistcoat looked black as a cloud at the shopkeeper standing there. (415)

Sophy's funeral procession, carries her back to her native village Gaymead. A peculiar affinity is now achieved between Sophy and her setting; an affinity denied in her lifetime is only achieved after death. Her interment occurs in the dear soil of her village, though her union with Sam is never achieved.

One crucial issue which Hardy originally intended throughout the story is the theme of alienation as stemming from the clash and contrast between country and city and the devastating effects of the latter upon a person, like himself, from the country. When Sophy is deracinated from the rural origin, she becomes isolated; her new setting, grey and impersonal, dramatizes her alienation. Sam Hobson, on the other hand retains his integrity and vitality in the several "worlds within worlds [of] the great city" (402), by his firm belief in, and deep association with, his rural origin. His daily intrusion into the world of the city with vegetable carts (albeit they are filled with unromantic potatoes and cabbages), life-giving resources, is a marked proof of his sense of success and adaptability; unlike

Sophy, his roots remain in the countryside. Thus, while Sophy degenerates in the city, Sam regenerates in and through a rural setting.

These were tensions which, as we have seen, had profound origins in Hardy himself. As his specific memory of the rural carts entering London, the germ of the story, indicates, Sophy's sense of rootlessness in the city, was one with which Hardy himself was all too familiar. He felt at first hand the way in which physical and spatial changes in England dramatized a deep change of life: "the advancing civilization of the city ... trivial and dehumanizing."²² As a writer who "communicates his vision of experience" by dint of "his visualising power",²³ Hardy manages resourcefully to delineate man's acute sense of physical and spiritual alienation through external descriptions of settings. It is through the power of place that Hardy's settings work themselves out in such a way as to thwart characters' attempt at belonging and communion, rendering their actions and activities insignificant and finally entailing their alienation. Hence, settings in Hardy are not merely a decorative; on the contrary, they become part of the unifying fabric of his stories.

22. Hasan 126.

23. David Cecil, Hardy the Novelist: An essay in Criticism (London: Constable 1943) 65.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Loneliness of Class-Consciousness

In his study of Thomas Hardy, Patrick Braybrooke points out how in Hardy's fiction individuals are caught up in "social laws which relegate people into the tightest watertight compartment".¹ The most difficult of social compartments to open, and from which to extricate oneself, in Hardy's society were those of class. It was a process with which Hardy struggled for much of his life, a struggle which is reflected over and over in his writing, was indeed a main creative impulse to that writing: how can an individual "rise" from his/her class origin? How can one move into another class? And above all, what is the price one pays emotionally and psychologically for uprooting oneself from one's class origin and what is the cost in terms of emotional vitality of being trapped in a class situation, and a set of class values, to which one does not ultimately subscribe? The cost so often in Hardy's fiction is a loss of personal authenticity and/or a failure to achieve happiness. The destructive effects of the class system, of "class deracination",² the loneliness of leaving one's own roots but failing to find a home in another part of society, is at the core of Hardy's fiction, and of the loneliness which haunts it. Attempts to alleviate that loneliness, in a love relationship across the barriers of class, seem repeatedly to be the source of more pain: either in the struggle to achieve the relationship or the disillusionment that arises from the failure of two people from different backgrounds ultimately to be able to come together because, at the deepest level of their emotional and sexual selves, their attitudes and their

1. Patrick Braybrooke, Thomas Hardy and his Philosophy (London: C.W. Daniel, 1928) 20.

2. Guerard, Thomas Hardy 19.

most fundamental impulses are conditioned by their class origin.

Hardy's acute sensitivity on matters of class, the emotional scar which underlies so much of his work, is evident in the careful way he disguises the true nature of his family and its origins in his autobiography. There was no way of disguising the fact that he did not come from an educated, genteel, middle-class family. So he constructs a myth of family decline from a more elevated social status:

The decline and fall of the Hardys much in evidence hereabout. An instance: Becky S.'s mother's sister married one of the Hardys of this branch, who was considered to have demeaned himself by the marriage. "All Woolcombe and Froom Quintin belonged to them at one time", Becky used to say proudly. She might have added Up-Sydling and Toller Welme. This particular couple had an enormous lot of children. I remember when young seeing the man -- tall and thin -- walking beside a horse and common spring trap, and my mother pointing him out to me and saying he represented what was once the leading branch of the family. So we get down, down, down.³

But the truth was very different. Rising "from very humble beginnings",⁴ Hardy's grandfather, John Hardy, made his first unassuming appearance at the village of Puddletown with "his mason's tools in a flask basket over his shoulder".⁵ Like his humble ancestors, the grandfather worked as a mason and later as a bricklayer, a calling in which Hardy's father later joined him. Indeed the father built up a small business and it is this commercial success that Hardy emphasizes in the Life, the establishment of an independent "master-masonry business".⁶

Given that his mother was such a dominant presence in Hardy's early life, it is

3. Life 214 - 15.

4. Gittings, Young Thomas Hardy 23.

5. Quoted in Millgate, A Biography 5.

6. Life 8.

striking that he deals with her background only "fleetingly".⁷ The reason for this evasiveness is again a matter of Hardy's anxiety about class origins, for his mother, Jemima Hand, had been brought up as a "pauper ... on parish relief".⁸ From this humble beginning, she had clearly made significant social progress, but this of course entailed a succession of jobs to which Hardy would certainly have not wished to draw attention:

[Jemima] had been a cook for the Reverend Charles Fox-Strangways at Maiden Newton, and had been a servant in other Dorset houses, including probably Kingston Maurward House in Thomas Hardy's own parish of Stinsford.⁹

Another fact, carefully concealed by Hardy from the respectable middle-class readership of his Life, is that his mother was some five-and-a-half months pregnant with Thomas when his parents were married:

Family tradition, characteristically emphasizing earthier aspects of the affair, has the young mason catching sight of the young servant woman while working on a near-by building and promptly seducing her under the bushes by the river Frome -- near the spot It was not until late in 1839, however, that she found herself pregnant. The marriage which was then arranged -- rather against the inclinations, so it is said, of both the contracting parties -- took place at Melbury Osmond on 22 December 1839, with Jemima's young sister Mary and her brother-in-law James Sparks as two witnesses.¹⁰

Unsurprisingly, the fact that the mother of his paternal grandmother, Mary Head (who was

7. T. R. Wright, Hardy and the Erotic (London: Macmillan, 1989) 24.

8. Gittings, Young Thomas Hardy 24.

9. Quoted in Gittings, 24.

10. Millgate, A Biography 15. Hardy's poem "A Church Romance" is a thinly-disguised version of the early romantic meeting of his parents. See Gibson 252.

called Mary Hopson Head), "gave birth to ... an illegitimate son",¹¹ is never mentioned in the Life. After the death of her parents, Mary Head (the grandmother) leaves her village of Fawley, and comes to live at Puddletown "where Hardy's grandfather seduced and then married her".¹² Indeed, Hardy's veiled reference to the fact that Mary Head's "memories of Fawley were so poignant that she never cared to return to the place after she had left it as a young girl",¹³ clearly reinforces the view that he was "haunted"¹⁴ by what he had learned about her and underlines his hypersensitivity towards even his more distant family ancestors. Illegitimacy, hurriedly-arranged marriages, and poor-relief: this was not the kind of background that Hardy wanted to advertise to his London literary friends, nor to his middle-class readership.

It is presumably Hardy's sense of social vulnerability, arising from this non-respectable background, that not only makes him acutely sensitive to issues of class difference but to attempt to compensate for it by "tracing" his family pedigree and carefully pointing out those "professional men" who are "remotely related to his mother",¹⁵ whereas immediate family members are more often than not overlooked. Similarly, and unsurprisingly, the Life is equally selective:

11. Quoted in Southerington, 243.

12. Gittings, Young Thomas Hardy 36.

13. Life 420.

14. Gittings, Young Thomas Hardy 36.

15. Gittings 18. For a detailed illustration in his original handwriting, see Millgate, A Biography 6-11, and the Hardy Pedigree 465.

He omits almost totally all his other close relatives, uncles, aunts, and very numerous cousins ... labourers, cobblers, bricklayers, carpenters, farm servants, journeyman joiners, butlers have no place in Hardy's memories, though he was related to all of these; nor, among women, do cooks, house-servants, ladies' maids or certificated teachers, regarded in the nineteenth century as little better than servants.¹⁶

One could, of course, see this as snobbishness but clearly, the issue is more profound, more intimate than this in Hardy's case and one can only speculate on the causal relationship between his background and the reticence, the impulse towards concealment, which was such a central element in Hardy's personality and his creative imagination. He tells Charles Kegan Paul in a letter of 18 April, 1881 "I have an opinion that the less people know of a writer's antecedents (till he is dead) the better".¹⁷ Even in his later life, this sense of social inferiority never forsakes him. In reply to the American painter, John White Alexander's demand to portray Hardy, the latter writes in 16 September 1886:

I could run up to Town for a day, if you are unable to leave; but what I suggest is that you come here and do it. This place is only a cottage in the country which I use for writing in, but we could make you comfortable for a couple of nights, and perhaps you might not object to a glimpse of this part of England -- though I am bound to say there is not much to see, from a sight-seer's point of view.¹⁸

Again, the tone is defensive, aware of the potential for condescension from those more used to life in "Town".

If these were Hardy's attitudes to his class origins in his mature, successful years, one can only imagine his caution in his early years in London, as he aimed to develop in his

16. Gittings, Young Thomas Hardy 18.

17. Collected Letters, Vol. 1 89.

18. Collected Letters, Vol. 1 152.

chosen profession as architect, proud of his social advancement and the way in which he was fulfilling his parents, especially his mother's, ambition for him. It is unsurprising, though, that when, after his early poetry began to focus the inner anxieties he felt in these early years in London, he turned to fiction, it was the tensions of class, the struggle with these "watertight compartments" that became his subject. The Poor Man and the Lady (1868) -- which Hardy could not get accepted by a publisher and which he cannibalized in some of the novels which followed -- is, very directly, concerned with the barriers erected between a young man, an architect called not 'Hardy' but 'Strong', who has a lower-class background, and his middle-class young lady. Indeed, Strong, rejected by his lover's father, becomes a socialist, and is seen giving a fiery speech on behalf of the socialists in Trafalgar Square (this some years before the 'Bloody Sunday' demonstration in the same Square in 1887). It was the novel's central issue of class, and the movement between classes that Hardy emphasized in the letter to Macmillan which accompanied his manuscript. He wrote the book, he tells the publisher for a number of reasons, and he lists them:

That the upper-classes of society have been induced to read, before any books in which they themselves are painted by a comparative outsider.

That in works of such a kind, unmitigated utterances of strong feeling against the class to which these readers belong may lead them to throw down a volume in disgust; whilst the very same feelings inserted edgewise to say; half concealed beneath ambiguous expressions, or at any rate written as if they were not the chief aims of the book (even though they may be) -- become the most attractive remarks of all.

That nowadays, discussion on the questions of manners, rising in the world, & C (the main incidents of the novel) have grown to be particularly absorbing.¹⁹

Hardy's love for, and subsequent marriage to, Emma Lavina Gifford very much sharpened his sensitivity about his origins. As the daughter of a solicitor, John Attersoll

19. Collected Letters, Vol. 1 7.

Gifford who "had the airs of what in those ultra class-conscious days was thought of a gentleman",²⁰ Emma Gifford was "unassailably genteel".²¹ Indeed, for the young man bent on "rising in the world" it is possible that her very gentility, the fact that she was so much more refined than the village girls with whom he had grown up, was part of her attraction to Hardy. Though the courtship ripened quickly, the awareness of class difference, of the precariousness of their relationship, is a crucial element in that relationship from the outset. It is this awareness, for example which presumably causes Hardy to write the following note, recording an anecdote told by Emma, on 9 August 1870:

E[mma]'s story of Miss R____, the aristocratic old lady in Cornwall whom she knows. When Miss R____ had fallen down in the street she was approached by some workmen to pick her up. 'How dare you think of touching me!' she exclaimed from the surface of the road. 'I am the Hon. Miss R____', and she would not allow them to help her to rise.²²

Hardy does not record, of course, his own feelings on this exhibition of female middle-class noli-me-tangere towards well-intentioned working-class males, though Evelyn Hardy's editorial comment is aware of the relevance of his recording the story:

This note shows us that Emma Gifford had a sense of humour which later deserted her, and that, only five months after meeting Hardy, she was telling him anecdotes which reflect his own awareness of social anomalies. Before their marriages Emma and her sister had taken posts as companion and governess in North Cornwall.²³

20. Seymour-Smith 106.

21. O'Sullivan 54.

22. Evelyn Hardy, ed., Thomas Hardy's Notebooks and some Letters from Julia Augusta Martin (London: The Hogarth P, 1955) 29-30.

23. Hardy, Thomas Hardy's Notebooks 30.

In the Life, Hardy states that the marriage occurred "with encouragement from all parties",²⁴ that is, from both families. Again the truth is very different, and the obfuscation revealing. The young architect, uncertainly making his way in the world, came immediately into painful and humiliating collision with the walls of these class compartments. One such dramatic collision is with Mr Gifford's obdurate response to Hardy's proposal:

John Gifford greeted his prospective son-in-law with open contempt: he is said to have referred to him in a later letter as a 'low-born churl who has presumed to marry into my family', and Hardy once glossed as 'Slander, or something of that sort' a reference (in the poem, 'I Rose and Went to Rou'tor Town') to the 'evil' done at Rou'tor Town, identifiable as Bodmin, not far from Rough Tor.²⁵

To be so refused, and in such humiliating terms, clearly must have made unbearably real Hardy's worst fears as to what might happen to him in middle-class circles and made him after his marriage, even more wary. Hardy's state of mind at this crass social snub, his hurt and despondency, is clearly reflected in a note of August 1872: "At Beeny Cliff ... green towards the land, blue-black towards the sea. Every ledge has a little, starved, green grass up on it: all vertical parts bare".²⁶

Marriage to the middle-class Emma, whatever the full nature of Hardy's complex attraction towards her, further uprooted him from his origins. Far from "encouragement from all parties", his family had not even met her by the occasion and none of his family attended the wedding in 1874, which took place in Paddington, far from Upper Bockhampton both in distance and in culture. Thus Hardy embarks upon marriage with

24. Life 74.

25. Quoted in Millgate, A Biography 142-43. (F. Dugdole to E. Clodd, 7 Mar 1913).

26. See Hardy, Thomas Hardy's Notebooks 38. "Near Lanivet" (1872) is among the poems of the period which reflects starkly Hardy's mood of depression.

Emma in a context of secrecy and self-division. Hardy presumably told the class-conscious Emma nothing of the humble nature of his family origins in Puddletown, "the cobblers, carpenters, labourers, and servants who were his relatives there".²⁷ Already in the intimacy of his marriage, he is playing a role, or at least being less than open as to his true nature, keeping a portion of himself secret, apart from his wife. Such a situation is clearly far from conducive to a happy, relaxed relationship. On 6 January 1886, he writes:

Misapprehension. The shrinking soul thinks its weak place is going to be laid bare, and shows its thought by a suddenly clipped manner. The other shrinking soul thinks the clipped manner of the first to be the result of its own weakness in some way, not of its strength, and shows its fear also by its constrained air! So they withdraw from each other and misunderstand.²⁸

At the same time, of course, he could never be at home again in any real sense at Upper Bockhampton. Hardy is, even more than by his career as architect and later, as writer, isolated by his marriage and, moreover, isolated in that marriage: away from his roots, but not fully "at home" with his wife, unable to be authentically himself. Indeed, by this point, Hardy was perhaps uncertain to what that self actually was, at least in social terms.

The shadows of the profound tensions of these years fall across much of Hardy's fiction; indeed a number of peculiarly recurrent formative patterns seem likely to have originated in these tensions. For example, one conspicuously reiterated figure in his fiction is that of the oppressively ambitious father figure; such figures are not unique to Hardy's fiction, of course, especially in the Victorian period. But they recur there with evident

27. Gittings, Young Thomas Hardy 196.

28. Life 177.

power and feeling, consistently ambitious for their daughters to progress, by marriage, to a social status usually above the family's present status, and equally consistently this means thwarting, often directly even brutally, the advances of a lower class suitor. The motif is present from the outset: in The Poor Man and the Lady, described by one critic as a "satire on the frivolity of the upper-class and its heedlessness of lower-class suffering",²⁹ Will Strong's courting of the middle-class Miss Allamount is firmly opposed by the father, who takes her away to London and arranges for her more socially-acceptable husband, despite her love for Strong. The novel ends tragically, with the death of the daughter and Strong's lifelong alienation. Again in "An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress" (1878), Egbert Mayne's aspirations to marry the aristocratic Geraldine Allenville are blocked on the presumption of his social unworthiness. An early conversation between Geraldine and her father, manifests the pressure on her tenuous liaison with Egbert as she carefully talks to her father:

"I said", she whispered, "suppose a man should love me very much, would you mind my being acquainted with him if he were a very worthy man?" "That depends on his rank and circumstances," he said. "Suppose", I said, "that in addition to his goodness he had much learning" and had made his name famous in the world, but was not altogether rich?" "When the time comes I will tell you", he said, "and don't speak or think of these matters again". (Indiscretion 78)

Another example of the failure of a happy sexual alliance, owing to paternal obstruction and interference comes in Under the Greenwood Tree. Placing the upward mobility and social distinction of his daughter, Fancy Day, above her happiness, the land agent Geoffrey Day directly snubs Dick Dewy, the son of a local carrier, harshly refusing his tentative proposal. Apparently Mr Day's carefully-planned education of Fancy, at some financial cost to

29. Harvey Curtis Webster, On A Darkling Plain (1947; London: Frank Cass, 1964) 74.

himself, is in the hope of getting her a titled husband, certainly not a carrier's son. As

Geoffrey Day explains obdurately to Dick:

if any gentleman who sees her to be his equal in polish, should want to marry her, and she want to marry him, he shan't be superior to her in pocket. Now do you think after this that you be good enough for her? "No." [says Dick].³⁰

As Dick sadly leaves this humiliating meeting, his plans unceremoniously pushed aside, even he realises the enormity of what he has suggested; in the face of Mr Day's reaction he himself wonders at "his presumption in asking for a woman whom he had seen from the beginning to be superior to him" (154), a profound feeling of social unworthiness and psychological insecurity initiated in him by the mercenary-minded and domineering father. The pattern is repeated in The Woodlanders, where the wood merchant, Melbury, has again at some cost, sent his daughter Grace away to be educated and polished in a good school, mainly with the view of catching a good husband, one higher than his own station. Interestingly, Melbury is aware that morally she should marry Giles Winterbourne, her childhood sweetheart:

But since I have educated her so well, and so long and so far above the level of the daughters hereabout, it is wasting her to give her to a man of no higher standing than her. (18)

When the well-educated, well-connected young Dr. Edred Fitzpiers shows interest in her, Melbury shows her off like a prize pony: "when you have that material it is sure to be worth while" (154), he says of his own investment in Grace's education. When Fitzpiers proposes, Melbury rushes to tell his wife as if they have won a fortune -- as in a sense they

30. Thomas Hardy, Under the Greenwood Tree, ed. Simon Gatrell (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985) 154. All future references are to this edition and will be included in the text.

have: "We've done it!" (156).

A Pair of Blue Eyes, a novel in which according to Evelyn Hardy, the novelist "for the first time ... dared to be himself, to state what he felt about life, death and the inevitable fate of his characters",³¹ was based perhaps more clearly than any of his other novels on events in his own life, specifically his courtship of Emma. In a letter of 24 July 1913, Hardy tells George Dewar that "the character of the heroine is somewhat -- indeed, rather largely -- that of my late wife, and the background of the tale the place where she lived".³² Clearly George Wing's assertion that Hardy's "early writings could not have been influenced by this union [Emma's] except optimistically and benevolently",³³ is an inexact and misleading view. Stephen Smith, the young architect's assistant and the son of a mason, develops a love for, and understanding with, Elfride Swancourt, the daughter of the incumbent of the parish church in Cornwall that Smith is restoring. Yet on account of his inferior birth, Swithin's advances and proposal to Elfride are rejected by her priggish, class-conscious father, Parson Swancourt. He is simultaneously desirous of a match that may benefit his daughter socially. After discovering Stephen's modest origins, Swancourt's dismissive rejection of his daughter's pathetic plea of being engaged to Stephen, at least "till he is a gentleman as good as you",³⁴ typifies the story's main motif:

31. Hardy, A Critical Biography 130.

32. Collected Letters, Vol. 4 288.

33. George Wing, Hardy (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1963) 13.

34. Thomas Hardy, A Pair of Blue Eyes, ed. Alan Manford (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985) 82. All future references are to this edition and will be included in the text.

He, a villager's son, and we, Swancourts, connections of the Luxellions Foh! A fine story. It is not enough that I have been deluded by having him here, -- the son of one of my village peasants, -- but now I am to make him my son-in-law! Heavens above us, are you mad Elfride He appeared a young man with well-to-do friends, and a little property; but having neither, he is another man". (82-3)

Relatedly, and interestingly, Hardy not only explores the impact of these class tensions on the young, lower-class man. A number of short stories examine the emotionally isolating effects on the daughters of parents' covetous concern for "social accomplishment, inherited wealth and title".³⁵ In "The Duchess of Hamptonshire" (GND), for example, a fervent understanding is born between Emmeline Oldbourne, the rector's daughter, and the handsome curate, Mr. Alwyn Hill. But this attachment is obstructed by the "over stiff and stern" curate father whose "severe white neckcloth, well-kept gray hair, and right-lined face betokened none of those sympathetic traits whereon depends so much of a parson's power to do good among his fellow-creatures" (341). Indeed, the father's dismissive rejection of Alwyn is coupled with his zealous approval of a rival marriage proposal from the Duke of Hamptonshire, a man of ancient lineage "which, before its ennoblement, had numbered many knightly and ecclesiastical celebrities in its male line" (340). Embittered in her unhappy marriage to the gruff Duke with his "graceless and unedifying pleasure" (340), Emmeline falls prey to grief and depression; her situation is as bleak and isolated as her previous life of "comparative solitude" (341). She behaves with none of the social confidence of her new class: on Sundays "she prayed earnestly in the great church-pew, where she sat lonely and insignificant as a mouse in a cell" (343). She is evidently paying a

35. Brady, The Short Stories of Thomas Hardy 53.

heavy price in terms of loss of natural feelings and creative life. This loss, the unnaturalness of her isolated position, is suggested when she meets secretly with her lover, Alwyn, in the shrubbery near the castle: "the two indistinct persons leapt together like a pair of dewdrops on a leaf; and then they stood apart, facing each other, the woman looking down" (343). Social propriety replaces natural impulse. And that propriety is implacably observed by Alwyn. He declines Emmeline's plea to elope with him to America, for the religious reason that "It is forbidden in God's law", and on account of the apparently unalterable fact that "you are the Duchess of Hamptonshire, the Duke of Hamptonshire's wife" (345); Alwyn manifests, in Hardy's eyes "his basic unworthiness", ³⁶ a resonant echo of the notions of propriety and shallow ethical and social beliefs of the society they lived in. Snubbed by Alwyn, Emmeline bitterly reviews her solitary fate:

Why has such a severe strain been put upon me? I was doing no harm, injuring no one, helping many people, and expecting happiness; yet trouble came. Can it be that God holds me in derision? I had no supporter -- I gave way; and now my life is a burden and shame to me O, if you only knew how much to me this request to you is -- how my life is wrapped up in it, you could not deny me! (344-45)

Victimised first by her over-ambitious father, who overlooked her spiritual welfare in favour of mercenary and mundane needs, and then oppressed by an over-righteous lover whose "moral perceptions are ... more socially conscious than hers", ³⁷ Emmeline ends up anonymously as an alien victim on board the ship in which Alwyn has sailed to Boston; she travels not first class as her rank would entitle her, but, because of her sudden flight and lack of cash, in "a common berth among the poorest emigrants" (350), amongst whom she

36. George Wing, "A Group of Noble Dames: Statuesque dynasties of delightful Wessex," Thomas Hardy Annual 5 (1987): 84.

37. Brady, The Short Stories of Thomas Hardy 81.

dies alone and unknown, and is buried at sea after a funeral officiated by the same perfidious lover who once refused her.³⁸

The anguish generated by parental pressures on children to marry where they do not love, usually for reasons of social advantage, is shown in many variations, the daughter in "The First Countess of Wessex" (GND), is caught between the rival wishes of father and mother; shut alone in her room, she is an emblem of the daughter-as-victim -- and on occasion Hardy even extrapolates the motif to show the pressure that sons might be under from parental marital ambition. One response to this situation is predictable, and again might be seen to have its origin in the painful and isolating situation which Hardy had himself experienced: the furtive marriage, in which the couple marry in isolation from, and in sad defiance of, parents who have impeded them. In "The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion" (WT), Phyllis Grove in her rural loneliness has fallen in love with the equally lonely German soldier, Matthäus Tina, despite her socially advantageous engagement to Humphrey Gould, a fashionable courtier, an engagement of which her father "highly approved" (37). Gould, having absented himself at court, returns to confess that he has in fact married another woman in defiance of his father:

Phyllis -- I'll tell you my secret at once; for I have a monstrous secret to confide before I can ask your counsel. The case is, then, that I am married: yes I have privately married a dear young belle; and if you know 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 parental idea as well as I -- and I have

38. Interestingly in 1882 (though peculiarly the story was first published in 1878), Hardy heard a story from a young curate about a charming woman who had invited him to her house. On inquiring about her, the servant surprisingly tells him "Why, Sir, you buried her this morning!" He found that amongst the many funerals of cholera victims he had conducted that day, as on every day, hers had been one". Unsurprisingly, for such a macabre irony would obviously have appealed to him, Hardy records it in his notebook. See Life 155.

kept it secret. There will be a terrible noise, no doubt; but I think that with your help I may get over it. (48)

Humphrey's father's thoughts on his son's previous engagement, to the very humble Phyllis, one can only image. But the tangle of loyalties -- Humphrey expects Phyllis to help him out, when he has betrayed her; she is relieved to be released from the betrothal because of her love of the German soldier -- is not untypical of the furtiveness which parental pressures cause in Hardy's fiction. Hardy's lovers from their different classes are caught in an isolated area between familiar class loyalties and find in clandestine alliances the only alternative left for them to consummate their pent-up emotions and sexual impulses. But there is no escaping society's stratification ultimately: the upper-class lady and her more humble lover are each of them the products of their class, inevitably conditioned emotionally and imaginatively by their class origin. Thus, the furtive marriage just as frequently results in a relationship that is uneasy or fractious, in which the couple are never able fully to come together.

In the short fiction, the title character in "Barbara of the House of Grebe" (GND) is the daughter of an ancient landed family, not only is her father a baronet -- his title created "a few years before the breaking out of the Civil War" (247) -- but her blood

through her mother, was compounded of the best juices of ancient baronial distillation, containing tinctures of Maundeville, and Mohun, and Syward, and Peverell, and Culliford, and Talbot, and Plantagenet, and York, and Lancaster, and God knows what besides, which it was a thousand pities to throw away. (251-52)

Barbara and her lover, however, care "no more about their blood than about ditch-water" (252). She marries without her parents' permission a young man from a nearby village, Edmund Willowes, a name which firmly associates him with his rural origins; he is "a widow-woman's son" whose father or grandfather "was the last of the old glass-painters in

that place where ... the art lingered on when it had died out in every other part of England" (250). In other words, like Hardy, he is a man of very humble background, whose father and grandfather were practitioners of an ancient craft, but labourers just the same as far as the lover's parents are concerned. For all that, as they discover that "an ancestor of the plebeian Willowes was once honoured with intermarriage with a scion of the aristocracy who had gone to the dogs" (252). (Again one remembers Hardy's version of his own family as one that had gone "down, down, down".) The furtive marriage is quite clearly based, again, on emotional and sexual attraction, rather than any connection of mind; Edmund "was, indeed, one of the handsomest men who ever set his lips on a maid's. A blue coat, murrey waistcoat, and breeches of drab set off a figure that could scarcely be surpassed" (253).

Again, however, the furtive, inter-class marriage is a fragile thing; the couple, although there is some accommodation made by her family -- we never hear about his -- are not able to enter society together. The house in which they are to live stands "on a slope so solitary, and surrounded by trees so dense, that the birds who inhabited the boughs sang at strange hours, as if they hardly could distinguish night from day" (255). While Barbara tells her parents brightly that "We can put up with the loneliness Some friends will come, no doubt" (254), her impulsive love towards this man from a very different background to hers very rapidly cools, especially in the time he is away, sent off to get the social polish that the Grand Tour might give: "she sighed sometimes -- her husband being no longer in evidence to fortify her in her choice of him -- and timidly dreaded what mortification might be in store for her by reason of this mésalliance" (254-55).

Barbara is portrayed as a young woman of far less integrity than her husband; while he is "an honest fellow, and the son of an honest father" (251), a young man who is willing and able to be apart from his wife for a time in order to be educated to be worthy of her, she, however, is less fixed in her feelings. Hardy is quite aware, as in all his fiction, that "humans hearts are as prone to change as the leaves of the creeper on the wall" (264). In particular, Barbara's "was essentially one of those sweet-pea or with-wind natures which require a twig of stouter fibre than its own to hang up on and bloom" (265). Again we notice the natural imagery; beneath the artifice of social class, humans are still in the grip of such natural impulses. Even before Willowes' return, she is drawn to Lord Uplandtowers; the hideous scarring which Willowes' face receives in a fire while abroad acts in a way as an emblem for the distance which is always between them, her growing awareness that the furtive marriage was a terrible mistake. And of course the one thing for which she did marry him - - his good looks -- has been destroyed.

The episode which follows, during her marriage to Lord Uplandtowers, is an extraordinary one: her use of the statue of the unscarred Willowes as a focus for her displaced sexual impulses which have no outlet in her marriage (269) and the defacing of the statue by her husband to show the scarred, deformed actuality, results in her being, effectively, psychologically tortured into submission by her second husband; he brainwashes her into "loving" him (274). The furtive marriage between classes triggers off a sequence of events which results in Barbara being destroyed as an individual, trapped in a lonely destructive marriage which is portrayed in positively gothic intensity.

A less horrific, more poignant fate awaits the couple who undertake a furtive marriage in "The Son's Veto" (LLI). Here, slightly unusually, it is the woman who is of

lower-class origin and the setting is more contemporary and realistic than in "Barbara of the House of Grebe": here we have again the social gradation of Victorian society. But those gradations still result in the marriage being one of deracination and waste for, we notice, the lower-class partner who has her origins in a Wessex village family. Although she has an understanding with a humble young man in the village Sam Hobson, Sophy's nursing of the widowed vicar, Mr. Twycott, for whom she works as a parlour maid, causes the respectable but lonely middle-class man to fall in love with her. From the outset Sophy's feelings for Mr. Twycott are not ones of passion. She has none of the natural feelings that she has for Sam Hobson; she has only feelings of "respect for [Mr. Twycott] which almost amounted to veneration" (406). She is acutely aware, however, of what an advantageous match it would be; she "hardly dared refuse a personage so reverend and august in her eyes" (406) and accepts his proposal. But, once again, the character of higher social status is acutely aware of the fact that his feelings are socially transgressive. Although Sophy is of "spotless character", Mr. Twycott knows that for a vicar to marry a parlour maid is an inexcusable "social" (406) sin; the couple cannot, he realises, continue to live in Gaymead, where the social status of the two of them is known to all, so he opts for the "domestic privacy" (407), which they can find in the relative anonymity of London, a place that is far "away from every one who (has) known her former position" (406). But there is inevitably a price to be paid; in leaving Gaymead Sophy is deracinated from her natural community, only to succumb to the emptiness and ennui of the city life in which she has only the unaccustomed routines of the middle-class wife:

She really [has] nothing to occupy her ... but to eat and drink, and make a business of indolence, and go on weaving and coiling the nut-brown hair, merely keeping a home open for the son whenever he came to her during vacations. (407)

Her upward mobility deprives her of a happy life, her life becomes inauthentic, unnatural. After the death of her husband, the appearance of her old flame, Sam Hobson, with his vegetable cart piled high with the natural products of the countryside, revives in her a happy prospect of a return to Gaymead. But this hope is again stifled by the obstruction of her son who, by this point has himself become a priest. Acutely aware of his social status, the son denies Sophy the simple right to live happily. Thus, the shattering of her dreams and her ultimate alienation seem to be the emotional price which she ultimately pays for the false social aspiration, which she early shows by the acceptance of a furtive marriage.

Marriage across class seems inescapably, then, to lead to a union which, however joyous might have been the initial impulses which brought the couple together, causes tensions which gradually but implacably subvert these natural impulses, isolating and alienating husband and wife. The poem "A Poor Man and a Lady" is a good example. The narrator, the poor man, and his lover, "a comely woman of noble kith," pledge their love (again secretly):

We knew it was not a valid thing,
And only sanct in the sight of God
(To use your phrase), as with fervent nod
You swore your assent when I placed the ring
On your pale slim hand. ³⁹

But the love of the socially-ambitious young woman towards her humble lover, a man who is "a striver with deeds to do,/And little enough to do with them," eventually cools: "Our 'union', as we called it, grew/Less grave to your eyes in your town campaigns" and she marries more advantageously. They meet just once more "alone" in a London church. She

39. Gibson 402.

makes clear that she no longer feels bound to the man. Ultimately left alone, the narrator realises that "no one knew, unless it was God". But he, too, of course, knows and evidently still feels the isolating effect of the episode.

If the isolating effects of crass class relationships, coupled with the estranging effects of furtive, secret marriages, are a recurring feature of Hardy's fiction, marriage itself is rarely a happy experience, even when the tensions from class difference are not central. Marriage itself it would seem is, for Hardy, too often an isolating and estranging relationship, trapping the couple rather than bringing them together; again these were painful tensions with which Hardy was all too familiar. On occasion the man escapes the trap; in the poem "Outside the Window", the protagonist returns to his beloved's house to collect the stick he has inadvertently left behind and sees "the girl of his choice", supposedly so soft and loving, in an altogether different light as she

Stands rating her mother with eyes aglare
For something said while he was there.

'At last I behold her soul undraped!'
Thinks the man who had loved her more than himself;
'My God! -- 'tis but narrowly I have escaped ...'⁴⁰

But more often romantic love, natural human impulse, however short-lived, not only blinds the individual from true knowledge of his/her partner, but once married, given Victorian divorce laws, the trap closes on those natural impulses, painfully constraining and distorting individual feeling. The most celebrated case, in the novel where Hardy finally confronts the mechanisms of Victorian marital laws and conventions, sees Jude's impulses -- and his conventional sense of humour -- trapping him in marriage with Arabella: when on one

40. See Gibson 419.

occasion Arabella tosses Jude's books, the emblem of now-impossible ambition, on the ground, smearing them with hot grease, emblematic of the physical and animal associations always given to Arabella, Jude reflects (with, given the books' themes, authorial endorsement) that "this matrimonial union" had been a "fundamental error" (69). Again, in the story "Interlopers at the Knap" (WT), Darton's fatalistic belief that "Hanging and wiving go by destiny" (126), seems to reflect in part Hardy's view on marriage. Similarly in "The Spectre of the Real", Jim explains to Rosalys, "We must philosophically look on the marriage as an awkward fact in our lives" and that it be "a sordid matrimonial knot". Relatedly Rosalys retorts "It will be well to forget this tragedy of our lives" (196).

Perhaps exacerbated by "the solitariness of [his] marriage", ⁴¹ Hardy's class sensitivities, his sense of vulnerability and isolation, seem to have been especially raw in the 1880s. Wounded badly by Charles Kegan Paul's (not necessarily critical) reference to him in the British Quarterly Review, in April 1881, as having "sprung of a race of labouring men", ⁴² the pride-stricken Hardy writes to him in 18 April 1881 that

[M]y father is one of the last of the old "master-masons" left -- anywhere in England, I should think -- the modern "builders & contractors" having obliterated them. From time immemorial -- I can speak from certain knowledge of four generations -- my direct ancestors have all been master-masons, with a set of journeymen masons under them: though they have never risen above this level, they have never sunk below it -- i.e. they have never been journeymen themselves. ⁴³

The letter makes uncomfortable reading, not only because of the evident rawness out of

41. John Bayley, An Essay on Hardy (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1978) 43.

42. Quoted in Millgate, A Biography 202.

43. Collected letters, Vol. 1 89.

which Hardy writes, but also because of the vulnerable naivety that it reveals: did Hardy really think that Kegan Paul was going to be impressed that Hardy's immediate ancestors were "master-masons" rather than "journeymen"? Did he think that the elegant London publisher was going to bother with such fine distinctions between the labouring classes rather than see the information as simply confirming his assertion that Hardy was came of "labouring men".

The other side of this painful alienation from the world in which he moved as an increasingly successful writer and public figure is the occasionally vigorous satiric perspective Hardy has on that society. On 8 July 1888 he observes

A service at St Mary Abbots, Kensington. The red plumes and ribbon in two stylish girls' hats in the foreground match the red robes of the persons round Christ on the Cross in the east window. The pale crucified figure rises up from a parterre of London bonnets and artificial hair-coils, as viewed from the back where I am Where the congregation rises there is a rustling of silks like that of the Devil's wings in Paradise Lost. Every woman then, even if she had forgotten it before, has a single thought to the folds of her clothes. They pray in the litany as if under enchantment. Their real life is spinning on beneath this apparent one of calm, like the District Railway-trains underground just by -- throbbing, rushing, hot, concerned with next week, last week Could these true scenes in which this congregation is living be brought into church bodily with the parsonages, there would be a churchful of jostling phantasmagories crowded like a heap of soap bubbles, infinitely intersecting, but each seeing his own Through this bizarre world of thought circulates the recitative of the parson -- a thin solitary note without cadence or change of intensity -- and getting lost like a bee in the clerestory.⁴⁴

Hardy's scorn for this fashionable congregation is evident; it is a world away from the sense of community, and of actual belief, of the congregation at Stinsford church.

But, of course, his alienation was not merely from the outer forms and fashions of the middle-class society, but, increasingly, from its moral taboos, "the watertight

44. Life 210-11.

compartments" of emotional and sexual behaviour by which the middle and upper classes demarcated themselves from those below them. Increasingly the moral values of "respectable" society, values which were becoming even more tightly delineated as the century wore on, were seen by Hardy as reductive of human potential, as constraining and distorting natural authentic human impulse. In 1893, he writes to the editor of the Parisian paper L'Ermitage:

I consider a social system based on individual spontaneity to promise better for happiness than a curbed and uniform one under which all temperaments are bound to shape themselves to a single pattern of living. To this end I would have society divided into groups of temperaments with a different code of observances for each group.⁴⁵

But such a vision of society, various groups tolerant and uncoercive of others, was, of course, a world away from the actuality of the Victorian England in which Hardy lived and wrote. His fiction, especially in the 1890s, beat with increasing disillusionment on the walls of the codes of his time, with the effect of aggravating his alienation from that world.

As Hardy was all too aware, it was amongst those who were at the edges of the middle classes, those who were aspiring towards a secure place within the pale of respectability and gentility, that the most acute sensitivity towards nuances of class differences existed, within that region of social mobility to which Hardy was himself all too sensitively attuned. He is also consistently aware of the potential for division within families, of alienation from secure roots, that such pretensions contained. Such attitudes are even visible in Hardy's sunniest novels, set in the relatively stable world of the Wessex of Hardy's youth. When Fancy Day marries Dick Dewy, she is not sure whether it is quite

45. Life 258.

respectable to follow the country custom and process with the wedding party around the parish. As she explains "I never can make a show of myself in that way! Respectable people don't nowadays" (188-89). That "nowadays" is revealing. Fancy is as aware as her creator that society is changing, that middle-class notions of behaviour are replacing the old traditions.

Her husband's family, owners of a small business, with aspirations towards a place within the Victorian, capitalist middle-classes, also put much emphasis upon their social appearances in the eyes of the others, and the way other social dignitaries would look at them. These are probably echoes of Hardy's mother's attitudes and ambitions in the portrayal of Mrs. Dewy. She says "Such a man as Dewy is! Nobody do know the trouble I have to keep that man barely respectable" (59). Mr. Dewy appears uncomfortably in Fancy's wedding procession with incongruous, huge gloves, as a "half-mark of respectability having been set upon himself ... (by Fancy's request) for the first time in his life" (190).

Again set in a country town, The Mayor of Casterbridge, reflects urban notions of respectability and what is to be genteel as a point of reference: Elizabeth Jane is another upwardly mobile young lady. She wants to become "better" (97). Moreover, she is not happy for her mother to talk to the firmity-woman: "Don't speak to her -- it isn't respectable!" (23). They worry about the respectability of the hotel, they are going to stay in. First Elizabeth asks the waiter "can ye tell me of a respectable hotel that's a little more moderate than this" (39). Then, a little later she tells her mother "let's go where the young man has gone to He is respectable" (41). Even earlier in the novel, when Elizabeth Jane sees Henchard for the first time at the head of a dinner table whose seating plan is carefully planned according to rank, she says "What a gentleman he is, isn't he?" (35).

In 1882, Hardy writes in the Life, he

was told a story ... of a girl ... who had been betrayed and deserted by a lover. She kept her child by her own exertions, and lived bravely and throve The young woman's conduct in not caring to be 'made respectable' won the novelist-poet's admiration The eminently modern idea embodied in this example -- of a woman's not becoming necessarily the chattel and slave of her seducer -- impressed Hardy as being one of the first glimmers of woman's enfranchisement; and he made use of it in succeeding years in more than one case in his fiction and verse. ⁴⁶

It would seem likely that "For Conscience' Sake" (LLI) is one such case; here the woman seduced and left pregnant by Mr. Millborne over twenty years previously has struggled and succeeded in bringing up her daughter. The important theme developed from the anecdotal 'germ' in this case is her having made herself "respectable", and the perilous nature of that respectability, especially for a woman, in such a class-conscious society. Once again the pressures of class result in isolation, vulnerability and loneliness.

Mr. Millborne, now middle-aged, formerly in banking but now living comfortably in London on a considerable income left him by his solicitor father, cannot forget the girl he jilted years ago in Wessex after promising her marriage and taking "advantage of [that] promise" (417). At the outset, as he tells his doctor, he is "a lonely man You don't know such loneliness as mine And the older I get the more I am dissatisfied with myself" (471). At the root of his loneliness is a sense of his having been dishonourable; he has no desire for marriage as such, nor any especial feelings left for the girl, Leonara: "I am a bachelor by nature, and instinct, and habit, and everything" (419). His unease, his gnawing restlessness is a matter of conscience, less a sense of evil in a spiritual sense than a sense that he needs

46. Life 157.

"to recover my sense of being a man of honour" (419); that is, he feels socially inauthentic, that beneath his veneer of comfortable middle-class bachelorhood, he is not wholly worthy of respect.

Twenty years ago Leonora was, a "decent, worthy young woman", of a lower social class than Mr. Millborne. And "[h]er position at the time of our acquaintance was not so good as mine she was a young girl in a music-shop; and it was represented to me that it would be beneath my position to marry her" (418). But when Millborne returns to Wessex to see her and put right -- "for conscience' sake" -- the wrong he has done her, Leonora has built up a business as a dancing teacher and she and her daughter are respectably middle-class:

He learned that the widow, Mrs. Frankland, with her one daughter, Frances, was of cheerful and excellent repute, energetic and painstaking with her pupils, of whom she had a good many, and in whose tuition her daughter assisted her. She was quite a recognised townswoman, and though the dancing branch of her profession was perhaps a trifle worldly, she was really a serious minded lady who being obliged to live by what she knew how to teach, balanced matters by lending a hand at charitable bazaars, assisting at sacred concerts, and giving musical recitations in aid of funds for bewildering happy savages, and other such enthusiasms of this enlightened country. Her daughter was one of the foremost of the bevy of young women who decorated the churches at Easter and Christmas, was organist in one of those edifices, and had subscribed to the testimonial of a silver broth-basin that was presented to the Reverend Mr. Walker as a token of gratitude for his faithful and arduous intonations of six months as sub-precentor in the Cathedral. Altogether mother and daughter appeared to be a typical and innocent pair among the genteel citizens of Exonbury. (420)

It is at the same time a highly class-conscious town. Leonora's dancing school for young ladies is still "perhaps a trifle worldly" for the local citizens but she is respectable. She is certainly not going to have her position and the chance of social advancement for her daughter jeopardised by the possibility of marriage to Millborne, for the sake of his conscience revealing, in the process, past events:

My position in this town is a respected one, I have built it up by my own hard labours, and in short, I don't wish to alter it. My daughter too, is just on the verge of an engagement to be married, to a young man who will make her an excellent husband. It will be in every way a desirable match for her. (422)

The social vulnerability of Leonora and her daughter Frances, the fragility of their own respectability, is underlined by the fact that, again, their "vocation", as Leonora carefully calls it (424), has been a source of objection to the marriage on the part of some of the friends of the fastidious young curate, Reverend Percival Cope, who is Frances' fiancé. Millborne exploits this situation with Leonora "Your marriage with me would help the match, instead of hindering it [B]y taking you out of this business together" (424).

Though moving to London is at first instance for these two women a "social lift" (424), they soon feel deracinated at being away from their beloved Exonbury. That the Millbornes, together with Rev. Cope, decide to sail in a yacht, further complicates the matters for both women. For one thing, the pallor of their seasickness causes Cope to detect an unexpected facial similarity between Frances and Millborne, a similarity which fills Cope's heart with suspicion. Being thin-skinned and fastidious, the curate delays further communication with Frances for the priggish reason that her family's "past had contained mysteries" (426). Having been informed of Cope's doubts, predicting then and there signs of failure of this socially-promising marriage, Leonora's grief is immediately less for her daughter's feelings than for her social prospects; she exclaims to Millborne:

Why did you come and disturb my life a second time? She harshly asked, 'Why did you pester me with your conscience, till I was driven to accept you to get rid of your importunity? Frances and I were doing well: the one desire of my life was that she should marry that good young man. And now the match is broken off by your cruel interference! Why did you show yourself in my world again, and raise this scandal upon my hard-won respectability -- won by such weary years of labour as none will ever know! She bent her face upon the table and wept passionately (427).

When Leonora reveals to her daughter the long-hidden secret of the nature of her relationship with Millborne, Frances is embittered by "a flush of mortification ... [and] shame" (428). Reprimanded both by his daughter, who regards him as a man who "has blighted my life for ever", and chided vehemently by Leonora who regards him "an unmitigated curse" (428) for his intrusion into their respectable lives, Millborne takes them back to Ivell in Wessex, where he rents for them a little manor-house. In his attempt to soothe and rectify his error, Millborne also bestows them a considerable property and a large annuity. Indeed, the reappearance of Mr Cope within the life of Frances, and his abrupt abandonment from scruples and doubts is highly ironic. It is on account of Frances' new wealth, and her being nouveau riche that he now "resume[s] the manner of a lover" (430). He is clearly a hypocrite who is not only happy that Frances and her mother have come to live so near him (in Ivell), but also deep down "(though he did not say this) [that they] meant to live in such excellent style" (430). Frances and Millborne ultimately marry and succumb to a life based as much, one feels, on their each satisfying the others' sense of what is socially satisfactory than on any profound feelings of love.

Millborne ends where he began: alone in solitary lodgings. In fact, in many respects he is worse off than at the beginning; not only is he living abroad, in Brussels and under an assumed name, but he has failed to redeem his past actions (in other than purely material terms). At the end he is alone with his guilt. The aptly-evocative image of Antigone (as a victim of familial duty and conscience) underlines the intensity of Millborne's predicament as a man who "by honourable observance of a rite, he had obtained for himself the reward of dishonourable laxity" (430).

"Enter a Dragoon" (CM) is another tale which reflects Hardy's preoccupation with respectability, and the adaptation of false notions of social acceptability that finally entails the heroine's isolation. Like Anton Tchekov's The Cherry Orchard, which opens with the nursery, denoting the missing hopes and wistful dreams of Madame Ranevsky's family, "Enter a Dragoon" begins with the portrayal of the "doomed house". By portraying this lonely "cottage-residence" with its "hollow rooms ... cracked walls and sloping floor" as a sustained and dominant image, Hardy introduces an overture to the unfolding tragic drama of Selina Paddock. But whereas Tchekov's masterpiece ends with the departure of the family and the axes' sounds cutting and uprooting the trees of the orchard, Hardy's story begins with the acute sense of emblematic uprootedness and discontinuity:

For some years before this eve of demolition the homestead had degenerated, and had been divided into two tenements to serve as cottages for farm labourers; but in its prime it had indisputable claim to be considered neat, pretty, and genteel. (675)

Again, the cottage is the site of a painful drama based ultimately on class and a perception of respectability. The precise social status of the Paddock family, unusually, is not made clear. But it is clear that they are comfortably off, and that the fact that the man Selina Paddock wishes to marry is merely a sergeant in the army is, in their eyes, sufficient to cause hesitation; her father "wished her to do better" (676). When the marriage plans do go ahead, Selina, very much her family's daughter, needs to have things done properly: the banns must be called three times at the local church. When the sergeant is called off to the Crimea before the three callings have been, they made no attempt to get a special licence. The decision is made "that it would be unwise to solemnize matrimony in such haphazard circumstances" (678). The sergeant, John Clark, is supposedly killed in the Crimea; Selina, almost inevitably, is left pregnant. Embittered after the departure and the news of John's

apparent death, Selina attempts desperately to protect her social dignity. That is why she keeps "a great plum-cake" which was

intended in earlier days for the wedding-feast of [herself] and the soldier ... [it] had been religiously and lovingly preserved ... as a testimony to her intentional respectability in spite of an untoward subsequent circumstance (678)

Three years later, at the very point at which Selina is to marry the "rubicund ... master-mechanic" (679), Bartholomew Miller, a financially-secure wheelwright, Clark returns now a Sergeant-Major; his intention "to finish the wedding" (679) in a socially acceptable way is taken as evidence that he "meant honourable enough" (676), and of course he now has social status in advance of the worthy rural craftsman, Miller. Marrying the father of her child also seems, to Selina, to be "right", to make her respectable. By keeping and showing John Clark "the sort of withered corpse" of their wedding cake and the "muslin gown, which ... meant to grace her as a bride three years before" (685), Selina ardently means to underline her social dignity in the face of any social stigma. But again, this very act reveals her hypersensitivity and vulnerability; this is a society where reputation matters, as the public attention paid to the goings-on in the Paddock house on the day of Clark's return shows.

When Clark dies suddenly, before the planned marriage, Selina puts on the widow's weeds which she deems to be appropriate; she sees herself as a widow, having "a moral relationship" to Clark "which she asserted to be only not a legal one by two most unexpected accidents" (689). The gesture is also an expression of grief at her social loss, a lament for "[h]er narrow miss of the recovered respectability they had hoped for" (689). Feeling that she is "John's widow in the eyes of Heaven" (690) gives her, in part, the moral stamina and emotional fulfilment which enables her to confront her neighbours, who despite

their full knowledge that she and John have "just going to be married -- and that [she] belonged to him" (679), don't spare her from their humiliating gossip as they relentlessly "indulge in sarcasm at her expense whenever they behold her attire" (689).

Now believing herself to be "Mrs. John Clark", Selina departs from her homeland and sets up a fruit and vegetable business near Ivell -- again, like Leonora, she resiliently asserts her independence and, again, having achieved a certain modest social status, she declines the second proposal of Mr. Miller, the only man who loves her and her son truly. Selina's imaginary widowhood takes a more intimate shape by her regular attendance to the grave of her deceased sergeant.

In her illusion, the embittered Selina enters the churchyard one day, only (to her surprise) to encounter Clark's "respectable widow" (692), a woman whom he had married on his way back from the Crimea. While revealing this ominous secret to Selina, John's real wife, who is referred to as a "legitimate widow" (692), ends the story on a sardonically emblematic note: she removes with the tip of her parasol, the ivy-roots Selina had planted on John Clark's grave, saying "I am sorry I pulled up your ivy-roots; but that common sort of ivy is considered a weed in my part of the country" (693). Indeed, this emblematically-ironic scene typifies Selina's social vulnerability and alienation, in contrast to the self-confident legal wife, who triumphantly tells Selina: "I am the only Mrs. John Clark, widow of the late Sergeant-Major of Dragoons, and this is, his only son and heir" (692).⁴⁷

47. This highly ironic situation between the two women at the graveside reminds us of the squabbling mothers over the graves of their dead sons in his sardonic poem "In the Cemetery", in much the same way as the pulling up of Selina's ivy recalls to the mind the famous gargoyle's scene and the devastation of Troy's flowers and hopes over Fanny Robin's grave. See Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, ed. Suzanne B. Falck-Yi (1874: Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993). All future references are to this edition and will be included in the text.

Again, the character's concern with social status leaves her ultimately and desperately isolated, not only from the man who would marry her, but from her family and home, uncomforted now even by the memory of the sincerity of her lost lover.

At one point in "Enter a Dragoon" Sergeant-Major Clark enters the house before Miller, the wheelwright can leave; Miller is discomforted and in his anxiety forgets to maintain the formal social registers appropriate to the house of his prospective in-laws: "Danged if I bain't caught!" murmured Mr. Miller, forgetting company-speech"(681). Hardy, given his own social movement from humble rural origin to London society, is acutely aware of speech habits and varied linguistic repertoire mainly as a means of bodying forth the educational and cultural difference between classes, origins and regions. Respectability is manifested in the way people speak, and those characters who are anxious about class status are also, inevitably, concerned about speech as class markers. For instance in Under the Greenwood Tree, Mrs. Dewy comments on Mr. Dewy's use of the word "taties", a rural form which she sees as non-standard and non-respectable. The use of this form is a thing "I was never brought up to. With our family 'twas never less than 'taters', and very often 'pertatoes outright'" (60). Fancy Day, similarly, asks her father and the tranter "to avoid saying "thee" and "thou" in their conversation, on the plea that those ancient words sounded so very humiliating to persons of newer taste" (193). Again, in Tess of the d'Urbervilles, Tess's education is in many respects her hamartia, her tragic flaw; she is a girl who no longer speaks "the dialect" (26). In The Mayor of Casterbridge, after Henchard reveals to Elizabeth Jane that he is her father, he simultaneously becomes desperately anxious that she be a respectable and accomplished lady. Little wonder then that he constantly criticises her speech habits. Indeed, this criticism turns into fury at

Elizabeth Jane's "use of dialect words -- those terrible marks of the beast to the truly genteel" (130). For example, at one time, she wishes to show Henchard something, then she says "If you'll bide where you be a minute, father, I'll get it", a non-respectable form of speech according to Henchard, who retorts reproachfully: "Bide where you be! '.... Good God, are you only fit to carry wash to a pig-trough, that ye use such words as those?" (130). Gradually, this and similar scourging censures have left their impact on the girl's speech, as Hardy explicitly tells the reader:

The sharp reprimand was not lost upon her, and in time it came to pass that for "fay" she said "succeed"; that she no longer spoke of "dumbledores" but of "humble bees"; no longer said of young men and women that they "walked together," but they were "engaged"; that she grew to talk of "greggles" as "wild hyacinth"; that when she had not slept she did not quaintly tell the servants next morning that she had been "hag-rid," but she had "suffered from indigestion." (130)

At another occasion Henchard asks Elizabeth Jane to write an agreement between himself and another gentleman. When she, contrary to his fussy expectation of her, scribbles "a line of chain-shot and sand-bags", he becomes once again exacting and vitriolic about what he deems "unladylike" handwriting. He angrily tells her "Never mind -- I'll finish it" (131).

The sense of the social role-playing which some of the characters must undertake is underlined by the way in which they must master more than one register. We have already noticed Bartholomew Miller being surprised into the wrong register in "Enter a Dragoon"; he must make a conscious effort to speak correctly with Selina's parents. In "The Honourable Laura" (CM), the hotel waiter, well-practised in the register with which he must speak to "the well-behaved visitors" (353) during the tourist season, can during the idleness of the dreary winter at the beginning of the story, lapse back into "talking the local dialect in all its purity" (353). Again, we notice dialect is perceived as natural and authentic.

Indeed, for Hardy, it seems, loss of authenticity is the price one pays for social advancement. To join the respectable circles of the middle-class and, even more, the sophisticated circles of the fashionable, one must acquire a whole range of outward procedures and behaviour. For it is appearance that matters, the show not the substance. Propriety replaces sincerity, and natural impulse and natural taste are sacrificed to artifice. So often in Hardy's fiction being respectable, being a gentleman is a matter of manners not morality, a polish that can be acquired; this is certainly, for example, the view of Elfride's father in A Pair of Blue Eyes:

anybody can be what you call graceful, if he lives a little time in a city, and keeps his eyes open. And he might have picked up his gentlemanliness by going to the galleries of theatres, and watching stage drawing-room manners. (91)

Again, Mr. Swancourt's reasons for refusing Stephen, confirm Walter E. Houghton's words that "when ... respectability combined to make gentility the goal of existence, the phenomenon of snobbery was pervasive".⁴⁸ As Swancourt explains to Elfride:

Yes I was inclined to suspect him, because he did not care about sauces of any kind. I always did doubt man's being a gentleman if his palate had no acquired taste. (83)

To be genuine, to be authentic, on the other hand, is to strip off the constraints and formalities of behaviour that the middle class deems to be markers of respectability and "good breeding". When Angel Clare returns home to tell his family about his proposed marriage to Tess, the genteel family of clergymen notice a difference in him; Angel has already begun to be more natural, more unrestrained:

48. Walter R. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind (New Haven: Yale UP, 1957) 188.

It was chiefly a difference in his manner that they noticed just now He was getting to behave like a farmer, he flung his legs about; the muscles of his face had grown more expressive; his eyes looked as much information as his tongue spoke, and more. The manner of the scholar had nearly disappear; still more the manner of the drawing-room young man. A prig would have said that he had lost culture, and a prude that he had become coarse. Such was the contagion of domiciliary fellowship with the Talbothays nymphs and swains. (162)

When Angel Clare confronts his parents with his inclination of marriage, the first thing his priggish father inquires about is "Is she of a family such as you would care to marry into -- a lady, in short?" and when Angel answers, that his choice is "a cottager's daughter" his father responds snobbishly "Mercy Chant is of a very good family" (166). In the Woodlanders, it is Giles, of course, who is the natural man:

He looked and smelt like Autumn's very brother, his face being sunburnt to wheat-colour, his eyes blue as corn-flowers, his sleeves and leggings dyed with fruit stains, his hands clammy with the sweet juice of apples, his hat sprinkled with pips, and everywhere about him that atmosphere of cider which at its first return each season has such an indescribable fascination for those who have been born and bred among the orchards. (204)

Ultimately, as her old love for Giles recovers, Grace casts off not only her relationship with the supposedly gentlemanly Fitzpiers, but also the gentility and polish which her education has given her, her father's investment to catch such a husband; again we notice the natural imagery:

Her heart rose from its late sadness like a released bough; her senses revelled the sudden lapse back to Nature unadorned. The consciousness of having to be genteel because of her husband's profession, the veneer of artificiality which she had acquired at the fashionable schools, were thrown off, and she became the crude country girl of her latent, early instincts. (204)

Hardy's painful awareness of the isolating effects of class difference is, then, a central creative impulse in his writing. It is a vital element in the construction of his

fictional world, a world in which loneliness is an essential condition. The rest of the present chapter will examine in detail how this impulse manifest itself in a selection of particular short stores. First, however, it is worth underlining the way in which this fascination with class world seems to be the main motivating factor behind what is in many respects the oddest of Hardy's collection of stories, A Group of Noble Dames, "oddest" and by general critical agreement the least successful, before considering one of the stories from that volume. The framing device, derived ultimately from Boccaccio and Chaucer, of having a number of individuals from different walks of life brought together in a situation where they tell each other stories, portrays the socially-mixed members of the South-Wessex Field and Antiquarian Club. The tales they tell of, as Hardy's preface calls them, "several bright-eyed Noble Dames" (207) whose "legends and traditions" were "renowned in times past in that part of England" (246), are mainly set back in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. This perhaps partly accounts for the relative lack of imaginative vitality, the lack of psychological complexity in the stories and in their female protagonists: they lack the urgency of the contemporary society whose tensions Hardy engaged so vigorously and painfully.⁴⁹

He knew little of the aristocratic world of the past and fails to imagine it: the shadowy females exist in a never-never land of rather stereotypical intrigues, whimsical romances,

49. Several studies have treated the limitation of the volume. For instance, William R. Rutland, Thomas Hardy: A Study of his Writings and their Background (Russell: New York, 1938), reacts to the volume as "a curious book adding nothing to Hardy's achievement" (219). Again, T. R. Wright, Hardy and the Erotic, believes that "None of these stories, of course, should be taken very seriously [T]hey illustrate, with grim and sometimes grotesque humour, the illusions of reciprocal relationship" (96). See, for example, Charles E. May, "Hardy's Diabolical Dames: A Generic Consideration," Genre 7 (1974): 307-21, and George Wing's "A Group of Noble Dames: Statuesque dynasties of delightful Wessex", Thomas Hardy Annual 5 (1987): 75-101, both of which provide valuable discussion of the stories.

infidelities, elopements, unexpected pregnancies and other scandalous romances, relationships, in which "traditions of the local families linger on".⁵⁰ It is a measure of the moral conservatism of Hardy's readers, however, that even these fanciful tales had the potential to cause offence. When sent to the editor of the Graphic, two of these stories were flatly rejected (those are "Squire Patrick's Lady" and "Lady Mottisfont") whereas the other four ("Barbara of the House of Grebe", "The Marchioness of Stonehenge", "Anna Lady Baxby" and "The Lady January") it was suggested should be revised. The editor W. A. Locker wrote in some alarm to Hardy on 25 June 1890:

Many fathers are accustomed to read or have read to their family-circles the stories in the Graphic, and I cannot think that they would approve for this purpose a series of tales, almost everyone of which turns upon questions of childbirth and those relations between the sexes over which conventionality is accustomed (wisely or unwisely) to draw a veil ... Now, what do you propose to do? Will you write us an entirely fresh story, or will you take the "Noble Dames" and alter them to suit our taste.⁵¹

More often than not, these upper-class women's entanglements in impetuously illicit liaisons, or furtive marriages, with lower-class lovers, make them lose their firm footing in the hierarchal society in which they live; constrained by their social situation, these noble dames become at odds with their former class as well as with their socially-inferior lovers. When she steps outside the oppressively conventional rituals of her class, the book seems to imply, each of these aristocratic women, has nowhere to go, she is entrapped in a form of a limbo, which for the most part denies her any emotional fulfilment. Time and again, the women succumb to boredom, ennui, disorientation and loneliness.

50. Collected Letters, Vol. 1 239.

51. Quoted in Millgate, A Biography 306.

Before considering one of these stories, we should perhaps note the way in which Hardy's concerns with the divisions of class are present not just within the stories themselves, but in the narrative frame of A Group of Noble Dames, in which the members recount this rather dull set of tales in lieu of, ironically, "papers on deformed butterflies, fossil ox-horns, prehistoric dung-mixens, and such-like" (244). At the end of their tale-telling sessions, the members go their own way:

By one, by two, and by three the benighted members of the Field-club rose from their seats, shook hands, made appointments, and dropped away to their respective quarters, free or hired, hoping for a fair morrow. It would probably be not until the next summer meeting, months away in the future, that the easy intercourse which now existed between them all would repeat itself. The crimson maltster, for instance, knew that on the following market-day his friends the President, the Rural Dean, and the Bookworm would pass him in the street, if they met him, with the barest nod of civility, The President and the Colonel for social reasons, the Bookworm for intellectual reasons, and the Rural Dean for moral ones, the latter being a staunch teetotaller, dead against John Barleycorn. The sentimental member knew that when, on his rambles, he met his friend the Bookworm with a pocket-copy of something or other under his nose, the latter would not love his contemporaries as he had done to-day; and the President, the aristocrat, and the farmer knew that affairs, political, sporting, domestic, or agricultural would exclude for a long time all rumination on the characters of dames gone to dust for scores of years, however beautiful and noble they may have been in their day. (373-74)

"The Marchioness of Stonehenge" is one the more successful stories in the volume, although it remains somewhat schematic, set far away from the immediate realities of nineteenth-century England, in a world of castles and cottages, aristocrats and loyal retainers. Here a character from a higher class is drawn to a lower-class lover primarily because of that lover's natural freedom; Lady Caroline, "spoilt" by the attentions of "almost all the young noblemen and gentlemen in that part of Wessex" (277), is drawn to a young man -- Hardy's narrator never even tells us his name -- who is the parish-clerk's son, a man who, though "plain-looking", is "gentle and delicate in nature, of good address, and

guileless heart" (277), and thus very different to the "more artificial men" (278) of her class.

Again, Hardy emphasizes the unreliability of female feelings. The young man's attractiveness to Lady Caroline is enhanced by the fact that "a young girl of the village already loved the young man fondly" (277). Yet another secret marriage follows and the relationship remains the stuff more of fable than contemporary reality. The marriage remains a secret; Lady Caroline maintains her social position uncompromised by her marriage: her husband only visits her at the Castle after dark and the couple mutually agree to "live on in outward appearance the same as before" (275). Indeed the narrator makes clear the wide disparity of their spheres:

[T]he young woman who rode fine horses, and drove in pony-chaises, and was saluted deferentially by every one, and the young man who trudged, and directed the tree-felling, and the laying out of fish-ponds in the Park, were husband and wife. (287)

Sharing no mutually social communication with her plebian husband, Lady Caroline's love fairly quickly begins to flicker and lose its ardour and she begins to have second thoughts about what she has done and the risk to her status. In an altercation between the two, exacerbated mainly by Lady Caroline's patronising demeanour and above all by her "anxiety about her own position and prospects" (279), her secret husband collapses and dies of a heart attack in her bed chamber. Even in this crisis it is her "imprudent union" that Lady Caroline seems primarily to lament. As she tells her now departed husband "Why not have died in your own cottage if you would die! I mismated myself for love of you!" (279). The measure of her desperation to maintain her social position, unblemished by any association with a man of the lower classes, is shown by the

extraordinary episode which follows the husband's death. Determined that he be found quite literally "in his place", and not in her room, she physically hauls him on her back from the castle to his humble cottage. The "macabre"⁵² episode dramatizes the desperate determination of this young woman, which surmounts any sense of affliction "at the loss of him" (279).

Driven by her craze "to save her reputation", whose defamation might have been precipitated by the disclosure of this socially stigmatic union, Lady Caroline decides to utilise her "influence" (281). In a further "grotesque"⁵³ scene over the dead husband's grave, she coerces Milly, the woodman's daughter (who used to love Lady Caroline's deceased husband ardently), into pretending to be his secret wife, she of course being of more equal station. Lady Caroline, it goes without saying, has the power to make sure she gets her own way:

If you will do so ... I will always be your father's friend and yours; if not, it will be otherwise. And I will give you my wedding-ring, which you shall wear as yours. (283)

Thus, by turning Milly ironically into "a corpse's bride" (283), Lady Caroline escapes the possibility of social ruin. Milly on the other hand becomes content with her new role as a widow for one whom she "vainly idolized" (283). Putting on mourning clothes, and daily tending his grave, Milly "believed herself to have been his wife indeed" (284).

But again Hardy's tale depends on the fluctuations of female feelings. Firstly, Milly's "intense affection [for] the young man" (284), and her assumption of the role of his widow

52. Carpenter, Thomas Hardy 74.

53. May, "Diabolical Dames" 316.

arouses, quite irrationally of course (but that is part of Hardy's point), feelings of jealousy in Lady Caroline. Then, discovering herself pregnant, she again confronts the possibility of "disgrace" (285). Desperation induces another emotional change-of-direction as she induces Milly to return the wedding ring, symbolically restoring her husband and thus her dignity as an honourable widow.

Obsessed by her fear of scandal, Lady Caroline arranges that both she and Milly disappear to London in order that the baby be transferred to her: again, natural feeling is repressed in the name of social status as Lady Caroline abnegates any maternal feelings towards her son. (Given the nature of the stories in this volume, we have little sense of any inner anguish at the point, nothing of the pain which, for example Tess, or Sue Bridehead experience at the loss of their children.) Free from such encumbrance, she can marry the Marquis of Stonehenge.

But Hardy has still not finished with this upper-class young woman. As her young son grows, loved by Milly in part because he shows "the lineaments of the man who won her girlish heart" (286), and as he advances in his army career, Lady Caroline's emotions shift again, and her long "dormant ... maternal instincts" (287) stir. Almost inevitably her marriage to the Marquis has not produced children and, when he dies, she is left "solitary and childless" (287). She has sacrificed the loving maternal relationship she could have had with her son in order to maintain a facade of social propriety and to marry well. But by the end she is a lonely, bitter figure:

What would it have mattered if she had never obtained this precious coronet of pearls and gold leaves, by comparison with the gain of having the love and protection of such a noble and worthy son? These and other sad reflections cut the gloomy and solitary lady to the heart; and she repented of her pride in disclaiming her first husband more bitterly than she had ever repented of her infatuation in marrying him. (287)

Her final attempt to assert her social power fails, when she imperiously -- and desperately -- decides that she not only "can defy the world's opinion" (288), but also can force the boy to "exchange a cottage-mother" for herself, being a peeress (287-88). What she seems to forget is that real motherhood is not merely a question of "flesh and blood" (288), as much as it is a genuine concern and undiluted natural devotion. When she demands her son back, the boy inadvertently reopens her emotional wounds: "you were once ashamed of my poor father, who was a sincere and honest man, therefore, I am now ashamed of you" (289). Moreover, the stark juxtaposition between the tones in which the son addressed the two women, the one formally as "You see, my lady", and "No, my lady" (288) and the other warmly -- "I cannot love another mother as I love her" and "she is my mother and I will always be her son" (288-89) -- sharply dramatizes the ironic ineffectuality of social veneer and the superficiality of ostentatious grace, in which Lady Caroline has wasted her life.

As if reminding her, ironically, of her former "cold reason" (279) towards his father, the boy kisses her "coldly" (289) in a nonchalant way which, when coupled with his "denial of her", marks "the beginning of the death" of this most lonely woman (289). Like Sophy Twycott, Lady Caroline dies of a broken heart, and out of gnawing alienation. We may not sympathize with her as a lofty wife and Marchioness, but as a mother asking ignominiously for her son's mercy, she is vehemently pathetic.

"The Waiting Supper" (CM) is a story of intense ennui and violent incompatibility in

which "two lost lives slide ineffectually into decline and wastefulness".⁵⁴ From the subtle opening pages, the story appears to be intended to draw the reader's attention to the social and economic circumstances that condition and determine the lives of the two socially-incompatible lovers: before we are even told his name, the figure of Nicholas Long, waiting in the dark for his lover is described as being "a yeoman" (588). The house, we are carefully told, outside which he waits, suggests "a countrified household of the smaller gentry ... formerly a numerous class, but now in great part ousted by the territorial landlords" (588). They may not be large landowners but the fact that Nicholas's lover is of a higher social class is immediately introduced and indeed emblematically presented. Nicholas stands at a distance, outside and in the dark, watching Christine, who is inside, in the light, visible through the window and spatially above him, the scene immediately establishing the unbridgeable social gap that "defies any romantic expectation the reader may have for [them]".⁵⁵

But this "spectatorial attitude" on the part of Hardy disappears once the "story proceeds ... [and] he ... penetrates into the minds and hearts of his characters".⁵⁶ Indeed, the meeting of Christine and Nic is a collision of two different and distant social worlds: and independent class-conscious girl has fallen for the socially-inferior Nic, who is himself

54. Wing 19. In spite of Hardy's disapproval and dismissal of the stories of the volume A Changed Man as "mostly bad ... [underlying] the feebleness to which I have declined", he sang the praises of "The Waiting Supper" which is the second story in the volume as "the best of the tales". See Collected Letters, Vol. 4 297-300.

55. Brady, The Short Stories of Thomas Hardy 180.

56. Maire A. Quinn, "Thomas Hardy And the Short Story", Budmouth Essays on Thomas Hardy: Papers presented at the 1975 Summer School, ed. F.B. Pinion (Dorchester: Thomas Hardy Society, 1976) 80.

acutely aware that he is "an untamed and uncultivated man, who has never seen London, and knows nothing about society at all" (590). But in this opening scene, they ultimately come together in the darkness, surreptitiously, out of the glare of the light from the genteel dining room.

Each is attracted by qualities in the other that the class system has deprived them of. As in the case of Lady Caroline in "The Marchioness of Stonehenge", a naturally noble young man, attractive because different, because of his lack of gentility. At the same time, paradoxically, she realises that the only way he can be accepted into society is by this "unpolished" (591) young man gaining the social veneer that travel and some education will give him. (Again, one is reminded of Edmond Willowes being sent abroad to gain education and polish worthy of his upper-class wife in "Barbara of the House of Grebe"). This will be necessary to make Nic acceptable to her father -- but one also feels that she, too, wants him to be "fully qualified" (591) to claim her; she is aware that he is "untravelled, socially unpractised" (590). Once again Hardy shows the young woman to be more class-conscious than the man, and her feelings less reliable. There is no doubt as to the sincerity of Nicholas's feelings; he loves her, not the idea of social advancement: "What property belongs to you I hate the very sound of; it is you I care for. I wish you hadn't a farthing in the world but what I could earn for you!" (592). But, after three years, her ardour is cooling. She rather likes the idea, and perhaps the excitement, of a lower-class lover, but when Nicholas produces a marriage licence it gives "such unexpected substantiality to the venture with which she had so long toyed as a vague dream merely, that she was, in truth, frightened a little" (593). The point is insisted on as the first part of the story develops; if he were to go away, she tells Nic, "You would be a pleasant dream to

me" (591), easier for the young woman to stay loyal to than the awkward reality of the actual, socially-inferior man. She is later aware of the impracticality of their plans: "That was my silly girlish dream about my hero" (607). Thus, the reality of, again, a secret marriage is not what Christine had ever dreamed of. Little wonder then that instead of displaying the amiable and hospitable manner familiar to a girl of her age, about to be married, Christine is markedly disillusioned and vehemently agitated, at the "venture", even seeing it as "a trap" (593). Indeed, Christine's later impulsive acceptance of Nic's proposal of a secret marriage -- "Take me whilst I am in the humour" (594) -- is not out of her real conviction, but only "To show you that you have not been mistaken in me" (593). And Nic's confession, on the other hand, that "We dare not be married here" (594), marks out starkly the social distance between himself and the girl he is going to marry, a distance which begins to suggest that their lifelong alienation has everything to do with the difference of their class. This sense of the vulnerability of their relationship is gently shown as he goes off across the fields with which he is so at home: his, says the narrator, is a "lonely progress" (594).

The sharpest formulation of their class-difference is made all the more poignant in the contrast of their reactions and expectations towards one another in the church on the morning of their proposed marriage: while Nic kisses her "with a sort of surprise, as if her had expected that at last moment her heart would fail her", Christine reluctantly acquiesces with "merely the momentum of an antecedent impulse" (596). But discovering her to be not "of age", the zealous rector, declines to unite them without her father's express agreement. In very Hardyian tones, the priest himself warns them of "[t]he tragedy of marriage It is

full of crises and catastrophies, and ends with the death of one of the actors" (597).⁵⁷

The turning point of the story's plot is the meeting between Christine and Bellston (the suave young nephew of a neighbouring landowner) at a christening feast. Apparently, the social distinction and the meretriciously glossy appearance of Bellston as a "young man from London" (598), whose main occupation is concerned with "[t]ravel and exploration ... not the study of British Peasantry" (599), triggers in Christine a long-suppressed longing (though we note that, immediately before Bellston effectively dismisses the importance of "these simple peasants" (599), Hardy's narrator carefully draws our attention to those very people:

The late autumn sunlight streamed in through the window panes upon the heads and shoulders of the venerable patriarchs of the hamlet, and upon the middle-aged, and upon the young; upon men and women who had played out, or were to play, tragedies or tragi-comedies in that nook of civilisation not less great, essentially, than those which, enacted on more central arenas, fix the attention of the world. (599)

Bellston's smooth dismissal of these same people is thus immediately seen as questionable).

Bellston's social veneer, and his "air of proprietorship" (599), which Nic manifestly lacks, seems precisely to turn the scales in Bellston's favour, and places another strain on a socially-incompatible relationship in Christine's life:

She was thinking of her Nic, and felt that, by comparison with her present acquaintance, the farmer more than held his own as a fine and intelligent fellow; but the harmony with her existence in the little things, which she found here [with Bellston], imported an alien tinge to Nicholas just now. The latter, idealised by moonlight, or a thousand miles of distance, was altogether a more romantic object for a woman's dream than this smart new-lacquered man; but in the sun of afternoon, and amid a surrounding company, Mr. Bellston was a very tolerable companion. (600)

57. Compare Jude's view on marriage in *Jude the Obscure*, while meditating initiating a relationship with his Cousin Sue: "marriage usually meant a tragic sadness ... [that] might be intensified to a tragic horror" (91).

Again Hardy insists on the vagaries of female affection. The reality of the "social breakers" (602) which will assail her relationship with Nic adds to the cooling of her passion (601), albeit dancing with him in the exuberance of a country dance briefly re-arouses her feelings for him; "Most great passions", observes the narrator sardonically, "burst during their decline into a temporary irradiation, which rivals their original splendour; and then they speedily become extinct" (604). The physical excitement of the dance apart, Christine feels indignant at her father's snobbery in his exhortation not to dance too often with Nic for the simple reason of his "being one of our own neighbouring farmers" (603). She is further stirred to a "half-hour's ardour" (604) out of jealousy at seeing Nic dancing fervently with a peasant girl.

The cooling of her love in the face of the realities of social difference, as well as the presence of Bellston -- "in little things Bellston seemed immeasurably nearer than Nic; and life was made up of little things" (604) -- makes her acutely aware of the reality of Nicholas, now seen not in the shadow of the park but in the full glare of the day, especially when he appears to her dishevelled from walking across the countryside: "Noontide lights and dwarfed shadows always banished the romantic aspect of her love for Nicholas [A]t this hour surfaces showed garishly, and obscured the depths" (605). All she does care for in the parochial-minded society of Wessex, is her social dignity, rather than any romantic love. She is mortified by rumours that she and Nic are indeed secretly married.⁵⁸ In revealing his

58. Roy Morell, Thomas Hardy: The Will and the Way (Kuala Lumpur: U of Malaya P. 1965) provides an insightful view of the couple's dilemma. He is correct in saying that "Christine allows incipient gossip about herself and Nicholas to discourage her from marrying him -- a change of mind which brings her much unhappiness" (156).

aunt's part in spreading this rumour afar, Christine initiates in the lonely Nic, a deeply bitter wound that is never to be healed:

The information, coupled with the infelicitous word 'proudly', caused Nicholas to flush with mortification. He knew that it was in his aunt's nature to make a brag of that sort, but worse than the brag was the fact that this was the first occasion on which Christine had deigned to show her consciousness that such a marriage would be a source of pride to his relatives -- the only two he had in the world. (606)

On the face of it Christine would confessedly believe that "social ruin is not personal ruin or even personal disgrace", whereas deep down every scintilla of her personality ties her succinctly to tradition and society. As she tells Nic "How can I meet acquaintances, when I don't know what they are thinking of me?" (606). That is why, when Nic proposes to produce another licence, she refuses, and her reasons are mainly social: "how can I continue to see you after such a rumour? we shall be watched now, for certain Ah -- you don't know what society is -- you don't know" (606-7). With an acute image of "frustration ... and quiet despair",⁵⁹ Hardy manages to depict the physical and spiritual estrangement between the couple whose once "perfect responsiveness" (602), has irretrievably broken down:

They sat apart, and not altogether, each looking afar of at vague objects, and not in each other's eyes. Thus the sad autumn afternoon waned, while the waterfall hissed sarcastically of the inevitableness of the unpleasant [T]he division between them was not closed. (607-8)⁶⁰

59. Brown, Thomas Hardy 116.

60. See F.B. Pinion, "The Ranging Visions, "Thomas Hardy After Fifty Years, ed. Lance St. John Butler (London: Macmillan, 1977). Pinion provides an insightful view of "The Waiting Supper" as a story which underlines Hardy's "hold of boyhood memories. The original of the hissing waterfall which expresses the tragic irony of situation came to his notice when his father was employed by the architect Benjamin Ferry in the rebuilding of Stafford House near Lower Bockhampton. Hardy felt impelled to use places connected with his forbears in his stories" (9).

Reading about his daughter's marriage in the newspaper, Mr. Everard snubs Christine and induces her to marry Nic for fear that "the rumour will become a scandal if you don't" (609). Even under this circumstance his justificatory preference for Nic has something to do with class, the latter being "a young man superior to most of his class ... And he's not poor -- at least his uncle is not" (609). But to his astonishment and surprise, Christine can by now only see her relationship with Nic as "a mistake" (610).

Her next meeting with Nic in the High Street is made all the more poignant by the violent contrast in the description of their external appearances, a contrast which adeptly insinuates a collision of two different and distinct social worlds; the stark simplicity and uncouthness of Nic's "wild, amphibious appearance which had marked him when he came up from the meadows to her side",⁶¹ is significantly and sharply contrasted with Christine's sense of her own status: "she crossed the pavement from the shop door, the shopman bowing and escorting her to the carriage" (610). Indeed, the final straw for Catherine, comes when a passer-by refers casually to her as "Mrs. Nicholas Long", a sardonic remark

61. This situation is very much reminiscent of the significant juxtaposition, in The Woodlanders, between Grace's fine superiority and the stark impoverishment of the shabbily-attired Giles, and the consequence of this on her: "when her eyes fell upon him for the last time he was standing somewhat apart, holding the tree like an ensign, and looking on the ground instead of pushing his produce as he ought to have been doing" (37). Again, in A Pair of Blue Eyes, Elfride's sharply critical eye is directed upon and influenced by the external features of Stephen Smith's parents, a posture which by no means ineffectual upon her later attitude towards him: "few women of old family can be thoroughly taught that a fine soul may wear a smock-frock, and an admittedly common man is one but a worm in their eyes. John Smith's rough hands and clothes, his wife's speeches, the necessary narrowness of their ways, being constantly under Elfride's notice, were not without their deflecting influence" (248-49). Compare, also Viviette's appearance in Two on a Tower, during the confirmation "in black attire ... a touch of red in her bonnet setting off the richness of her complexion" (157), and Swithin's appearance shortly after their furtive marriage in a borrowed "old clothes" (151). Agitated at his shabby appearance, Viviette tells him "there was something so ghastly and so uncanny in your putting on such garments that I wish you had never been more thoughtful, and had left them alone" (151).

which results in her "supercilious [attitude] ... and vexation at his presence" (611). She procrastinates once more as is her habit, but feels guilt-stricken at mistreating him. Embittered by Christine's evident feelings, Nic is "flushed with indignation"; his pride receives the painful stab of "mortification" (611). His sentimental wound is made all the worse by another painful confrontation with the class barriers: the condescending letter of Christine's father, in which he can only see "the writer's contempt behind the words" (611). Again, we feel, Hardy is touching an old and personal hurt. Faced by these barriers and these hurts, Nicholas feels that "Exile [is] the only course" (612-13).⁶²

When, after fifteen years, of wandering isolation and the never worn-away longing for homecoming, Nicholas Long, returns to his native land with a mélange "of old hopes and fears" (614), the lonely returnee puts up at "an isolated inn" (613), one which reminds him nostalgically of "his boyhood days" (617), a place which is at one with his introspective mood. Though the initial meeting between Nic and Christine "closed up for him" the whole "intervening time between past and present" (616), it also reveals, among other things, their "transposed fortunes".⁶³ While Nic has become a wealthy and sophisticated man during his years of travelling and exile, Christine is now "poor ... almost friendless ... left in very lean pasturage" (619), after his brother has sold the Froom-Everard estate. She lives in a small

62. In a minor way, though still interestingly, Nic's reaction is similar to that of the wounded pride of Shelton, in Galworthy's The Island Pharisees. Seized by pricks of mortification and pride, after reading (Antonia's) his sweetheart's patronising letter, a letter from which he can only glean that she "was ready without love to marry him, as a sacrifice ... [and that] she was going to sacrifice herself", Shelton decides to forsake Antonia. For one thing he believes that "In marrying her he would be marrying not only her, but her class -- his class". See The Island Pharisees (London: Heinemann, 1904) 283-85.

63. Norman D. Prentiss, "The Poetics of Interruption in Hardy's Poetry and Short Stories," Victorian Poetry 31-1 (1993) 48.

portion of the old house, alone except for the housekeeper; for all his supposed polish and charm, Bellston turned out not to be a good husband, even striking her on one occasion. Ultimately, years before, he had left her, and he is now presumed dead. Once again, the barriers and conflicts created by class difference have resulted in separation and loneliness for the two lovers.

Reminding her of the situation in which she "stood with [him] at the altar once" (617), Nic asks Christine to complete their abortive marriage. Nic's continuing love for her, makes him forgive her past procrastination, and overlook her being "another's" (617), Nic is indeed tantalized by something like a reopened wound. But however stirring his contact with the object of his fascination may be, Christine, given her uncertainty about her husband, still seems unattainable, and Nic alone:

He missed her companionship this evening more than he had done at any time during the whole fifteen years; and it was as though instead of separation there had been constant communion with her throughout that period. The tones of her voice had stirred his heart in a nook which had lain stagnant ever since he last heard them. They recalled the woman to whom he had once lifted his eyes. (617)

Wandering through his old village before his next meeting with Christine, Nic feels totally rootless and estranged even in the place that was once home to him. He no longer knows the people, so much has changed. Like John Lackland of "A Few Crusted Characters" (LLI), he can only feel himself in and among "the gravestones of other inhabitants with whom he had been well acquainted, till by degrees he seemed to be in the society of all the elder Froom-Everard population, as he had known the place" (618-19).

When Christine ultimately confesses to Nic that she feels her tribulation to be "a punishment for my faithlessness" (621), one feels that she has taken firm steps towards

maturity. However, we note that following Nic's re-offer of marriage, her acceptance still isn't without a touch of social aspiration:

What a cosmopolite, you are! I expected to find my old yeoman still; but I was quite awed in the presence of such a citizen of the world. Did I seem rusty and unpractised? Ah -- you seemed so once to me! (618)

In celebration of their betrothal and on the night preceding its consummation, Christine prepares a supper for Nic. As she waits for him, an emblematic incident occurs, ominously suggesting Christine's lonely future:

She glanced up at the clock, which stood also in this room, there not being space enough for it in the passage. It was nearly seven, and she expected Nicholas at half-past. She liked the company of this venerable article in her lonely life: its tickings and whizzings were a sort of conversation. It now began to strike the hour. At the end something grated slightly. The, without any warning, the clock inclined forward and fell at full length upon the floor. (622)⁶³

For one thing, the only article which fills intermittently the void of her lonely life is shattered, an "ominous" sign which Christine's maid, Mrs. Wake (whose name is both "ironical and suggestive"),⁶⁴ construes as "a sign of violent death in the family" (623). No sooner does this happen than a knock is heard on the door and a messenger arrives with

63. Ruth A. Firor associates the sudden falling of the family clock with "numerous omens of death in Hardy's work". Closely related to this belief is the disturbance of the joy of the newly married couple by the fall of the mirror in "Honeymoon Time at an Inn", and the ominous fall of Marie Louise's portrait before marrying Napoleon in "The Dynasts". See Folkways in Thomas Hardy (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P. 1931) 14-18. Compare also the stoppage of the ancient family clock, after the death of Egbert's grandfather in "An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress", an incident which forshadows his ennui and lifelong alienation: "the intense silence that prevailed seems more like the bodily presence of some quality than the mere absence of a sound" (Indiscretion 66).

64. A.F. Cassis, "A Note on the Structure of Hardy's Short Fiction," Colby Library Quarterly 10 (1974): 291.

Bellston's trunk and news of the imminent arrival of her husband.⁶⁵ The fall of the clock together with the arrival not of Bellston, but his trunk, which sits ominously in Christine's room is a Hardyian tour de force, revealing Christine's vulnerability. As Bert G.

Hornback has observed:

Indeed, time -- in the person of an old clock -- actually stops just before Nicholas is due to arrive, and just before the announcement that Bellston is at that moment on his way to Christine's house, ironically timing his return from her past to coincide with her formal rejection of that past.⁶⁶

The imminent threat of Bellston's return, coupled with "the gloomy silence of the stopped clock" (624), destroys any prospect of happiness, and sentences her to return, for an indefinite period, to a crushing sense of "solitude" (624).

Both Nic and Christine are represented as victims of protracted waiting and ennui. They wander lonely and aimlessly, waiting for Bellston, unable to marry. Nostalgically they sit near their old trysting place, the cascade "with its never ending sardonic hiss at their baffled attempts to make themselves one flesh" (629), with unmitigated feelings of resignation and reticence. The ineradicable presence of "the dim shape of that third one" stood continually between them (692), keeps haunting them, in their sad impasse. When Nic broaches his long-repressed demand of marriage after seven years, Christine declines

65. Purdy, A Biographical Study has aptly observed that "When 'The Waiting Supper', was collected once episode in VII was changed significantly, and the ominous arrival of Bellston's portmanteau substituted for the appearance of the man himself and his talk with Christine" (152).

66. Bert G. Hornback, The Metaphor of Chance: Vision and Technique in the Works of Thomas Hardy (Athens: Ohio UP, 1971) 77.

evasively. Her sense of trepidation at Bellston's possible sudden reappearance is still great. Each time Nic tries to bridge the gulf between himself and Christine, the cleavage is irredeemably widened. Even his desperate attempt to live near her hints ironically upon their wide apartness: the From river "form[s] the boundary [between] the From-Everard manor" (630), where Christine lives, and his newly-built cottage.

Circumstances, having of course their origins both in class difference and particularly the social sensitivity of Christine, have conspired to erode the natural impulses and passion of the couple. By the time that Bellston's skeleton is found -- under that same sardonically hissing waterfall -- Nic's renewed proposal lacks "The fervour of his earlier years" (632); it would seem that "the bleaching process" (629) of time that has begun to grey their hair has also "grayed their passion".⁶⁷ The pitch of their early pure love has gone for good (605), giving way to "Time's ceaseless scour ... wearing them away without uniting them" (630).

Interestingly, in 9 July 1889 Hardy writes "love lives on propinquity, but dies of contact".⁶⁸ According to J. Hillis Miller, this note initiates "the law which governs the ending of love in Hardy's world", for in most of his fiction "love vanishes as soon as the goal of love is obtained. It exists only so long as the goal is close enough to be seen, but has not yet been reached".⁶⁹ Christine is content to leave things as they are, not to risk further hurt even though they would be married:

67. Howe, Thomas Hardy 81.

68. Life 220.

69. Miller 176.

'Is it worth while, after so many years?' she said to him. 'We are fairly happy as we are -- perhaps happier than we should be in any other relation, seeing what old people we have grown. The weight is gone from our lives; the shadow no longer divides us; then let us be joyful together as we are, dearest Nic, in the days of our vanity; and with mirth and laughter let old wrinkles come. (632)⁷⁰

Indeed, this "pathetic and "abject"⁷¹ end of the lovers' alienation is "perfectly consistent with that of their first meeting",⁷² an end which testifies to the story's main concern with "class prejudice",⁷³ and the grim consequence that follows. Again, this attitude on the part of Christine, underlines "the paradoxical happiness" peculiar to Hardy's lovers. As J. Hillis Miller has succinctly observed in relation to this story:

They can be happy only if their relationship is artificially fixed by an obstacle which maintains love while preventing its fulfillment. As is so often the case in his work the lovers are joined by what separates them. What stands between them prevents their love from dying by preventing also its consummation.⁷⁴

70. Christine's earlier quoting of Browning's "The Statue and the Bust", clearly underlines among other things, "procrastination ... [as] an important theme" of the story. See Brady 176. Hardy's lovers are in many ways like Browning's lovers, whose love is marred by vacillation and the lapse of time: "They found love not as it seemed before .../ So weeks grew months, years; gleam by gleam/The glory dropped from their youth and love". In part this effect may be due to Hardy's admiration and preoccupation with the poem in which "there is nothing to be said about procrastination that is not" mentioned. See Elliott Felkin, "Days with Thomas Hardy: From a 1918-1919 Diary," Encounter 18 (1962): 30. Again, in his poem "Long Plighted", Hardy touches upon the same theme: "Is it worth while, dear, now,/ To call for bells, and sally forth arranged/For marriage-rites -- discussed, descried, delayed/so many years". See Gibson 140.

71. Wing 19.

72. Brady, The Short Stories of Thomas Hardy 176.

73. Howe, Thomas Hardy 81.

74. Miller 156.

Whereas Ford Madox Ford condemns "On the Western Circuit" (LLI) as "one of the worst instances of throwing away of a subject"⁷⁵ Norman Page recommends the story as "one of the most powerful of Hardy's short stories ... [that] provides additional evidence of his preoccupation with the theme of marital disharmony".⁷⁶ "On the Western Circuit" is indeed primarily a drama of disillusionment and incompatibility and like many of Hardy's stories, including "The Waiting Supper", it shows specifically the incompatibility between natural feelings and the harsh machinery of the class system.

The story -- in some ways reminiscent of "The Three Strangers" -- brings together by chance three characters who are, albeit in varying degrees, alone and leaves them at the end in even more painful isolation. The London attorney, Charles Raye, is first presented as a man who does not wholly belong to "a century wherein sordid ambition is the master-passion that seems to be taking the time-honoured place of love" (457). For all his travels from Wintonchester to Casterbridge, he is viewed as a rootless Londoner and a "fastidious urban" (476). Anna, on the other hand, is a rural new-comer from "The lonely country" (458). And Mrs. Harnham is a middle-class woman who unhappily married under the influence of "the belief of the British parent that a bad marriage with its aversions is better than free womanhood with its interests, dignity, and leisure" (467).

75. Ford Madox Ford, Mightier than Sword (London: Allen & Unwin, 1938) 135.

76. Page, "A Reconsideration" 83. Kristin Brady, further sees the story in form as "a hypothetical legal case [A] retributive justice for those who have done wrong". For a detailed discussion of the story along legal dimensions and in terms of law, see Kristin Brady, "Conventionality as Narrative Technique in Hardy's 'On the Western Circuit'" Journal of the Eighteen Nineties Society 9 (1978): 22-30. See also Penelope Pether, "Hardy and the Law," Thomas Hardy Journal 7 (1991): 28-41.

The opening of the story is again something of a tour-de-force as Charles Raye emerges from the gloomy shadows of Melchester Cathedral into the gaudy, noisy light of the town's annual fair:

The spectacle was that of the eighth chasm of the Inferno as to colour and flame, and, as to mirth, a development of the Homeric heaven. A smoky glare, of the complexion of brass-filling, ascended from the fiery tongues of innumerable naphtha lamps affixed to booths, stalls, and other temporary erections which crowded the spacious - market square. In front of this irradiation scores of human figures, more or less in profile, were darting athwart and across, up, down, and around, like gnats against a sunset. (455)⁷⁷

In their blind fascination with the glamour of the fair, these people are dwarfed by the machines they have created, at the same time losing the human qualities which supposedly differentiate them from the material world:

Their motions were so rhythmical that they seemed to be moved by machinery. And it presently appeared that they were moved by machinery indeed, the figures being those of the patrons of swings, see-saws, flying-leaps, above all of the three steam-roundabouts which occupied the centre of the position. It was from the latter that the din of steam-organs came. (455)

This is not the only way in which individuals in this society are "moved by machinery" of course; the scene emblemizes the social merry-go-round in whose class-differentiated circles all of Hardy's characters are trapped, in this story as elsewhere. At the same time the vulnerability of the characters is here emphasised: beyond the gaudy social mechanisms there is nothing; the human individuals all as vulnerable, and as insignificant, as "gnats against a sunset".

77. Penelope Pether has significantly observed that "The fair into which Anna, Raye and Edith plunge is likened to the eighth chasm of Dante's inferno, to which the counsellors of fraud were consigned" a thing which is quite pertinent to Charles Raye (34).

Fascinated by Anna, this "fairer product of nature" (457), Raye strikes up a conversation with her. Having no friends in the world but Mrs. Harnham, to whom she has recently been engaged in service as a serving maid, Anna soon divulges all her life story to Raye. She further discloses the strictest secrets of Mrs. Harnham's incompatibility with her husband, a further testimony to Anna's lack of social experience and her being "Unreserved -- too unreserved -- by nature" (457). When Anna, in turn, asks about Raye's background, the reader immediately anticipates how disastrous their encounter will be, for the incongruity of their situation and background. Not only is Raye, conscious of their difference in class, more reserved about giving details who he is, he is also associated with "the smoky city" of London, a sombre place in which "everybody lived who lived at all, and died because they could not live there" (458). He is further "full of vogue latter-day, glooms and popular melancholies" (457), whereas Anna's rural simplicity is underlined by her vertigo on the mechanical merry-go-round, as well as her fascination at seeing "a steam-circus" for the first time, and her inability to "understand how such wonderful machines [are] made" (457). She is extremely and innocently happy "to have a new hat for next Sunday that [is] to cost fifteen and ninepence" (458).

The parochial-minded Anna admires in Raye his ostensibly civilized manner, and his sophisticated urbanity. She is mesmerised by his veneer of gentility: "you are so genteel that you must have plenty of money" (458). Raye on the other hand is attracted to Anna not only on account of her being "the prettiest girl" among the rest, but also as a very inexperienced rural girl, quite a new type to his apparently "sensuous" nature (456).

Hardy's panoramic perspective in this opening scene extends further to take in Anna's employer, Edith Harnham. For all the roominess of her "dignified residence of

considerable size" overlooking the square, Edith is sequestered within one "unlit" room with "her cheek resting on her hand", watching the visiting fair from above the windowsill. A further scrutiny of the woman's face through "the glare of the market-place" reveals her as being "an interesting creature ... with sensitive lips". As she sits alone, the disparity between her and her husband is immediately made obvious; whereas the husband expresses his dissatisfaction with the fair as a "[h]orrid nuisance every year", Edith retorts "I like it" (495). Further, her husband's reluctance to accompany her in search for Anna -- "I'll go if you wish, though I'd rather go a hundred miles the other way" (460) -- is another testimony to his inertia towards Edith, who in like manner "[does] not care much about him" (458). Thus, for one thing, like Emma Bovary, Edith is married to a dull and insensitive husband. But whereas Emma marries Charles thinking him to be the long-awaited knight-saviour of her dreams, Edith has been coerced into a marriage of convenience to an elderly wine merchant, just to please her parents. It becomes increasingly clear that this socially-motivated and atrophied marital life, has deprived Edith, still young and attractive, of any emotional or physical fulfilment. Her emotional starvation makes her life insipid to an intolerable degree. She craves the warmth and companionship that she has been so long denied in her "lonely life" (467). So she is overly familiar and kind to Anna, particularly as "being without children she had wished to have her near her in preference to anybody else" (457-58), and becomes unfailingly protective of her in the way many single mothers are. As she tells her husband, "I am going to look for Anna, I have made myself responsible for her, and must see she comes to no harm" (459-60). Brought-up, we notice, in the same area of Anna's "lonely country" (458), as a child, unloved as a wife, Edith simply craves someone to cherish and fill the void of her sterile life.

It is small wonder, then, that when Edith is caught between Anna and Raye, in the crowd of the fair, in a moment of intense sensuality, she responds to Raye's inadvertent clasp of her hand, and his sliding of his fingers inside her glove, though being in the full knowledge that "he [has] no other thought than that the imprisoned hand was Anna's" (460); the moment, fraught with sexual overtones, is so novel and thrilling to Edith that she "refrain[s] from undeceiving him" (460). Entranced by the "magic" (461) of Raye's fingers, and the sensation of "his breath [which] fanned her cheek" (460), Edith is made susceptible to a budding romance; the moment triggers all her innermost desires, and the pent-up romantic emotions of her hitherto unstirred "deeper nature" (467).

Though on the face of it Edith is willing to give the couple her blessing, provided Raye be "respectable" (461), deep down she clearly at the same time longs to partake vicariously of their love-making, "observ[ing] the pair from a screened nook" (460-61) in an enticing love-making-scene. Parting from "the pleasure machine" at which they meet one another, and on their own way back home, the lovers' disparity is insinuated by the bifurcation of their routes through a physical barrier, an adept foreshadowing of their impending separation:

When they drew near the door of the wine-merchant's house, a comparatively deserted spot by this time, they stood invisible for a little while in the shadow of a wall, where they separated, Anna going on to the entrance, and her acquaintance returning across the square. (461)

The several rather furtive assignations between Anna and Raye at Melchester enable the latter to possess Anna "body and soul" (463). Raye's commitment is much more ambiguous. He is drawn to Anna's lack of sophistication and naturalness of feeling, but at the same time is acutely aware of how impossible it would be to make her part of his

sophisticated, middle-class, professional life in London. The liaison must remain merely a "summer fancy" (463), far away from his respectable life. He refrains from giving her, on leaving, both his complete name and his address, just by way of safeguarding his social situation and his life as a respectable barrister in London society. However, entrapped in his austere London lodging "by a tawny fog from all the world besides" (463), and bored with the monotony of his professional daily life, Raye feels increasingly isolated and unfulfilled. His loneliness is exacerbated by the haunting memory of "his fascinating child of nature" (463), the natural girl Anna whose "pink and breezy" (464) beauty is in vivid contrast to the artificially fashionable London girls.⁷⁸

Though Edith, at first, agrees to enter into a passionate correspondence with Raye for Anna's sake given the latter's illiteracy, she later deems correspondence with Raye a "luxury" (467) to herself. For one thing, Edith becomes "possessed to the bottom of her soul with the image of a man to whom she was hardly so much as a name" (467). That the emotional and sexual barrenness of her marital background makes her vulnerable to Raye's charisma is made poignantly explicit: stirred by Raye's dazzling looks, flirtatious voice, "tender touch" and his adept seduction of another woman in only two days, Edith is

78. In 15 March, 1890, almost one year before Hardy first published "On the Western Circuit", he comments on the artificial beauty of London society ladies: "But these women! If put into rough wrappers in a turnip-field, where would their beauty be?" See Life 224. Compare also Hardy's note of 19 July 1891, on the stultifying exaggeration of what is natural: "Note the weight of a landau and pair All this mass of matter is moved along with brute force and clatter through a street congested and obstructed to bear the petite figure of the owner's young wife in violet velvet and silver trimming, slim, small ... and who, if held up by the hair and slipped out of her clothes, carriage, etc. etc., ... would not be much larger than a skinned rabbit, and of less use". See Life 237.

immeasurably fascinated, like a "she-animal" (467).⁷⁹ Again Hardy is emphasizing the pressure of natural instinct not just in men, but in women too, penned-up in society's conventions. Indeed, Edith's deliberate involvement in Anna's emotions further demonstrates the older woman's inner void as well as her vicarious attempt "to restore in herself the youth she has lost in her marriage".⁸⁰ Again, this is made clear in her desperate sigh, after Anna's disclosure of her pregnancy: "I wish his child was mine -- O I wish it was! ... Yet how can I say such a wicked thing!" (469). Acutely aware of the social abyss into which Anna will fall as a result of bearing an illegitimate child, Edith (as Anna) writes a calm, carefully-worded letter to Raye; on receiving a letter whose lines reveal a sincere tone of "devotion to his interests ... self-sacrifice ... [and] nobility of character" (469), together with the impact of her early letter which also contains "nothing to show her sense of claim upon him" (464), Raye realises ashamedly how mistaken he has been in distancing himself protectively, out of concern for his social status. When he realises that Anna would be neither a "clog upon his high activities" (468), nor even a bar "encumbering his life" (463) of lacquered respectability in the meretricious gentility of London society, the priggish "Esquire, stuff-gownsmen, educated at Wintonchester" (459) Charles Raye decides not to

79. When published periodically in December 1891 in The English Illustrated Magazine (and in 28 November 1891, in America at Harper's Weekly), "On the Western Circuit" undergoes certain bowdlerizations with the view of conforming to the prudery of the Victorian norms and readers. For one thing the above-mentioned reference to Edith as "she-animal", and the reference to Anna's unwed pregnancy as a factor that precipitates her marriage to Raye, as well as many other frankly sexual allusions that did not appear in magazine form, appears later in the final version of the volume. For another, Edith Harnham is turned into a widow and her husband as her uncle. Norman Page's comment with respect to the story's "development ... from manuscript to the various printed versions" is intriguing indeed. See Page, "A Reconsideration" 81-82.

80. Brady, The Short Stories of Thomas Hardy 142.

desert Anna, whom he ironically and only now deems "a treasure" (469). When he consults his sister about the agreeability of marrying Anna, after showing her "Anna's" fine epistles, letters which of course express deep and genuine feeling, expressed with a gentility of which Anna would be incapable, the sister approves of Anna, as one who "writes very prettily" (470). Thus, for the first time, and in his "real name" (470) instead of "the partial" (463) one, under which he has disguised himself all through the relationship with Anna, Raye writes a letter which while revealing in part "a substratum of honesty and fairness in [his] character", still discloses to what extent he is constantly "infested with the self-indulgent vices of artificial society" (470). As he patronizingly writes to Anna:

[I]n offering to wed her he had, at first, contemplated the step of retiring from a profession which hitherto had brought him very slight emolument, and which, to speak plainly, he had thought might be difficult of practice after his union with her. But the unexpected mines of brightness and warmth that her letters had disclosed to be lurking in her sweet nature had led him to abandon that somewhat sad prospect. He felt sure that, with her powers of development, after a little private training in the social forms of London under his supervision, and a little help from a governess if necessary, she would make as good a professional man's wife as could be desired, even if he should rise to the woolsack. Many a Lord Chancellor's wife had been less intuitively a lady than she had shown herself to be in her lines to him. (471)

Indeed, the very tone of the letter divulges the weight of consideration which society dictates to Raye, and the social adaptability to the genteel London society and its rites, which, while conforming to it, entails their internal chasm.

On receiving Raye's letter, Edith is aware, in a way that Anna is not, of the threat marriage to an illiterate country girl will present to Raye's career and whole social existence, that such a marriage "meant his ruin" (471). She rationalises the situation by insisting to herself that her role is that of Anna's "protector" (466), that Anna is her "protégée" (468) and her well-being must be protected, whereas in fact, of course, Edith's actions are actually

rooted in her own feelings and desires; every atom of her emotionally-starved being stops her from putting an end to this "ecstasy of fancy" (470). And when Edith confronts Anna with her intention of informing Raye of the truth, Anna's reply reveals her role in the "triangular network of fraud and deception",⁸¹ in much the same way as it divulges the social dimension of their predicament:

O, mis'ess, dear mis'ess -- please don't tell him now! cried Anna in distress. If you were to do it, perhaps he would not marry me; and what should I do then? It would be terrible what would come to me". (471)

Unsurprisingly given his social anxieties and profound aspirations, Raye opts for "the ceremony to be in London, for greater privacy" (472). It is one more furtive marriage. It is this marriage which marks the end of the deceptive dream of the three characters and precipitates their final alienation. Whereas to the simple and ignorant Anna, this marriage is not only a saving of her reputation, but an achievement of social status far above her origins, to Edith it marks "the death of her dream" (472). To the upwardly mobile and "gentlemanly bridegroom" Charles Raye, of course, this marriage proves to be "an irremediable social blunder" (472).⁸² When Raye asks Anna to write a letter to his sister and discovers, to his amazement, her illiteracy -- she writes "a few lines, in the characters and spelling of a child of eight, and with the ideas of a goose" (474) -- he discovers the real identity of his correspondent, and the true source of the emotions to which he has

81. Brady, The Short Stories of Thomas Hardy 127.

82. Compare Mr. Twycott's furtive marriage in "The Son's Veto" with his parlour-maid, Sophy; a demeaningly marriage of convenience which Hardy similarly describes as "social suicide" (406).

responded. He and Edith are, he realises, "devoted lovers ... by correspondence!". As he explains to Edith,

Legally I have married her -- God help us both! -- in soul and spirit I have married you, and no other woman in the world! Yes, it is between you and me that the bond is -- not between me and her! (475).⁸³

Raye's extracting a kiss from Edith on "her mouth" (475), the sure mark of her passionate love for him and the only real and direct contact of "the emotional" (462) and imaginative Edith with a "very wicked and nice" (460) man, also marks, with implacable Hardyean irony, the separation between them. And separation will now indeed be their lot: Raye's social aspirations and professional dreams are ruined, by a socially-incompatible union which he views as "a galley, in which he the fastidious urban, was chained to work for the remainder of his life, with [Anna] the unlettered peasant, chained to his side" (476).⁸⁴ Again the trap had closed on two victims.

Edith, too, returns to her maladroit husband also to be chained to a life of "perfunctoriness" (476). Entering Anna's room in the darkness is a bitterly nostalgic reminder of Edith's wistful unfulfilled longings. Anna's marriage is not only social ruin to Raye, but also a psychological disaster for Edith: for one thing she has lost Anna's presence which might have filled her maternal void. For another Anna's departure marks the end of

83. Compare Troy's pathetic words to Fanny's Coffin in Far from the Madding Crowd "in the sight of heaven you are my very very wife". Compare also his words to Bathsheba "You are nothing to me -- nothing A ceremony before a priest doesn't make a marriage. I am not morally yours" 312.

84. John Bayley, An Essay on Hardy points out that "the apparently open end of the story is grimly determined by ... [this] metaphor" (225).

Edith's "impassioned dream" (476). Little wonder then that, "under the stupor of grief" and while "her lips [are] still tingling from the desperate presence of [Raye's] kiss" (476), Edith whispers despairingly to her husband "I forgot I had a husband" (476).

On the honeymoon journey to Knollsea, the yawning gap between Anna and Raye is made poignantly apparent: whereas Anna shyly "draw[s] near him as if her were a god", in a portrait of submission in which she early shows signs of being "a domestic animal who humbly heard but understood not" (473), Raye with painful and "dreary resignation" (477) reads the constant reminder of the origins of the lonely life that lies before them: "those sweet letters ... signed 'Anna'" (477). It is a chilling final scene, and an emblematic one: locked in the small railway compartment, cut off from the outside world, separated by up-bringing and education, and in Raye's case, inescapably cut off from the woman whose actual feelings he has responded to. At the same time, as Kristin Brady says of such characters generally:

[T]heir unhappiness stems from the degree to which conventional beliefs, customs, and desires govern the way in which they regard each other, construct their visions of happiness, make their sexual choices, and live their respective lives.⁸⁵

Charles seems to have forgotten the free, spontaneous feelings he had towards Anna at the outset of the story, seeing such spontaneity as transgressive of the conventions by which he has learned to live his life. The characters' real tragedy is the way they have internalised society's values, the way the characters thereby imprison and isolate themselves.

"The Son's Veto" (LLI), is another poignant tale in which "[e]ducation and culture are counterpoised in pitiless antagonism".⁸⁶ Sophy Twycott's gnawing grief and her

85. Brady "Conventionality" 28.

86. Hasan 127.

subsequent tragic alienation are mainly precipitated by her son's snobbery and that arises directly from the education which has moved him so far from the roots of his own mother's rural upbringing.

For all that the vicar's attraction to Sophy is -- like that of Charles Rye for Anna in "On the Western Circuit" -- bound up with her naturalness, when they remove to London, her husband is careful to polish away signs of her class origin; again, she has to learn registers of "respectability":

she had now been married more than fourteen years, and, her husband had taken much trouble with her education; but she still held confused ideas on the use of 'was' and 'were', which did not beget a respect for her among the few acquaintances she made. (407)

After her husband's death, marooned as she is in her semi-detached suburban villa, Sophy's loneliness is exacerbated by her son's repeated jibes about her relative illiteracy. While standing with her son, listening to a band performing a charity concert at a London Park, Sophy makes a grammatical error in the use of a verb. In his snobbish mortification about his mother's inadvertent slip, Randolph retorts acidly and unceremoniously: "Has, dear mother -- not have Surely you know that by this time!" (403). The boy, Randolph's, attendance at one of the great English public schools has developed in him more than just a concern for the class markers of grammatical accuracy, of course; having attained the polish of sophisticated urbanity and gentility, Randolph becomes all the more unrelenting to, and ashamed of, his unrefined, ill-educated mother. This inevitably widens the gap between mother and son:

Sophy's milieu being a suburb of minor tradesmen and under-clerks, and her almost only companions the two servants of her own house, it was not surprising that after her husband's death she soon lost the little artificial tastes she had acquired from

him, and became -- in her son's eyes -- a mother whose mistakes and origin it was his painful lot as a gentleman to blush for. (408)

Revitalised by her contact with Sam Hobson and through him, with the natural impulses of the countryside she has left, she longs for the kind of emotional fulfilment, which in her loneliness, she feels she could achieve with him. But she anticipates her son's priggish reactions; she tells Sam plaintively

I have a son, you know, a dear boy. He's at [A] public school -- one of the most distinguished in England [and] I am not a lady I never shall be. But he's a gentleman, and that -- makes it -- o how difficult for me. (410)

Knowing how "genteel" (412) and lady-like, Sophy used to be in her life with the vicar (though knowing her true humble origin as a serving-maid), Sam is hesitant about asking for her hand in marriage. But the real obstacle facing them both is Randolph who comes to embody the rigour of contemporary class division:

I almost fancy when I am miserable sometimes that he is not really mine, but one I hold in trust for my late husband. He seems to belong so little to me personally, so entirely to his dead father. He is so much educated and I so little that I do not feel dignified enough to be his mother (412)

When Sam tells her "still, you can do as you like, Sophy -- Mrs. Twycott It is not you who are the child, but he", she replies submissively "Ah, you don't know! Sam, if I could, I would marry you, some day. But you must wait a while and let me think" (412).

Enervated by her loneliness and homesickness, Sophy thinks of broaching the question of her re-marriage with Randolph, during -- a fine Hardyian touch -- a cricket-match at Lord's, presumably the Eton and Harrow match. In a revealing scene which bespeaks the extent of the estrangement between mother and son, Sophy witnesses

and anticipates lugubriously the early symptoms of the failure of her dream of escaping her loneliness:

They promenaded under the lurid July sun, this pair, so wide apart, yet so near, and Sophy saw the large proportion of boys like her own, in their bread white collars and dwarf hats, and all around the rows of great coaches under which was jumbled the débris of luxurious luncheons: bones, pie-crusts, champagne-bottles, glasses, plates, napkins and the family silver; while on the coaches sat the proud fathers and mothers; but never a poor mother like her. If Randolph had not appertained to these, had not centred all his interests in them, had not cared exclusively for the class they belonged to, how happy would things have been! (413)

When Sophy broaches Sam's proposal to Randolph, inevitably the first thing the latter asks about, out of "his aristocratic school-knowledge" (408), is whether his would-be stepfather is "a gentleman" (413). But when he is acquainted with Sam's real social status, a status which bespeaks a lack of refinement, he exclaims in exasperation "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!" (414).

On coming home from Oxford, during an Easter vacation, Randolph is infuriated at his mother's second broaching of the possibility of marriage to Sam; by now the boy's "wide infantine sympathies, ... with which he, like other children, had been born, and which his mother, a child of nature herself, had loved in him" has been constricted by his education to "a few thousand wealthy and titled people, the mere veneer of a thousand million or so of others who did not interest him at all" (408). Once again natural feeling has been distorted and deformed by the grinding rituals of social class. Being "ordained", his exasperation now takes "a more manly anger" (414), by making his mother swear before his private altar never to marry Sam Hobson without his consent. For all his notions of propriety and allegiances ("I owe this to my father" (414)), Randolph's religion is in fact an instrument of

social rigour and discrimination not of Christian charity, willing to sacrifice his mother's modest hopes of happiness on the altar of social decorum and his own social position. In her submission to his "contempt" and "ascendancy" (414), Sophy is reduced to a lonely entrapment, where her lameness increases and her heart pines away. In the absence of any one to talk or confide to, and amidst her utter loneliness, exacerbated mainly by her son whose "education ... ousted his humanity" Sophy murmurs dejectedly to herself, "Why mayn't I say to Sam that I will marry him? Why mayn't I?" (415).

Intimidated as a wife by a loveless marriage, motivated mainly by social reasons, unloved as a mother, Sophy ends up as a lonely, ostracized woman. Only in death is Sophy's dream ironically achieved. In a heartrending cortège, emblematically witnessed by her only two acquaintances in the world, this lonely woman ultimately returns, a lifeless corpse, to her native village Gaymead, in Wessex, where she is interred; only in death does Sophy come home.

"To Please his Wife" (LLI) also shows the high price paid by Hardy's characters for the internalization of conventional social values and class ambition. Described by F.A. Cassis as "a story not often read, and rarely, if ever, anthologised",⁸⁷ though rightly described by Braybrooke as "a very tragic short story [an] amazingly fine drama",⁸⁸ "To Please his Wife" is one of Hardy's most moving stories, dramatising again the vulnerability of the individual to the implacability of chance. In this story it is a young woman, Joanna Phippard, who seeks to "rise in the world" and it is part of the story's success that Hardy manages, for all our awareness of her ambition and covetousness, finally to evoke our

87. Cassis 293.

88. Braybrooke 68.

sympathy and pity for her in her poignant, lonely situation at the end of the story.

The story opens admirably with the emergence of a "dark figure of a man in a sailor's garb ... against the light" (478), into St. James's Church, in Havenpool Town, after a Sunday service. Indeed, this aptly emblematic reference to the recently-returned sailor, Shadrach Jolliffe, as a "dark figure" forshadows appropriately the implacable end that awaits him. Escaping "providentially" (479), from a shipwreck, Shadrach mounts the chancel-step to offer thanks.⁸⁹ Here at the outset Shadrach's emotional loneliness is dramatised as he kneels at the end of the service, apart from the congregation:

The people who had remained agape and motionless at the proceeding, mechanically knelt down likewise, but they continued to regard the isolated form of the sailor who, in the precise middle of the chancel-step, remained fixed on his knees, facing the east, his hat beside him, his hands joined, and he quite unconscious of his appearance in their regard. (478-79)

On finishing his thanksgiving, Shadrach leaves the Church and immediately meets the two girls whose presence in his life is to set in motion his drama: Emily Hanning and Joanna Phippard. While initially Shadrach is attracted to Emily, Joanna's jealousy causes her to win him away, seeing Emily and Shadrach "a green envy had overspread" her (482).

The narrator makes clear Joanna's mercenary and snobbish motives behind her choice:

Joanna was not altogether satisfied with the sailor. She liked his attentions, and she coveted the dignity of matrimony; but she had never been deeply in love with Jolliffe. For one thing, she was ambitious, and socially his position was hardly so good as her own, and there was always the chance of an attractive woman mating considerably above her. (480)

Like "a disabled vessel ... [driven] toward port";⁹⁰ the dutiful Shadrach is driven into a

89. Compare the hero's name with the allusively biblical Shadrach, who is thrown into the fire for refusing to worship the golden idol, but is miraculously rescued by the Lord. See Daniel 3.

90. Brady, The Short Stories of Thomas Hardy 131.

marriage with her. It is after the marriage that a profound and ironic reversal in the fortunes of the female protagonists occurs. While Joanna and Shadrach struggle to achieve financial and social success through a small grocery business, Emily Hanning marries a thriving merchant, Mr. Lester, whose fortune allows his wife to live in a considerable style. Hardy draws adeptly the sharpest portrait of the dire difference in class through the collision of two different worlds: genteel middle-class society with its richness, splendour and affluence (represented by Emily) contrasted with the humble lower-middle-class struggle of Joanna and Shadrach:

The worthy merchant's home, one of those large, substantial brick mansions frequently jammed up in old-fashioned towns, faced directly on the High Street, nearly opposite to the grocery shop of the Jolliffes, and it now became the pain of Joanna to behold the woman whose place she had usurped out of pure covetousness, looking down from her position of comparative wealth upon the humble shop-window with its dusty sugar-loaves, heaps of raisins, and canisters of tea, over which it was her own lot to preside. The business having so dwindled, Joanna was obliged to serve in the shop herself, and it galled and mortified her that Emily Lester, sitting in her large drawing-room over the way, could witness her own dancings up and down behind the counter at the beck and call of wretched twopenny customers, whose patronage she was driven to welcome gladly; persons to whom she was compelled to be civil in the street, while Emily was bounding along with her children and her governess, and conversing with genteelest people of the town and neighbourhood. (484-85)

As the "big brick house opposite" reflects "the oppressive sun's heat into the shop" (485), Joanna's sense of grievance and thwarted social ambition simmers; in increasing rage, she feels Emily's "[t]races of patronage" (485) (actually quite illusory, as it turns out, the creation of Joanna's own heated imagination). During long hours of labour in her meagre grocery shop which "now consist[s] of little more than a window and a counter" (490), and from behind "the screen of bottled pickles" (485), through which she peeps frustratedly upon Emily's luxurious mansion, Joanna seems to be imprisoned by her bitterness, unable to

respond to her basically decent husband. When each woman has two sons, Joanna is only aware of how, while Emily's sons will be able to go away to get a good education in a "college" (485), her own sons will be "obliged to go to the Parish School" (486).

It is his awareness of his wife's ambition and that he is "not brought up to shopkeeping" (485) that pushes Shadrach back to the sea, albeit reluctantly:

Not for the pleasure of it, I can tell'ee. There's no much pleasure at sea, Joanna, as I can find my back parlour here. To speak honest I have no love for the brine. I never had much. But if it comes to a question of a fortune for you and the lads, it is another thing. That's the only way to it for one born and bred a seafarer as I. (486)

At one level, though, for all its dangers, the natural freedom of the sea, the story suggests, is preferable to the constraints of the world of money and society; there is "a more open space to strike out in than here among friends and neighbours" (486), more natural freedom than in the pokey shop in which, when she visits, Emily has to "squeeze ... through the opening of the counter and into the parlour behind the shop," (491) and in a town in which even "large, substantial brick mansions" like Emily's are "jammed up" (484) between neighbouring buildings.

Joanna, on the other hand accedes stoically to "the semi-widowed existence of sailors' wives" (486), during the first journey, in order to turn her two sons, whom she "loved to idolatry" (484) into "gentlemen" armed with "algebra and ... Latin!" (487). As she tell Shadrach before departure "I want to be something genteel" (488). On his safe return, Jolliffe empties a "canvas bag, full and rotund" (487), with sovereigns and guineas into Joanna's lap. To his amazement, Joanna remains discontented with what he himself considers "a fortune", as she exclaims: "is that all? ... A fortune -- judged by sea; but judged by land --" (487). It is this last sentence which sets ironically and sharply the line of

demarcation between two juxtaposed worlds: the world of the sea with its spirit of adventure, and freedom, its contact with the basics of life and its need for decent faith in the powers of Providence, and the mercenary world of Havenpool with its frantic preoccupation with false notions of gentility, respectability, social veneer, ostentatious rivalry as typified by Joanna.

Being a mere pawn now "in the cursed grip of the lust for money",⁹¹ that will elevate her to the socially-graceful sphere of her rival Emily, Joanna grudgingly tells Shadrach "we count by hundreds; they count by thousands' (Nodding towards the other side of the street). They have set up a carriage and pair since you left" (488); in the face of the insensitive remarks of Joanna -- "they are rich, and we are poor still! I was once above her" (488) -- Shadrach has little choice but to agree to go back to sea, yet with his two sons this time, with the view of maximising their fortune. Though at first, Joanna procrastinates and trembles at the offer, her social ambition overcomes her maternal feelings and ultimately she acquiesces. Though feeling guilt-ridden, at their leaving, it seems that her old dream of rising socially, and her painful inclination to eclipse her only rival in the world, Emily Lester, forstall any other prospect: "when ... she looked across at Emily's, a gleam of triumph lit her thin face at her anticipated release from the thralldom of subservience" (490).

With the lapse of time and the failure of her husband and sons to return, Joanna's financial circumstances deteriorate and her psycholocial mood degenerates. Her sense of guilt deepens: "Tis I have sent them!" (490). Obsessed with notions of their safety and return, Joanna becomes a slave to an overriding anxiety, in which there are signs of madness

95. Braybrooke 69.

and bursts of lurking hallucination:

She went to church regularly morning and afternoon, and sat in the most forward pew, nearest the chancel-step. Her eyes were mostly fixed on that step, where Shadrach had knelt in the bloom of his young manhood: she knew to an inch the spot, which his knees had pressed twenty winters before; his outline as he had knelt, his hat on the step beside him. God was good, Surely her husband must kneel there again: a son on each side as he had said; George just here, Jim just there. By long watching the spot as she worshipped became as if she saw the three returned ones there kneeling, the two slim outlines of her boys, the more bulky form between them; their hands clasped, their heads shaped against the eastern wall. The fancy grew almost to an hallucination; she could never turn her worn eyes to the step without seeing them there. (491-92)

Not only is the story brought neatly full-circle, from Shadrach's original lonely kneeling in the church at the beginning, but Joanna's desperate state of mind is dramatised; ultimately her guilt becomes morally instructive and she comes to see her tribulation as a "purgation for the sin of making them the slaves of her ambition" (492).

Finally, debilitated by her financial situation and by her mental state, Joanna is forced not only to give up her home and shop, but to accept Emily's kind offer of a room in her mansion across the street. Joanna's mental disturbance is clear by this point: "I know why you've got me here! They'll come, and be disappointed at not finding me at home, and perhaps go away again; and then you'll be revenged for my taking Shadrach away from 'ee!" (493). Her decline is inexorable; she becomes gaunt with anxiety, and increasingly out of touch with the realities of the world around her. The abjectness of her situation, the price she has paid for her social ambition, is clear at the end, when six years after the men have gone, and after every one assumes their death, steps in the street outside late at night cause her to rush from her bed and into the street:

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" (493)⁹²

In few of Hardy's stories is the emotional and psychological impact of alienation and guilt, the price of accepting without question the grinding mechanism of social ambition, dramatised so vividly; she has become something barely human, pitiful in her isolation.

These were tensions of the rigour of class-consciousness, and class-snobbery whose recurrence in Hardy's fiction (both short and long) as we have seen, bespeaks the novelist's concerns and obsession with the predicament.

Partaking in such a characteristically Hardyian idiosyncrasy, the examples discussed reveal repeatedly the alienating effect of class-consciousness and the irretrievable price that most of the characters ultimately pay for attempts to ascend the top of the social ladder. Restless yearning to transcend the boundaries of parochial-minded Wessex, as well as the barriers of the middle-class world beyond, repeatedly, indeed almost inevitably the reader ultimately feels, ends in the claustrophobic loneliness of a loveless marriage or in total personal isolation.

92. Compare this final passage with the dire sense of loneliness of someone cut out off from community and society in Hardy's marvellous poem "Nobody Comes", which shows the same sense of loneliness and ennui: "And mute by the gate I stand again alone,/And nobody pulls up there." See Gibson 743. Compare also Hardy's insightful poem "The Sailor's Mother." See Gibson 664.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Loneliness of Gender: The Caging of Erotic Feeling

In recent years much has been written about Hardy's treatment of gender and particularly, about his construction of women in his fiction. The attention this aspect of Hardy's work has received is a measure of how rich and complex this aspect of his work is. George Wotton, for example has observed that:

At times he writes with great sympathy about the subjection of women, at others his comments appear to us now to display the typical male attitudes of his time which would certainly be called sex blind and perhaps sexist.¹

At times, and especially in the period before the development of more sophisticated critical theories about gender, Hardy's treatment of women has indeed been seen negatively. Thus, J. O. Bailey views Hardy's women as mere "creatures of instinct".² Four years later, Albert J. Guerard sees Hardy's female characters as being "irrational, impulsive, vain, fickle, dishonest, and unjust".³ In the same vein, Rosalind Miles observes Hardy's acute awareness of women's "trivial details",⁴ while Perry Meisel is of the view that "the capricious woman and her romantic relationships to the central male figures is the most definitive characteristic aspect of the universe of Hardy's novels".⁵ John Lucas observes the way Hardy seems to portray women's "impulsiveness",⁶ while Irving

1. George Wotton, Thomas Hardy: Towards a Materialist Criticism (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1985) 122.

2. J. O. Bailey, "Hardy's 'Imbedded Fossil'," Studies in Philology 40 (1954): 671.

3. Guerard, Thomas Hardy 132.

4. Rosalind Miles, "The Women of Wessex," The Novels of Thomas Hardy, ed. Anne Smith (London: The Vision P, 1979) 25.

5. Perry Meisel, Thomas Hardy: The Return of the Repressed (New Haven, London: Yale UP, 1972) 40.

6. John Lucas, The Literature of Change: Studies in the Nineteenth-Century Provincial Novel (Sussex: The Harvester P, 1977) 138.

Howe, noting more sympathetically Hardy's fascination with women, also registers the same sense of female instability and capriciousness:

Throughout his years as a novelist Hardy found steadily interesting the conceits and playfulness of women, the elaborate complex of stratagems in which the sexual relationship appears both as struggle and game. He liked the changefulness, sometimes even the caprice of feminine personality; he marvelled at the seemingly innate capacity of young girls to glide into easy adaptations and tactical charms.⁷

It is certainly not difficult to find evidence of Hardy's awareness of the wiles of the female in his society. When asked to contribute to a symposium on the topic of sex education for young women ("The Tree of Knowledge") which appeared in The New Review in May 1894, Hardy recommends that

a plain handbook on natural processes, specially prepared, should be placed in the daughter's hands, and, later on, similar information on morbid contingencies.⁸

This, in the context of prevailing attitudes, is a relatively liberal stance.⁹ But he goes on:

7. Irving Howe, Thomas Hardy (1966; London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968) 108-9.

8. Thomas Hardy, "On the Tree of Knowledge," Life and Art by Thomas Hardy: Essays, Novels and Letters, ed. Ernest Brennecke JR. (New York: Greenberg, 1925) 118.

9. The Edward Carpenter Archive at Sheffield City Library gives some confirmation of young middle-class women's ignorance of the facts of physical sexuality. After the publication of Love's Coming-of Age in 1896, which took a radical attitude to sexual freedom and not only deplored contemporary attitudes to women, but acknowledged women's sexual drives, Carpenter received many letters from women, preserved in the archive, indicating the depth of their ignorance of sexual matters even when they got married and the emotional and sexual stress, even trauma, which resulted. As a homosexual, Carpenter was acutely aware of the sexual repression his society's attitudes insisted upon; he writes in his autobiography, after the First World War, looking back on the Victorian Age in which he had grown up: "sex questions ... were generally tabooed and practically not discussed". See Edward Carpenter, My Days and Dreams: Being Autobiographical Notes (1916; London: Allen & Unwin, 1918) 195. Compare Tess's agonizing words -- after the seduction scene -- to her mother: "Why didn't you tell me there was danger in men-folk? Why didn't you warn me?" (87).

Innocent youths should, I think, also receive the same instruction; for (if I may say a word out of my part) it has never struck me that the spider is invariably male and the fly invariably female.¹⁰

The woman as spider, inveigling the young man into her web, this is not the standard Victorian vision of the angel at the hearth, of course, but it is an image which is not hard to find in Hardy's fiction, from the more lighthearted earlier work -- Fancy Day's sexual teasing not only of Dick Dewy but also of Rev. Maybold -- to the darker tones of the mature novels: Mrs Charwood's seduction of Grace's husband, Fitzpiers (we note that Mrs Charwood has mantraps "against the walls" (59)), and Eustacia Vye drawing the men to her on the Heath like "moths" to the flame (87).

But this is far from the whole picture, of course, and Rosemarie Morgan helpfully suggests a more thoughtful approach to issues of gender-relations in Hardy's work:

Having no liking for the 'perfect' woman in fiction, and having a preference for 'imperfection' in his heroines, Hardy has been accused, from Victorian days to the present, of misogyny. But, for the imperfections of man in his fiction, he has not once been accused of misanthropy.¹¹

The male protagonists are, of course, seen by critics as tragic heroes, at the mercy, as a later chapter will explore, of the isolation and alienation which result from the struggle to exist in a universe which has no organising intelligence, a universe governed only by chance. Women, however, are victims twice over. They share the vagaries of existence in a world devoid of secure

10. Hardy, "The Tree of Knowledge" 118.

11. Rosemarie Morgan, Cancelled Words: Rediscovering Thomas Hardy (London: Routledge, 1992) 123. On this point see also Mary Childers, "Thomas Hardy: The Man Who 'Liked' Women," Criticism 23 (1981): 317-34 and Katherine Rogers, "Women in Thomas Hardy," The Centennial Review 19,2 (1957): 249-58.

meaning. But in addition they have to exist in a social structure which has been constructed by, and for the benefit of, men, a social structure which defines and constructs women in specific ways, regardless of their true nature. Her role, in Hardy's society, was that of the young woman who, on the basis of her social accomplishments and unblemished character as well as of her financial situation (i.e. the financial provision her father could provide her with at marriage) and the acceptability of her looks, would be chosen to become the wife of a man of her own social station (or better still that of a higher one). At this point she became his emotional companion, the adornment of his drawing room, the virtuous mother to his children, dutiful, emotionally sensitive but devoid of economic or political power in her own right *and* devoid, too, of the sexual impulses which governed the more animalistic aspect of the male: "Her place was in the home, on a veritable pedestal if one could be afforded, and emphatically not in the world of affairs".¹² This construction of women, it almost goes without saying, had its own inner contradictions. As Susan Kingsley Kent points out

the dominant theme of middle-class ideology stressed women's roles as wife and mother to the exclusion of all other functions and invested in women the responsibility of upholding morality and purity. While denying middle-class women sexuality, nineteenth-century bourgeois society paradoxically heightened an awareness of women as primarily reproductive and sexual beings.¹³

Moreover, such as emphasis on the needs of the woman to be virtuous, to deny the valid existence of her own sexual impulses, sets up painful inner tensions. Not only are perfectly natural impulses condemned as "sinful" -- by the woman herself, of course, conditioned by her upbringing and

12. Richard D. Altick, Victorian People and Ideas (London: J. M. Dent, 1974) 54.

13. Susan Kingsley Kent, Sex and Suffrage in Britain, 1860-1914 (London: Routledge, 1990) 24.

society -- but she is aware of the pressures she can create in others; it is a situation of which

Hardy was acutely aware, as George Wotton points out:

Unable to reconcile [the] conflicting vision of herself, she [the Hardy heroine] experiences her subjection as guilt in expiation of which she must suffer the remorse of seeing the suffering of those who 'love' her, suffering of which she is held to be the cause.¹⁴

To return for a moment to one of the "spiders" who inveigle man into their webs, Mrs Charmond in The Woodlanders is ultimately a victim not a simple villain, despite the effect which her vampish life-style -- her boudoir in which she reclines with her cigarettes -- as well as her adultery would have had on the Victorian reader. When, in that very boudoir, Fitzpiers asks her how she came to be in the area at all, she answers: "A man brought me. Women are always carried about like corks on the waves of masculine desires" (188). At the same time she is not just the victim of a particular man but of a society which condemns her own sexual and emotional desires; when Mr Melbury warns her off having any further relationship with his daughter's husband, Hardy's language carefully registers the power of her frustrated feelings:

As soon as he was out of the room she went to a corner and there burst into tears, and writhed, under an emotion in which hurt pride and vexation mingled with better sentiments.

Mrs Charmond's mobile spirit was subject to these fierce periods of high-tide and storm. She had never so clearly perceived till now that her soul was being slowly invaded by a delirium which had brought about all this; that she was losing judgement and dignity under it, becoming an animated impulse only, a passion incarnate. A fascination had led

14. Wotton 131. Relatedly, Jenni Calder, Women And Marriage in Victorian Fiction (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), feels that "because man is a victim of his sex drive, because man must have a woman, the woman has a position of immense power at the same time as being degraded" (206). For example, in Jude the Obscure, Sue tells Jude: "Sometimes a woman's love of being loved gets the better of her conscience, and though she is agonized at the thought of treating a man cruelly, she encourages him to love her while she does not love him at all. Then, when she sees him suffering, her remorse sets in, and she does what she can to repair the wrong" (253).

her on; it was as if she had been seized by a hand of velvet; and this was where she found herself -- overshadowed with sudden night, as if a tornado had passed. (231)

Hardy is clearly aware of the power of female emotional and sexual drives -- we see similar pressures in Eustacia Vye in The Return of the Native.¹⁵ He is aware, too, of the inner stresses created both by society allowing no legitimate outlet for such instincts (indeed denying their existence, unless the woman was "fallen" or "sinful", a danger rooted deep in Christian theology) and also, repeatedly, by the woman refusing to recognise the true nature of such impulses, herself repressing them and/or identifying them (and thus herself) as "sinful".¹⁶

Thus, the portrayal by Hardy of women as "capricious" needs more careful consideration. He is aware that young women in his society live their lives in an essentially artificial way. They are constructed as essentially lacking the instinctual sexual drives deemed natural to men and must at the same time, as we have seen, make themselves appealing and attractive to men -- in a way which does not manifest any sense of sexual desire -- in order to "catch" a husband to ensure their future financial well-being, since *they* have no economic power of *their* own. Harvey Curtis Webster has observed that:

The women by nature cultivate the art of attracting men. Because women realize that the captivation of men is their chief aim in life, they are adept in the arts of coquetry. The lives of women in general are dominated by 'woman's ruling passion' to fascinate and influence those more powerful than she.¹⁷

15. Penny Boumella, Thomas Hardy and Women: Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form (Sussex: The Harvester P, 1982), points out correctly that "The interaction of dominant, but largely unrecognized, sexual feeling and apparently independent feeling or action creates in Hardy's women a predisposition towards intense physical response to mental and emotional conflict" (38).

16. Cf. David Morse, High Victorian Culture (London: Macmillan, 1993) 482.

17. Webster 129.

At the same time she must do so while being on occasion acutely uncertain of the nature of her own selfhood, denying impulses and feelings about some men, for example, impulses which would seem to her puzzling and even dangerous. George Wotton neatly sums up the position:

They become their own enemies because the enemy is not without but within ... it is not men who dominate women but their own 'essential natures' [They] are not consciously in control of their actions because they are controlled by something even deeper than emotion, namely instinct.¹⁸

In new relationships with men, perhaps fraught with excitement, suffering and anxiety, there is the feeling of insecurity, and lack of a sure sense within the woman of precisely who she is, a lack of authentic means of stabilizing her seemingly chaotic emotional experience, while at the same time being acutely aware that the society's sexual dance was ultimately not merely a matter of emotional satisfaction but of very real economic necessity. Hardy manifests this insecurity, is both fascinated by it and aware of what lay behind it, and of the potential dangers of the woman's situation, her vulnerability and of the isolating effects both of her emotional anxiety and, even more painful, of her offending her society's codes.

Inevitably Hardy's portrayal becomes more profound as his understanding deepens: the pains of Mrs Charmond, for example, come not only after somewhat lighter treatment of the issues. In Under the Greenwood Tree, the very name of Fancy Day suggests a concern with outward appearance, and a lack of authenticity, perhaps fickleness. Repeatedly she makes the life of the ardent Dick somewhat miserable; on his day off, for example, she keeps Dick waiting while she mends her dress so that she will look pretty in Church, rather than going out immediately for a

18. Wotton 174.

walk with him. Tempted by the trappings of middle-class comfort and respectability, Fancy is attracted to Rev. Maybold and impulsively accepts his offer of marriage, despite her understanding with Dick; when Maybold discovers what she has done, she replies:

It is my nature -- perhaps all women's -- to love refinement of mind and manners; but even more than this - to be ever fascinated with the idea of surroundings more elegant and pleasing than those which have been customary. And you praised me - and praise is life to me. It was alone my sensations at these things which prompted my reply. Ambition and vanity they would be called: perhaps they are so. (176-77)

Even at the "happy ending" of this early novel, as Dick finally wins his Fancy, there are slight shadows: it is clear that some things Fancy will never be able to share with her husband. In some respects she will remain alone: as they hear the romantic song of the nightingale, she thinks "of a secret she would never tell" (198). In Far from the Madding Crowd, Bathsheba Everdene is more financially secure than Fancy once she inherits the farm, but she is still seen as impulsive, unstable even coquettish in her personal relationships: "Bathsheba's feeling was always to some extent dependent upon her whim, as is the case with many other women" (402). She sends Boldwood a valentine, stirs this serious man into passion only to reject him: "Mr Boldwood, I promised you nothing You were nothing to me once ... you are now nothing to me again" (213). This time, of course, the consequences of a young woman's emotional game - playing are more tragic, and not only does the overall tone darker in the novels which follow, but so does Hardy's understanding of the supposedly fickle woman: she becomes both more tragic and more isolated as the depth of her plight is explored: Eustacia alone and desperate in the house on the Heath, Mrs Charmond alone in the boudoir of her substantial house.

Darkest of all is the way that Jude is torn apart by "the rule of woman's whims" (249), those of both Arabella and Sue. Motivated by Sue's kiss that constitutes "a turning-point in [his]

career", Jude decides to relinquish being a "servant of a religion in which sexual love was regarded at its best a frailty and its worst damnation" (227). Bitterly he reviews his fate as shaped by the seemingly capricious hands of two women:

Strange that his first aspiration towards academical proficiency had been checked by a woman, and that his second aspiration -- towards apostleship -- had also been checked by a woman. 'Is it,' he said, 'that the women are to blame, or is it the artificial system of things, under which the normal sex-impulses are turned into devilish domestic gins and springes to noose and hold back those who want to progress'. (228)

But again, of course this is not the whole story. While we can understand why at one point Judge says to Sue: "I think you are a flirt" (214), we also can see the inadequacy of such a view of Sue. She is the most divided and insecure of all Hardy's heroines, and in part this stems ultimately from the precise fact that she is in process of challenging the very conventions which imprison her fellow women and have imprisoned her forebears in Hardy's fiction. She is neurotic about sexuality; as, in some way a New Woman, as a woman who can quote Mill and Shelley against marriage, she is determined to be free, not to be enmeshed in the nets of her society's dictates about sex and marriage. She would prefer to be Jude's "friend" or "comrade" (164).¹⁹ But ultimately she pays a price for her independence, an almost hysterical fastidiousness about sex, in part born of a revulsion from the necessity to undertake the sexual act with Phillotson and then a fear that sexuality will damage her relationship with Jude.

In short fiction the figure of the capricious woman recurs, but again it is not ultimately a simple matter of the woman as spider and the man as fly; the woman too is a victim of her

19. Interestingly, this word has been repeatedly used by Edward Carpenter in the pamphlets collected as Love's Coming-of-Age to denote the right relationship between the sexes. Carpenter, of course, took the term from Walt Whitman.

circumstances. "The Lady Penelope" (GND), is not ultimately much more profound than the other, for the most part rather slight, stories in the above volume. Set in the seventeenth century, the story has, at least in its first part, the tone of the fable, with the beautiful Lady Penelope capturing the hearts of three essentially (to the reader) undistinguishable knightly lovers: Sir George Gale, Sir William Hervey and Sir George Drengard. Impatient at the repeated bickering of the three ardent suitors, Lady Penelope, in a "peremptory mood" impulsively, if implausibly, tells the three men: "Have patience, have patience, you foolish men! Only bide your time quietly, and , in faith, I will marry you all in turn" (331).²⁰

For no evident reason other than pure whimsy, she first marries Sir George Drengard. When he dies, she expresses interest in marrying Sir William Hervey, whom she prefers to his surviving rival, Sir John Gale. But as a woman (and here perhaps the fable set in the seventeenth century has some echo of the situation of the nineteenth-century woman) she cannot address him directly but only "by indirect hints through his friends" (332); but he does not pick up her "indirect signalling" (332); Lady Penelope piqued by his failure to renew his former attentions, out of caprice and in response to Sir John Gale's "unremitting" courtship and her friends' jests about marrying all three of the men, agrees to marry Sir John.

It is a loveless marriage, however, and at this point in the story the narrative alters its tone and to some extent its technique. Up to this point none of the characters has been very much

20. Compare the playful fickleness of the poor laundrywoman Avicé II, in Hardy's novel The Well-Beloved. As she tells Jocelyn Pierston: "I got tired of my lovers as soon as I got to know them well. What I see in one young man for a while soon leaves him and goes into another yonder, and I follow, and then what I admire fades out of him and springs up somewhere else; and so I follow on, and never fix to one. I have loved *fifteen* o'ready! yes, fifteen, I am almost ashamed to say, she repeated, laughingly". See Thomas Hardy, The Well-Beloved, ed. Tom Hetherington (1897; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986) 106.

developed psychologically; we have little sense of their having an inner life. But as Lady Penelope faces her unhappy marriage, the reader is given more insight into her lonely suffering. When Sir William does come home from his foreign travels, he sees her as looking "sick and sorry" (333). Moreover in her "heartsick" state her character grows in depth and maturity; when her second husband eventually dies, it is a different woman, far from capricious, who patiently, over many months, awaits Sir William's return:

[S]he had been cured of precipitancy (if ever women were), and was prepared to wait her whole lifetime a widow if the said Sir William should not appear. (335)

On marrying Sir William, however, Lady Penelope becomes a victim not only of the universe's contingency but also, and more directly, of social suspicion, born of course of a perception of her as a woman who wants and gets her own way. It is chance that causes her first two husbands to die, her rash statement about marrying all three of the knights thus being brought to pass. But local gossip cannot believe in this sequence of events and suggests that she in fact helped events along by poisoning Sir John, who had treated her so badly. When she hears these rumours, Sir William goes abroad again, leaving his wife to even more profound loneliness:

She dwindled thin in the face, and the veins in her temples could all be distinctly traced. An inner fire seemed to be withering her away. Her rings fell off her fingers, and her arms hung like flails of the threshers, though they had till lately been so round and elastic. (337)

When he returns home having been sent news of his wife's illness, it is too late and she dies of her illness, one "which seemed to be rather mental than physical" (337). Again the capricious woman becomes a victim of her actions, but more profoundly of circumstances and of social attitudes.

"A Mere Interlude" (CM) is another story which portrays the heroine's "impulsive

quality",²¹ a heroine who marries even more precipitately than Lady Penelope. The story is, once again, told by a narrator, ostensibly authenticating the events of the tale; the narrator, "a traveller in school-books" (757) immediately suggests that there is more to Baptista Trewthen than meets the eye:

People were wrong, he declared, when they surmised that Baptista Trewthen was a young woman with scarcely emotions or character. There was nothing in her to love, and nothing to hate But still waters run deep; and no crisis had come in the years of her early maidenhood to demonstrate what lay hidden within her, like metal in a mine. (757)

Baptista is another of Hardy's lower-class women who has been educated in order to advance herself socially; her family, on "Isles of Lyonesse beyond Off Wessex" (767), have spent money on her education and, after training, she becomes teacher on the mainland. But, far from allowing her freedom, her situation ultimately confirms the lack of real opportunities for young women in this society. The young woman quickly comes to "hate school" (758), and to dislike the children whom she sees as "unpleasant, troublesome little things, whom nothing would delight so much as to hear that [she] had fallen down dead" (758). Thus when she receives an offer of marriage, with her parents' endorsement, from Mr Heddegan, a financially-secure neighbour of theirs on the island, she sees in him a way of saving herself from her "natural dislike for teaching" (758). At the same time, the young woman is being forced to choose between two unattractive options; Heddegan is twenty years her senior and she has no affection for him. As she says to her landlady Mrs Wace: "Between us two, I like him better than school, but I don't like him quite so much as to wish to marry him" (758).

21. Brady, The Short Stories of Thomas Hardy 172.

Relinquishing herself passively to "what fate offered" (758), and to her landlady's advice, Baptista decides to accept Heddegan and prepares, at the end of the term, to travel home for the wedding. The measure of her passivity is that when she is delayed for several days, just before the wedding, from travelling to the island by bad weather, "It was indeed curious to see how little she minded [I]t would not be too much to say that ... she experienced an indefinable relief at the postponement of her meeting with Heddegan" (760). At this somewhat vulnerable point, as she wanders lonely on the port, Hardyean chance intervenes: she meets Charles Stow, a young man who had been her "sweetheart" (783) two years previously at the training college. He reminds Baptista of his previous feelings for him, and ardently urges her "to break off a marriage that's distasteful" (764) in favour of marrying him immediately. He coaxes her by praising her "pretty face", reminiscent he says, of "great actresses" (762).²² His courtship, after two years, is "as impetuous, violent even, as it was short"; she in fact reacts as much to his reproaches for not having responded to his affections two years ago as to his flattery and, she recollects later, is "piqued" into suddenly accepting him (768) and the two are married.

But chance again intervenes: as Baptista reflects on her "temerity in wedding so hastily that morning" and on the fact that she will have to tell her bewildered parents and fiancé, Charles goes for a bathe and is drowned. Entering "one of those undemonstrative phases so common with her" (769), she simply boards the ferry as if to leave behind the "ephemeral, meteor-like husband"

22. Compare Troy's flirtatious coaxing of Bathsheba and the consequence of this on her in Far from the Madding Crowd: "Ah, Beauty: good-bye" (173), as well as the narrator's insightful remark, two pages later: "It was a fatal omission of Boldwood's that he had never once told her she was beautiful" (175). Compare also, Fancy Day's reply to Rev. Maybold in Under a Greenwood Tree, in which she confesses of this bias in her, perhaps in all women's nature in Hardy: "And you praised me - and praise is life to me" (177).

who now "impressed her yet more as a fantasy" (770) than a reality which she has to take serious account of. Discovering that Mr Heddegan is on board the boat, she deftly slips "from her left hand the symbol of her wifhood" (772) and in due course, with a "resilient passivity"²³ that is at the same time not without archness, Baptista decides that "her story should remain untold" (772) and marries Heddegan. But her past is not so easily put aside: Heddegan has arranged that they should spend their honeymoon on the mainland, at Pen-Zephyr where she had met Charles and where he had been drowned, only days earlier. In fact, to her horror, the room in the hotel which he chooses for them contains the hat of the young man who has just been moved out to accommodate them: it is Charles's hat and, in a splendid piece of Hardy grotesquerie, she discovered that the body of Charles is in fact laid out in the room next door, awaiting his funeral. Failing to get her husband to change hotels, Baptista is condemned to spend the night there:

Horror broke her down That night she lay between the two men she had married - Heddegan on the one hand, and on the other through the partition against which the bed stood, Charles Stow. (777)

For all her impetuosity and duplicity, Baptista is portrayed as the victim of her actions, but perhaps even more of circumstance (the chance arrival of Charles at a point when she is in low spirits, and then his accidental death) and of her social situation as a young woman (she must teach or marry). The result is a sense of desperate isolation, trapped by the secret she dare tell nobody, and trapped, like Edith Harnham in "On the Western Circuit" (LLI), in a marriage to a man she does not love and who seems to have little emotional tenderness towards her; Heddegan quickly

23. Peter Larkin, "Irony and Fulfilment in Hardy's 'A Mere Interlude'," Journal of the Eighteen Nineties Society 9 (1978): 18.

seems "weary of his brief honeymoon" and tells her that he "must be into business again on Monday morning at latest" (779).

Her isolation is made all the more acute when, after they return home to the island and again by chance, a tramp, a former glazier who had acted as witness to her marriage to Charles, begins to blackmail her. Realising that she cannot ultimately buy his silence and that "the secret was sure to disclose itself" (783), she opts to "face a revelation" and to confess to her husband the "sort of tragedy I have concealed" (783), the facts of her fleeting first marriage. She is in turn astonished at the "ecstatic emotion" with which Heddegan greets her confession; then he confesses his secret, the existence of his "four tragedies -- that is to say, four strapping girls" (784) from a similarly furtive relationship, legalized only as his mistress was dying. Moreover, the daughter's illiteracy condemns Baptista to the "one thing she abhorred" (785) and to escape which she married Heddegan in the first place, teaching -- "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!" (758). Punished, in other words, for her capriciousness and, ultimately, for being a young woman who has felt that she has no option but to marry a man for his money and thus for "peace and quietness" (783).

This time, however, the impulsive young woman, trapped in her loneliness and unhappiness, looks ultimately on her fate as a "retribution fairness" (786) and begins to be matured by her "very mortification" (786);²⁴ she develops a more authentic sense of who she is and ultimately reaches a form of serenity and content. She starts to feel "sympathy" for the four

24. Brady, The Short Stories of Thomas Hardy, points out that "Baptista's Christian name suggests that her 'interlude' will be a 'baptism' of some sort, and her surname -- blending the words 'truth' and 'burthen' -- implies that these two things are somehow linked" (172).

girls, to learn

That in humanity, as exemplified by these girls, there was nothing to dislike, but infinitely much to pity She grew to like the girls of unpromising exterior, and from liking she got to love them, till they formed an unexpected point of junction between her own and her husband's interests, generating a sterling friendship at least, between a pair in whose existence there had threatened to be neither friendship nor love. (786-87)²⁵

It is not a story to gain the applause of feminists, in Hardy's own time or ours, but it is ultimately a story which again shows female capriciousness and impulsiveness to have its roots in the limits placed upon women's lives, the confining options which such lower-middle-class women had in life; while the impulse towards love and sexual contentment was a wholly understandable one, its frustration left women emotionally unfixed and insecure.

Thus, what one senses in Hardy, in the novels as well as in the short stories, is an understanding of the tensions which underlie, and give rise to, the surface capriciousness and impulsiveness. Hardy shows "how women's lives were distorted simply because they were women, trapped in a moral order rooted in sexual discrimination and in a social structure which refused to acknowledge them as complete human beings".²⁶ And this awareness is not present only in the fiction: James Granville Southworth has observed in relation to the poetry:

It is true that since Shakespeare has had no more profound sympathizer, one more willing to understand her as she is, than Hardy. He seems to have understood her inner qualities

25. Interestingly, it seems that this happy ending stems in part from Hardy's awareness of the intrinsic addition and happy impact that the existence of children may add upon the dreary life of a couple of married people. A note dated 13 August 1876, almost eleven years before the publication of "A Mere Interlude", may hint, in part, at Hardy's basic inspiration for this ending: "We hear that Jane, our late servant, is soon to have a baby. Yet never a sign of one is there for us" See Life 116.

26. Patricia Stubbs, Women and Fiction: Feminism and the Novel, 1880-1920 (Sussex: Harvester, 1979) 80.

better even than he had understood those of his men.²⁷

In the 1890s, even as pressure from women themselves is growing, for fuller rights to higher education and the professions, for the vote, for greater social and sexual freedom, Hardy's journal shows him to be acutely, even painfully, aware of the extent to which the majority of women remained passive, conditioned to accept their lot:

A community of women, especially young women, inspires not reverence but protective tenderness in the breast of one who views them. Their belief in circumstances, in convention, in the rightness of things, which you know to be not only wrong but damnably wrong, makes the heart ache, even when they are waspish and hard²⁸

That compassionate "protective tenderness", it could be argued, is an essential feature of how Hardy regarded the world, especially the natural world, around him; in a characteristic passage he tells William Archer "what are my books but one plea against man's inhumanity to man -- to woman -- and to the lower animals".²⁹ In fact Hardy's novels and short stories are replete with examples of animals, birds and women who becomes vulnerable either because of the indifferent processes of the natural world or because of man's -- and here the gendered noun is intentional -- callous exploitation or the way he has structured society, women "suffering under immutable law".³⁰ It is not simply a matter of Hardy being fond of birds for their own sakes, for all his "extensive familiarity with [their] habits, colours and songs".³¹ Frequently he turns to them as

27. James Granville Southworth, The Poetry of Thomas Hardy (New York: Russell, 1966) 56.

28. See Life 235.

29. William Archer, Real Conversations (London: Heinemann, 1904) 47.

30. Southerington 70.

31. See F. B. Pinion, Thomas Hardy: Art and Thought (London: Macmillan, 1977) 136.

referents through which he can dramatise the human situation, usually the plight of women: women as vulnerable or caged.³² This is of course a particular aspect of Hardy's sense of human beings as ultimately part of the rhythms of the natural world, living in one universe with animal nature, at the mercy of natural processes though with an awareness, too, of how other creatures are at the mercy of the human race. What also separates human kind from the other animals and birds is humans' "possessions of consciousness",³³ that awareness of self that is the source of human loneliness. In a letter of 19 December, 1913 to The Times, Hardy remonstrates against what he sees as the mindless practice, especially in a supposedly modern civilization, of keeping birds in cages.

It seems marvellous that the 20th Century, with all its rhetoric on morality, should tolerate such useless inflictions as making animals do what is unnatural to them or drag out an unnatural life in a weird cell.³⁴

Given this strength of feeling, we can sense the power which lies behind the following note in his journal as, watching a crowd at Marble Arch on 28 May 1885, he once again makes a connection between the bird world and the human world:

This hum of the wheel - the roar of London! What is it composed of? Hurry, speech,

32. On Hardy's distinctive use of imagery in general and on this point in particular, see for example Richard C. Carpenter, "The Mirror and the Sword: Imagery in Far from the Madding Crowd," Nineteenth-Century Fiction 18 (1974): 345; Raymond Chapman, The Language of Thomas Hardy (London: Macmillan, 1990) 86-7 and Alastair Stewart, "Pictorial Imagery in the Novels of Thomas Hardy," The Review of English Studies 12 (1961): 262.

33. Southerington 69-70.

34. Quoted in Orel, Personal Writings 252. For Hardy's further compassionate feelings towards birds in particular see Life 264, 321-22; his letter of 22 December, 1916 to Florence Henniker, Collected Letters, Vol. 5 192; J. Stevens Cox, ed., Thomas Hardy's Will and Other Wills of His Family (St. Peter Port, Guernsey: The Toucan P, 1967) 2 and D. F. Barber, Concerning Thomas Hardy (London: Charles Skilton, 1968) 119.

laughters, moans, cries of little children. The people in this tragedy laugh, sing, smoke, toss off wines, etc. Make love to girls in drawing-rooms and areas, and yet are playing their parts in the tragedy just the same All are caged birds; the only difference lies in the size of the cage.³⁵

It is worth noting, before moving on, one further link between Hardy's compassions for the suffering of animals and suffering in the human world. On 13 July 1888, the street life of London again impresses itself on his imagination

After being in the street: What was it on the faces of these horses? -- Resignation. Their eyes looked at me, haunted me. The absoluteness of their resignation was terrible. When afterwards I heard their tramp as I lay in bed, the ghosts of their eyes came in to me, saying "where is your justice, O man and ruler?".³⁶

Two years later at the Alhambra Theatre, he notices:

the air of docile obedience on the faces of some of the dancing women, a passive resignation like that of a plodding horse, as if long accustomed to correction The Première Danseuse strokes each calf with the sole of her other foot like a fly - on her mouth hanging a perpetual smile.³⁷

In the fiction, again, it is the women who are most frequently related to animals and birds, usually to manifest the ways in which their natural life is being constrained, distorted or ignored.

35. Life 171.

36. Life 211. For further Hardy's signs of deep sympathy with animals see Life 303, 346-47, 434, 444; Harold Orel, The Final Years of Thomas Hardy, 1912-1928 (London: Macmillan, 1976) 89 and Flower 104.

37. Life 226-27. Michael L. Campbell, "Thomas Hardy's Attitude Towards Animals," Victorian Institute Journal 2 (1973), points out that "Men and animals, Hardy felt, are joined together not only by their common origin but also by their sharing of frustration and suffering" (64). As Holland, Thomas Hardy, has pointed out, Hardy's horror of cruelty of any kind, especially cruelty to animals, must "in a hunting county and a district surrounded by hunting counties to a considerable extent [have] cut him off from county society which was interested chiefly in sport, and not in literature or intellectual pursuits" (20-1). In other words, Hardy's compassionate regard for the creatures around him, human and animal, in itself contributed to some extent to his lack of involvement in society after his move back to Dorset from London.

For instance, in Far from the Madding Crowd, Bathsheba's debilitation, isolation and anguish at her husband Troy's behaviour is caught vividly in a highly sensuous image, after her discovery of the yellow slip of Fanny's hair in Troy's watch: "she chafed to and fro in rebelliousness, like a caged leopard, her whole soul was in arms, and the blood fired her face" (284). Manifestly, the plight of Hardy's most vividly-drawn female protagonist, Tess, is conveyed by an emotionally-moving series of symbolic patterns of animal and bird imagery. For instance, as Alec begins his seduction of Tess he makes "a sort of couch or nest for her in the deep mass of dead leaves", telling her "Now, you sit there" (75); almost from the outset the girl is a poor homeless bird, eating the crust of humanity for the rest of her life. At Talborthays, we are told that Tess responds to the music of Angel's harp "like a fascinated bird [and] could not leave the spot" (127); once more she is to be painfully ensnared. In a remarkable scene, but one which in the present context we may see as relating to a central aspect of Hardy's imaginative vision, Tess, alone in a wood, finds numbers of dead and wounded pheasants from the previous day's hunt: "With the impulse of a soul who could feel for kindred sufferers as much as for herself, Tess's first thought was to put the still living birds out of their torture" (271); her own misery will end only when Angel returns, and even for that, harried to the end, she will finally have to pay her own lonely price. In the memorable opening scene of The Mayor of Casterbridge, when Susan Henchard is sold by her drunken husband, her plight is echoed by another bird, trapped, temporarily, by a man-made construction:

At that moment a swallow, one among the last of the season, which had by chance found its way through an opening into the upper part of the tent, flew to and fro in quick curves above their heads, causing all eyes to follow it absently. (11)

The motif recurs in Jude the Obscure: for example, after Sue Bridehead's confession to Jude of

her marital unhappiness -- another woman caught in the snares of contemporary laws and conventions -- Jude responds: "I can see you through your feathers, my poor little bird" (221).

The association of the woman, constrained by the way her society constructs her role, with the lonely caged bird is equally prevalent in the short fiction. For example, in Hardy's uncollected story "The Spectre of the real" (1896), Rosaly's distraction, disillusionment and sense of vulnerability after meeting Jim to put an end to their incompatible marriage is emphasized as she looks

out under the log roof at a chaffinch swinging himself backwards and forwards on a larch bough. A sort of dreary indifference to her surroundings; a sense of being caged and trapped had begun to take possession of Rosaly. The present was full of perplexity, the future objectless. (Indiscretion 195)

In "Fellow-Townsmen" (LLI), Barnet, the businessman, visits Lucy Savile, the young woman with whom he had a relationship -- and with whom he apparently had an informal understanding -- before making a more advantageous marriage. The cottage is small and Lucy lives alone, struggling to earn sufficient money to maintain her respectability. Barnet has not visited her for a long time:

The unwanted tones of a man's voice in that feminine chamber had startled a canary that was roosting in its cage by the window; the bird awoke hastily, and fluttered against the bars. She went and stilled it by laying her face against the cage and murmuring a coaxing sound. It might partly have been done to still herself. (86)

Clearly, the bird does not only manifest the internal turmoil which Lucy herself feels at Barnet's unexpected visit, but also her situation: she is the victim of the way this man has treated her and of the financial constraints which entrap a young woman in her position, whatever her personal

qualities. "Barbara of the House of Grebe" (GND) is a much more melodramatic treatment of a woman victimized by a man; T. S. Eliot said of this story that it "seem[s] to have been written solely to provide a satisfaction for some morbid emotion".³⁸ But the compassion for the grotesquely mistreated Barbara is again evident. Lord Uplandtowers, determined to "cure" his wife of her fetishistic love for her supposedly-dead former husband, Edmund Willowes, secretly mutilates the marble statue of Willowes which Barbara has in a closet; in her shock at the disfigurement, she is reduced to a state of complete nervous debility. Caged in her dead marriage to Uplandtowers -- in the following nine years she has eleven children, many of whom fail to survive -- she is a lonely, broken figure: "If he ever spoke sharply to her now, she did not revenge herself by flying off to a mental world of her own" (274).³⁹

Not all of the imagery which associates the suffering of women with birds utilize the literal image of the cage; sometimes it is more oblique or foreboding. In "The Romantic Adventures of a Milkmaid" (CM), for example, Baron Von Xanten grants the young milkmaid, Margery, her wish to attend the Yeomanry Ball as a "votive offering" (794) for saving him from suicide in a fit of depression. Alone and anxious, caught as it were in the uncertain area between her homely roots, with her farmboy fiancé, and her attraction to the upper-class, cosmopolitan glamour of the Baron, she awaits the Baron in the woods; her sense of insecurity is subtly suggested:

38. T. S. Eliot, After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy (London: Faber, 1934) 58. Relatedly, Bayley, An Essay on Hardy, condemns the story as "repellent" (21).

39. Compare Hardy's excellent poem "The Impercipient"; a poem which depicts Hardy's conflicting attitudes towards religion. Debilitated by the painful sense of loss of faith, enervated by the dire loneliness among his righteous fellows, Hardy compares himself to a clipped-wing's bird: "O, doth a bird deprived of wings/Go earth-bound wilfully!" See Gibson 68.

Nothing was moving except on the minutest scale, and she remained leaning over, the night-hawk sounding his croud from the bough of an isolated tree on the open hill side. (790)⁴⁰

In "A Mere Interlude" (CM), the anxiety which underlines Baptista Trewthen's apparent composure as she returns to the guest house at Pen-Zephyr bursts through into consternation as she realises that the hat which hangs behind their door is that of her dead first husband: again the imagery vividly indicates her sense of frozen horror:

Opposite her seat was the door, upon which her eyes presently became riveted like those of a little bird upon a snake Her teeth almost shattered; she murmured something incoherent. (775)

Again, in "Alicia's Diary" (CM), a story of jealousy, possessiveness and deceit followed ultimately by remorse and painful alienation, Caroline's vulnerability is suggested at the outset: while walking with her intended, Charles, and her sister, Alicia (through whose diary the story is narrated) -- we note that "Charles [is] in the middle between Caroline and [Alicia]" -- Caroline's attention is not on the other two, including her sister, who is unknown to her, a rival. Alicia later records in her diary:

Presently I found that, as usual, he and I were the only talkers, Caroline amusing herself by observing birds and squirrels as she walked docilely alongside her betrothed. (664)

40. One might note here that, though in the published version Margery does not go off with the mysterious Baron on his yacht at the end of the story but marries her humble suitor, Jim Hayward, this was not Hardy's original intention. A note written in 1927 on his copy of the volume in which the story appears again shows the pressures which Hardy was under to respect the bourgeois values of his readership:

Note: the foregoing finish of the Milkmaid's adventures by a re-union with her husband was adopted to suit the requirements of the summer number of a periodical in which the story was first printed. But it is well to inform readers that the ending originally sketched was a different one, Margery, instead of returning to Jim, disappearing with the Baron in his yacht at Idmouth after his final proposal to her, & being no more heard of in England. (Quoted in Millgate, His Literary Career as a Novelist, 283).

We notice that "docilely"; the point cannot be developed in a short story as it is in Tess of the d'Urbervilles but Caroline is as vulnerable, as potentially a victim as the birds and the small animals which she watches. Indeed, as she later flees to meet her lover in Venice, Caroline and her maid are seen (by Alicia, of course, in her diary) as "birds of passage" who "will be a mark for every marauder who encountered them" (653).

There are many other related examples, all indicating Hardy's sympathetic understanding of the pressures which underline the games women were required to play in Victorian society, how vulnerable they were to opinion and gossip, how precarious was their happiness and their prospects for financial security, and how often what looked like marital security was in fact a marital cage.

In part -- it is evident for example in what has already been said of his portrayal of women like Mrs Charmond and Eustacia Vye -- Hardy's compassionate understanding of women in his society stems from an understanding which few contemporary writers shared and very few -- beyond specifically sexual radicals like Carpenter or Havelock Ellis -- were willing to write about: that women, ordinary women not just harlots and "fallen women", had sexual desires and that these were perfectly natural. Quite how Hardy, with his limited experience of sexual relationships, arrived at such a perspective is difficult to determine. Possibly not having been brought up within the insulation of metropolitan middle-class conventions but within the rhythms of the natural world, where, the processes of animal breeding apart, the relations between youths and young girls in the rural community was less inhibited, may have played some part. We recall how the milkmaids, in Tess, are erotically aroused by Angel, especially after he has carried them across the flood in the lane: "The air of the sleeping-chamber seemed to palpitate with the hopeless passion

of the girls. They writhed feverishly under the oppressiveness of an emotion thrust upon them by cruel Nature's law - an emotion which they had neither expected nor desired" (149). Here, of course, class barriers prevent any possibility of a relationship with Angel, though such feelings towards a youth of their own class would presumably have been acted upon. Once more Hardy stresses the essential naturalness of such impulses.

Certainly, when John Goode remarks that "Hardy's strategy [is] to constitute the woman as symptom, as object of sexual desire",⁴¹ this in only part of the story; Rosemary Sumner is closer to the heart of the issue when she points out Hardy's "understanding of the sexual basis of much psychological disturbance" in women.⁴² In recent years feminist critics have paid increasing attention to this aspect of Hardy's writing, Judith Mitchell going as far as to assert that "As a late Victorian creator of erotic novels that deal frankly with women's issues, Hardy bears comparison with most feminist writers of the day".⁴³ Hardy's impatience about the reticence with which sexual matters were dealt with in contemporary literature is apparent in his essay "Candour in English Fiction" in January 1890:

Nothing is such literature should for a moment exhibit lax views of that purity of life upon which the well-being of society depends; but the position of man and woman in nature,

41. John Goode, Thomas Hardy: The Offensive Truth (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988) 121.

42. Rosemary Sumner, Thomas Hardy: Psychological Novelist (London: Macmillan, 1981) 3.

43. Judith Mitchell, The Stone and the Scorpion: The Female Subject of Desire in the Novels of Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, And Thomas Hardy (Westport; Connecticut and London: Greenwood P, 1994) 155. On this point see also Margaret R. Higonnet, "Introduction," The Sense of Sex: Feminist Perspectives on Hardy, ed. Margaret R. Higonnet (Urbana, Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1993) 5.

and the position of belief in the minds of man and woman -- things which everybody is thinking but nobody is saying -- might be taken up and treated frankly.⁴⁴

It is this acute concern with "what everybody is thinking but nobody is saying", and specially with what Patricia Stubbs terms "anxiety about women's sexuality",⁴⁵ which is a central element in the way, in his novels and his short fiction, Hardy regarded his world and in his "probing of the significance of ... patriarchal power" for both women and men.⁴⁶

Hardy's fiction explores the power and potential of sexuality in women's lives, the stress of suppressed feelings, the violence which can erupt from such suppression, the anguish of unrecognised and unfulfilled desire -- and the isolating effects of this situation, the solipsistic suffering of the woman, whether she is in a relationship or not. The means which women employ to reconcile their inner feelings with society's -- and of course their own -- expectations are crucial. As Patricia Ingham has perceptively pointed out, their "sexual behaviour" is the determining factor in women's social existence, and "when they prove defective in this respect they are rightly destroyed from within by shame and guilt and eradicated from without by exile, death, disappearance".⁴⁷ In other words, the price the woman pays for passions is fear, and of course the very fear that is stimulated by such feelings -- and perhaps is part of its thrill -- may also finally inhibit and destroy it. The price paid for safety and stable commitment could be ennui:

44. See Orel, Personal Writings 133.

45. Stubbs 81.

46. Boumella 3.

47. Patricia Ingham, Thomas Hardy (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989) 39. "Rightly", of course, only in the terms of the social codes, not according to Hardy's own values.

With contact love dies. The world which until a moment before had been polarized around the object of love, dynamized ever more intensely by the present of the well-beloved, now becomes flat and dull once again.⁴⁸

One might argue that, to take Patrician Ingham's terminology, that the woman, at each extreme, faced two modes of exile. As Ingham points out the revelation of a violation of society's sexual codes could lead to varying degrees of literal exile: to social ostracism and life abroad, the lonely fate of the "fallen woman". (The lower-middle-class girl, even in a non-metropolitan part of the country, if her actions fell foul of the bourgeois aspirations of her family and community might well end up in exile not on the continent but on the streets.) On the other hand, the type of married life which Miller describes -- though there must have been some contented marriages! -- is merely another mode of exile: exile from authenticity of feeling, from a full expression of self. Indeed one might argue, as we have seen, that such was essentially the position of the young women in middle-class England before marriage.

Hardy's awareness of women's natural sexuality, for all one's sense of his personal reserve, serves to make his perception of women, at least as they appear in his writing, a distinctive one. Indeed it is a perception of women born of that tension between detachment and awareness of female eroticism. In this sense T. R. Wright is in part accurate when he comments that Hardy's heroines are "presented primarily as objects of erotic interest not only for the narrators and for the male characters but also for the implied reader/voyeur".⁴⁹ "In part accurate" because one might quibble with that "primarily"; as we have seen Hardy's portrayal becomes more complex, more aware of the pressures on contemporary women. Whereas the early heroines might be not much

48. Miller 176-77.

49. Wright 34.

more than the objects of the fascinated male gaze, the later female figures are seen more profoundly, with more compassionate understanding, even identification, and not merely voyeuristically.

But there is in the way Hardy constructs a woman a strong sense of woman's physical appearance, how she is regarded by the world. not just the narrator, and the consequences, given the way society constructs women, of that appearance. Mary Childers refers to "the conjuring up [of] images of breasts, female arms, and female faces"⁵⁰ in Hardy's fiction; this is most obvious in the case of Tess, who is also the woman who, in the novels at least, suffers most the consequences of her appearance, her physical attractiveness to men. Over and over Tess is gazed at, ostensibly by another character but also of course by narrator and reader:

[Alec] watched her pretty and unconscious munching through the skeins of smoke that pervaded the tent, and Tess Durbeyfield did not divine, as she innocently looked down at the roses in her bosom, that there behind the blue narcotic haze was potentially the "tragic mischief" of her drama She had an attribute which amounted to a disadvantage just now; and it was thus that caused Alec d'Urberville's eyes to rivet themselves upon her. It was a luxuriance of aspect, a fullness of growth, which made her appear more of a woman than she really was. She had inherited the feature from her mother without the quality it denoted. It had troubled her mind occasionally, till her companions had said that it was a fault which time would cure. (45)

This passage forms part of one of the most sensuous, even erotic scenes in Hardy's fiction, as Alec tempts her to take the strawberry into her mouth: "No-no! she said quickly, putting her fingers between his hand and her lips. I would rather take it in my own hand". "Nonsense!" he insisted; and in a slight distress she parted her lips and took it in" (44). Tess's mouth seems to draw Alec at least as much as her other physical attributes. It is a feature which seems to attract the narrator

50. Childers 319.

also:

The pouted-up deep red mouth to which this syllable [UR] was native had hardly as yet settled into its definite shape, and her lower lip had a way of thrusting the middle of her top one upward, when they closed together after a word. (213)

It is an aspect of Hardy's awareness of female sensuousness noted by Rosemarie Morgan: "a woman's mouth [was], not only the most natural and apt, but also the most legitimized symbol of her sexuality".⁵¹ In a note of 23 July 1889, Hardy records: "Of all the people I have met this summer, the lady whose mouth recalls more fully than any other beauty's the Elizabethan metaphor 'her lips are roses full of snow' ... is Mrs. Hamo Thornycroft -- whom I talked to at Gosse's dinner";⁵² the moment, and its literary echo, made such an impression on Hardy that, some years later, he has recourse to it again, as Angel gazes at Tess:

How very lovable her face was to him. Yet there was nothing ethereal about it: all was real vitality, real warmth, real incarnation. And it was in her mouth that this culminated [Her] mouth he had seen nothing to equal on the face of the earth. To a young man with the least fire in him that little upward lift in the middle of her red top lip was distracting, infatuating, maddening. He had never before seen a woman's lips and teeth which forced upon his mind, with such persistent iteration, the old Elizabethan simile of roses filled with snow Clare had studied the curves of those lips so many times that he could reproduce them mentally with ease; and now, as they again confronted him, clothed with colour and life, they sent an *aura* over his flesh, a breeze through his nerves, which well-nigh produced a qualm; and actually produced by some mysterious physiological process, a prosaic sneeze. (152-53)

The mouth it seems, for Hardy, forms the focus of a woman's physical presence, the essence of

51. Rosemarie Morgan, Women and Sexuality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy (London: Routledge, 1988) 50. By "Legitimised" Morgan is presumably referring to the fact that some writers have seen the lips, especially when reddened by lipstick, as a subliminal echo of the female sexual organs. See for example, Desmond Morris, Manwatching: A Field Guide to Human Behaviour (London: Cape, 1977) 239-41.

52. Life 220.

her sensual being.⁵³ One might at the same time suggest that not only is the mouth a characteristic associated with physical tenderness -- the actual physical delicacy of the tissue of the lips -- and with kissing, but also with eating and devouring. In other words the mouth is a deeply ambiguous feature, especially if one recalls the significance which Desmond Morris associated with the lips. Thus, Hardy's focus on the mouth might be seen to encapsulate his fascination with woman as both creature of social display and delicate beauty and as creature of natural desires and appetites.

The sense of the woman as object of narrational spectatorship, as well as the importance to the female of her appearance in attracting male attention, is present also in Hardy's short fiction. "The Withered Arm" (WT), for example, one of the stories which most fully shows Hardy's concern with the supernatural and the grotesque,⁵⁴ ultimately focuses on Gertrude Lodge's desperate attempt to redeem her mutilated beauty and her distorted physique. Indeed the story opens with the milking men and women gossiping about the stunning physical beauty of Gertrude, Farmer Lodge's new bride, and again we see the narratorial gaze:

Her face too was fresh in colour, but it was of a totally different quality [to Lodge's] -- soft and evanescent, like the light under a heap of rose-petals. (54)

53. Compare the narrator's obsessive focus on Tess's corporeal frame in terms of her mouth; after having her hands been kissed by Angel: "she lifted her eyes, and they beamed devotedly into his as her lower lip rose, in a tender half smile" (187). Relatedly, in Jude the Obscure, after the notoriously famous erotic scene of Arabella's throwing "the characteristic part of a barrow - pig" (53) upon Jude's ear, the narrator describes her as having "a round and prominent bosom, full lips, perfect teeth" (36), similarly Sue's lips as "taking their life from some words just spoken" (90). In Far from the Madding Crowd, after Bathsheba's salvage of Oak from suffocation in Cap. 3, she is described as a "young girl with ... remarkably pleasant lips and white teeth" (26). Compare also Hardy's poems "She Changed Me" and "Two Lips", See Gibson, 365-737. For all the narrator's infatuation with his beloved's mouth and lips in each, still this is coupled with intense vulnerability, melancholy and death.

54. These aspects of the story will be fully discussed in Chapter Six.

When Rhoda Brook, the forlorn Wessex milkmaid whom Lodge has formerly seduced, dispatches her illegitimate son to gather information about Lodge's new wife, it is her actual physical appearance that Rhoda wants to hear about -- and the report the boy gives of Gertrude's appearance that morning at church is again, of course, the result of male gazing, and again it is Gertrude's mouth that the boy finally focuses on:

"Well, did you see her?"

"Yes; quite plain"

"Is she ladylike?"

"Yes and more. A lady complete."

"Is she young?"

"Well, she's grown up, and her ways but quite a woman's"

"Of course. What colour is her hair and face?"

"Her hair is lightish, and her face as comely as a live doll's"

"Her eyes then, are not dark like mine?"

"No - of a bluish turn, and her mouth is very nice, and red and when she smiles, her teeth show white". (55)

The "youthful freshness of the yeoman's wife" have evidently made a deep impression even on "the somewhat hard nature of the boy" (56) so that, when his mother presses him to tell more, the sensuality of Gertrude's appearance is manifested in the detail which Hardy gives of the sound of her dress:

[Her] white bonnet and a silver-coloured gown ... whewed and whistled so loud when it rubbed against the pews that [she] coloured up more than ever for very shame at the noise, and pulled it in to keep it from touching; but where she pushed into her seat, it whewed more than ever. (56)

Thus it is a calamity for this woman "whom [Lodge] had wooed for her grace and beauty" when her arm starts to wither. It is her desperate "hope to win back his heart again by regaining some at least of her personal beauty" (66) which drives her to visit Conjuror Trendle, a visit which, disastrously culminates in her seeking to touch the corpse of a newly-hanged man as a form of

spell to cure her. Once again, women are the victims in this story: the lonely, secret desperation of Gertrude, and her ultimate death, underlines the vulnerability of the woman to the value which this society places on female beauty to win and keep a man. And the seduced and deserted Rhoda ends up alone.

In "An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress" the male gaze is, once more, across the barrier of class: the erotic appeal of Geraldine's beauty, seen by Egbert across that gulf, brings about ultimate ruin. Again the gathering of the local community at church on Sunday is the site of the fatal gaze. Geraldine Allenville is described as a "solitary sitter ... a very sweet lady" (Indiscretion 43). Indeed, this initial sense of her loneliness is made all the more poignant, and ominous when her face is described as seeming almost "to resemble the covered marble skull immediately above her head" (Indiscretion 44). When she visits Egbert at the school, to thank him for saving her life, the terms in which he sees her are very much in keeping with the pattern of Hardy's construction of female beauty:

He turned and looked at her as she stood among the children. To his eyes her beauty was indescribable The clear, deep eyes, full of all tender expressions The ripe tint of her delicate mouth, and the indefinable line where lip met lip ... the soft motions of her bosom when she breathed ... all struck him as something he had dreamed of and was not actually seeing. (Indiscretion 47-8)

When he returns to Tollamore, Egbert meets Geraldine by chance at a concert; in a scene charged with emotion, their hands can only meet "under the cord" (Indiscretion 87) which divides the cheaper seats in which he sits from the more expensive in which Geraldine sits, not only a symbolic manifestation of the barriers which separate them but a clear foreshadowing of their forthcoming separation. They can gaze at one another, but cannot speak over the sound of the music: "he only recognized the words by their shape upon her lips" (Indiscretion 62).

Again in this story it is the woman who finally pays the heavier price to defy the society's codes. Once more a secret marriage comes to disaster, when the newspapers publish the story of their elopement. When she collapses having gone back to seek her father's forgiveness -- in a characteristic scene Egbert watches from the darkness as her figure enters the lit house -- he is at last invited into the house to discover that she has ruptured a blood vessel; she eventually dies, with Egbert on one side of her bed and the family, apart, on the other. Evelyn Hardy is right when she links the vulnerable fate of the beautiful Geraldine with that of Tess: "Both women, 'frail and sorry wrecks on the sea of life', were punished and destroyed by going against 'the letter the killeth'".⁵⁵ Hardy himself emphasizes both the lovers' short lived love and the heroine's tragic vulnerability when he uses lines from Edmund Waller's "Go Lovely Rose!" as the epigraph to the final chapter:

How small a part of time they share
That are so wondrous sweet and fair!

It seems that these women, frequently gazed at by character and narrator as so naturally and sensually beautiful, are doomed if they act on the sexual impulses hinted at in their appearance, and to which others respond; they are doomed by the attitudes of society and by the chance action of events in the random universe. George T. Wright is quite correct when he sums up:

The world Hardy depicts in his short stories is anarchic and fundamentally cruel, for desire is seen to bring in its wake suffering, sadness and a total disregard for the convention by which society struggles to survive. To represent it is dangerous and debilitating, yet to indulge it is to make the everyday world we call 'real' meaningless and absurd.⁵⁶

55. Hardy, A Critical Biography 108.

56. Wright 105.

In such a society in such a universe the female is for ever more vulnerable than the male.

Both marriage, as we have already suggested, may not be the end of the woman's struggle to achieve happiness, security, and companionship (even if not equality and self-realization). It is in the nature of human relationships, and especially given the circumstances in which so many Victorian marriages were entered into, that of course some marital relations will fail, through personal incompatibility, as well as through unfaithfulness, unkindness or even cruelty. And if Hardy was an acute observer in his fiction of the vulnerability of women in the social dance leading up to marriage, he is if anything even more aware of the pain inflicted upon human individuals, both men and women, by an unhappy marriage. But especially, given the nature of nineteenth-century divorce laws as well as the unequal terms on which marriage was entered into, the main sufferer was the woman. Shirley Stave, in observing the "bitterness" with which Hardy views the "courtship and marriage practices of the Victorians", suggests that for all Hardy's apparent cynicism about marriage and the status of women,

his 'cynicism' may actually be level headedness, the result of his bitter awareness of the conditions his society produced, and his unsentimental gaze that refused to look away from the reality he saw.⁵⁷

In fact one might, indeed note how few happy marriages there are in Hardy's fiction. Moreover, when a heroine does achieve a measure of happiness in marriage, for example Bathsheba Everdene in Far from the Madding Crowd, or Baptista Trewthen in "A Mere Interlude" (CM), that happiness is won only after struggle, emotional wrong turnings and consequent lonely suffering. It is unsurprising perhaps to find Hardy dissenting from the traditional finale of English

57. Shirley A. Stave, The Decline of the Goddess: Nature, Culture, and Women in Thomas Hardy's Fiction (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood P, 1995) 14.

fiction in "Candour in English Fiction" (1890):

Life being a physiological fact, its honest portrayal must be largely concerned with, for one thing, the relations of the sexes, and the substitution for such catastrophes as favour the false colouring best expressed by the regulation finish that "they married and were happy ever after," of catastrophes based upon sexual relations as it is. To this expansion English society opposes a well-nigh insuperable bar.⁵⁸

Inevitably Hardy's experience of his own long unhappy first marriage must contribute to his attitude here, though given what we have seen of his awareness of the nature and experience of women, it is clearly not the only factor. Indeed, one might suggest that in part his sympathy for women in unfulfilled relationships, especially those who suffered in lonely, loveless marriages, is born of his identification with these women: women like Mrs Harnham in "On the Western Circuit" (LLI), who can only watch the vitality of life from her window, or experience it vicariously, or Sophy Twycott in "The Son's Veto" (LLI), or even Barbara in "Barbara of the House of Grebe" (GND). Not that the lonely pain of incompatible marriage is restricted to women. At the end of "On the Western Circuit" Charles Raye is chained in marriage to the well-meaning but simple, illiterate country girl Anna. Less dramatically, though portrayed with no less feeling, Barnet in "Fellow-Townsmen" (WT) is trapped in a marriage which gives him no emotional pleasure of fulfilment, and his isolation is made all the worse by the continued presence of Lucy Saville, the woman he rejected and for whom he still feels real tenderness.

But trapped they are, men and, especially, women, bound by the laws to remain together, caught often by an original impulse of feeling that, assuming financial and social circumstances are appropriate, has drawn them together; as George Wotton has observed "the problem of

58. Orel, Personal Writings 127-28.

marriage in Hardy is nothing more than his perception of the absurdity and cruelty of the legal institutionalization of this transient perception".⁵⁹ Indeed, given his sense of the organic links, between human beings and the natural universe, Hardy's inability to endorse the marriage codes of Victorian society stems from the fact that they are imposed on, and take no account of, the life of natural impulse. He notes in 1894 that:

Whether marriage, as we at present understand it is such a desirable goal for all women as it is assumed to be; or whether civilization can escape the humiliating indictment that, while it has been able to cover itself with glory in the arts, in literatures, in religions, and in the sciences, it has never succeeded in creating that homely thing, a satisfactory scheme for the conjunction of the sexes.⁶⁰

Given his feelings, the nature of contemporary divorce laws became an issue -- and of course a controversial one⁶¹ -- on which Hardy increasingly focused. Nor was the matter confined to his journal and his fiction; in July 1893 he reported a conversation with Lady Londonderry, the Duches of Manchester and Lady Jeune:

All four of us talked of the marriage-laws, a conversation which they started ... of the difficulties of separation, of terminable marriages where there are children, and of the nervous strain of living with a man when you know he can throw you over at any moment.⁶²

59. Wotton 131.

60. See Hardy, "The Tree of Knowledge" 118-19.

61. Ellen Lew Sprechman, Seeing Women As Men (Maryland: UP of America, 1995) points out that:

In a society structured upon marriage as the destined role for women, Hardy's disdain for the institution invoked hostility. His depiction of women as openly sensual human beings was likewise unpalatable to Victorian sensibilities. (11)

62. Life 258. See also his letter of 1 June, 1896 to Florence Henniker, and the one of 22 December 1908 to Helen Ward, both of which disclose his further sympathy with women. Collected Letters, Vol. 2 122 and Vol. 3 360.

When asked to contribute to a symposium entitled "Laws the Cause of Misery", on the topic of "How Shall We Solve the Divorce Problem?", Hardy takes, for the times, a radical view:

I can only suppose, in a general way, that a marriage should be dissolvable at the wish of either party if that party prove it to be a cruelty to him or her.⁶³

The issue of divorce had been addressed by Hardy, specifically with regard to the unequal position of women, in The Woodlanders in 1887.⁶⁴ At one point Grace's father, Melbury, hears of a supposedly new law,⁶⁵ and sees the opportunity to free his daughter from the adulterous Fitzpiers. Neither Grace nor her father, of course, know any detail of the law: "To hear these two Arcadian innocents talk of imperial law would have made a humane person weep". But the law -- specifically the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 -- is not humane, at least not to women.

Melbury goes off to seek legal advice and returns with the news that she is "as ever Fitzpier's wife He has not done you enough harm. You are still subject to his beck and call" (289). In fact by the 1857 Act, while a husband could obtain divorce on the grounds of his wife's adultery, "a wife was required to prove not only adultery but the additional aggravation of desertion, cruelty, incest, rape, sodomy or bestiality".⁶⁶ The pain of marriage and the arbitrary nature of the law is even powerfully and feelingly in Jude the Obscure, the book which finally brought the wrath

63. See Brennecke JR., Life and Art 120.

64. Interestingly this is after the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1884, which not only allowed divorce for women in certain circumstances but allowed her some control over their property. See Joan Perkin, Victorian Women (London: John Murray, 1993) 126, and Fraser Harrison, The Dark Angel: Aspects of Victorian Sexuality (London: Sheldon P, 1977) 13. Clearly the 1884 Act did not go nearly far enough for Hardy.

65. In fact given that the book is apparently set in about 1876, the law was not a new one. See for example James Gibson's note to p. 333 of his Penguin English Library Edition of the novel (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981) 461.

66. O. R. McGregor, Divorce in England (London: Heinemann, 1957) 18.

of Victorian values down on Hardy's head.⁶⁷ Here Sue feels the full anguish of what it is to live in a marriage which will not work, totally unable to respond to Phillotson sexually: "For a man and a woman to live on intimate terms when one feels as I do is adultery, in any circumstances, however, legal ..." (234).⁶⁸ The sheer unnaturalness of the marriage codes in Hardy's eyes, for men as well as women, is emphasized when Jude marries Arabella early in the novel:

And so, standing before the ... officiator, the two swore that at every other time of their lives till death took them, they would assuredly believe, feel, and desire precisely as they had believed, felt, and desired during the few preceding weeks. What was remarkable as the undertaking itself was the fact that nobody seemed at all surprised at what they swore. (56)⁶⁹

As Hardy was well aware, by the 1890s, women themselves were demanding changes in the marriage laws, as part of a whole agenda of woman's rights. Sue Bridehead has, in fact read John Stuart Mill's essay "The Subjection of Women", written in 1861 and published in 1869 (234). Unsurprisingly Mill's essay was unpopular with his contemporaries, arguing as it did for the rights of women in marriage and their right to divorce, but it was one of the texts taken up with enthusiasm in the 1890s by the so-called "New-Woman". Mostly young and mostly middle-class, those women sought not only a change in the laws, especially those concerning

67. While Edmund Gosse in St. James's Gazette called the novel "a grimy story", The Pall Mall Gazette of 12 November 1895, found it full of "dirt, drivel and damnation." See Lawrence Lerner and John Holmstroke, ed., Thomas Hardy: A Selection of Contemporary Reviews (London: The Bodley Head, 1968) 111-22.

68. See also Hardy's scathing criticism on this point in Jude the Obscure 269; 270; 334-35, The Woodlanders 278; 289; 303 and Tess 235.

69. Compare Hardy's derision on the hypocrisy of marriage oath as evidenced by Grace in The Woodlanders 350. See also Hardy's attack on marriage, further in Jude, 189, 208. For a testimony of Hardy's sympathy with women for indulging themselves in a lifelong quagmire and the oppressive suppression of their natural instincts, by marrying just for conventionality, see also Sue's reply to Jude 214-16; 306, The Mayor of Casterbridge 6, and The Woodlanders 358.

marriage, divorce and the suffrage, but a transformation in the way women were regarded, a change in their society's notion of what a woman could do, indeed in what women were. And this, of course, meant a transformation of society itself. As Elaine Showalter sums up:

The sexually independent New Woman criticized society's insistence on marriage as woman's only option for fulfilling life Politically, the New Woman was an anarchic figure who threatened to turn the world upside down and to be on top of a wild carnival of social and sexual misrule.⁷⁰

Unsurprisingly, Hardy was generally sympathetic to the attitudes of the New Women, to their demand for equality and sexual freedom, although a note on 14 July 1888 suggests he could also be somewhat taken aback when confronted by the actuality of such women:

We dined at Walter Pater's. Met Miss _____, an Amazon, more an Atalantic, most, a Faustine. Smokes, handsome girl: cruel small mouth: she's of the class of interesting women one would be afraid to marry.⁷¹

Hardy's interest in the way in which the new attitudes of women were being explored in fiction by women is evidenced by his friendship and correspondence with several of them. In a letter of 7 June 1893 to Florence Henniker, he writes about Sarah Grand: "Reaching home Monday at tea-time who should be sitting in the drawing room but the author of the Heavenly Twins".⁷² In a later letter about the same authoress, he writes to Florence Henniker in 16 September 1893: "'Sarah Grand' has an immense advantage over you ... can write boldly, & get listened to".⁷³ This

70. Elaine Showalter, Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the fin de Siècle (London: Bloomsbury, 1991) 38.

71. Life 212.

72. Collected Letters, Vol. 2 12.

73. Collected Letters, Vol. 2 33.

admiration is endorsed in another letter of 22 December 1895 to Mary Chavelita Clairmonte praising her 1893 controversial short story volume Keynotes:

My reading of your "keynotes" came about somewhat as yours did of "Jude" I need hardly say what my reply was: & how much I felt the verisimilitude of the stories & how you seemed to make us breathe the atmosphere of the scenes.⁷⁴

Sue Bridehead herself exhibits many of the attitudes of the New Woman, of course. Her neurotic challenge to the sexual attitudes of her society ends in disaster, in fact Hardy's grim vision here is in keeping with other fiction in the period about the New Woman, the works of what Gail Cunningham characterizes as "the neurotic school", including George Egerton's Keynotes (1893) and Grant Allen's The Woman Who Did (1895), in which women are frequently defeated, break down, and/or commit suicide. Emma Brooke's A Superfluous Woman (1894) even contains two deformed children who, in a fit of rage savage each other to death, a curious echo of events in Jude the Obscure.⁷⁵

All the stories in Wessex Tales, as well as those in A Group of Noble Dames and over half of those in Life's Little Ironies were composed before 1890 and very few stories were composed after about 1893; in many ways therefore the stories pre-date the era of the New Women per se.⁷⁶

However, there are one or two examples in Hardy's short stories which suggest something of the female independence later associated with the New Woman. For example, Sally Hall in

74. Collected Letters, Vol. 2 102.

75. See Gail Cunningham, The New Woman and the Victorian Novel (London: Macmillan, 1978) 50-51.

76. On the dating of the "New Woman" as a cultural, and particularly a literary phenomenon, see Nikki Lee Manos's essay in G. A. Cevalasco, ed., The 1890s 429-31.

"Interlopers at the knap" (WT), published as early as 1884, is a rather different sort of heroine from those to be found elsewhere in Hardy. Her character is first suggested as the well-to-do former Charles Darton of Casterbridge is making his way by horseback to the village where, Sally, his intended bride lives; Darton tells the friend who is accompanying him, Japheth Johns, "Sally is a comely, independent, simple character, with no make-up about her" (127). Japheth is right in questioning as to whether Sally is indeed "simple". But she certainly seems atypical in that, at least in Charles's view, she is not a young woman who pays much attention to pretty clothes or to the other social rituals usually expected when a young woman marries a man, and interestingly Charles seems to value this; he has bought her a dress which is "rather serviceable than showy For why should a woman dress up like a rope-dancer because she is going to do the most solemn deed of her life except dying?" (127).

That Charles is right in his judgement of her is confirmed by Sally's nonchalance as to whether the new gown arrives in time; she tells her mother, "Come rathe or come late it don't much matter, as I have a dress of my own to fall back upon" (130). Her mother is more sensitive to social appearance, more concerned with the upward mobility that Sally's marriage to Charles will represent. The mother sees the return of the destitute son, Philip, and his family on the eve of Charles's arrival to be a threat to her daughter's marriage and improved social status. Again, Sally is unconcerned by such niceties (and assumes Charles will be similarly unconcerned)

"Nonsense, mother!" Charley isn't the man to desert me! But if he should be, and won't marry me because of Phil's come, let him go and marry elsewhere. I won't be ashamed of my own flesh and blood for any man in England - not I". (134)

And in the emotionally-fraught scene when she goes into the barn and sees Darton holding the hand of Helena, Philip's wife, Sally is not immediately roused to jealousy or to the weeping

emotional reaction which might be expected of the Victorian romantic heroine: "Sally's independence made her one of the least jealous of women" even though she can see that "there was something in the relations of those two visitors which ought to be explained" (138).

After Philip's death, and made aware of Darton's previous relationship with Helena, who is now, with her children in dire financial need, Sally makes clear in a letter, firmly and in an even-tempered tone, her view of Darton's past behaviour and the fact that she feels that he now should marry Helena:

I am sure she would accept you as a husband at the proper time, and I think you ought to give her the opportunity. You inquire in an old note if I am sorry that I showed temper (which it *wasn't*) that night when I heard you talking to her. [At the point of her brother's death, and having just heard of the past relationship, she has cried out passionately "you can protect her now as well as the children!"] No, Charles, I am not sorry at all for what I said then. (143)

Later, after Helena's own death, Sally expresses an adamant refusal of Darton's proposal, although it would still be socially and financially advantageous; she is content with her current situation and sees no reason to marry Darton and compromise her view of his past action: "... as we've quite enough to live on if we give up the diary to-morrow, I should have no need to marry for any meaner reason I am quite happy enough as I am, and there's an end of it" (147). She refuses Darton's second offer of marriage, and she refuses the proposal of his friend, Japheth Johns. Darton assumes that the reason she has refused him is that Sally has heard false rumours of his likely financial ruin, and so he proposes a third time, and is even more firmly turned down. Sally calmly explains to him: "The truth is, I am happy enough as I am, and I don't mean to marry at all ..." (151-52).

One might assume that Sally's repeated refusals of the eligible Darton are based on her anger at his not having told her about his previous relationship with Helena. But the real reason seems to be the one Sally gives him; in the final sentence of the story we are told that it is not just Darton she has declined to marry: "Sally, notwithstanding the solicitations her attractions drew down upon her, had refused several offers of marriage, and steadily adhered to her purpose of leading a single life" (152). Sally's action, and Hardy's portrayal of it, is interesting. While she has none of the conscious intellectual awareness of the New Woman (we hear nothing of Sally's reading), expresses no theoretical views about the position of women, what we have here is a woman who, admittedly not in actual financial need, is content with a modest style of life, feels secure in her own life, is sure of who she is and how she wishes to live her life, and thus refuses the contemporary matrimonial conventions. At the same time, one notes that we are never given an insight into Sally's inner feelings -- the last portion of the story is very much narrated from Charles Darton's point of view; perhaps Hardy is not sure quite how such a woman would think and feel. Moreover, although the sense given is of a contented woman, there is a sense of a rather austere calmness about her rather than happiness. The choice, for once, is the woman's, but she still ends up alone, steadily adhering "to her purpose of leading a single life" (152).

But, as we have seen, for those women who did marry, the marital home did not necessarily mean an alleviation of loneliness or an achievement of personal fulfilment for the woman. This might be especially true for the financially-secure middle-class young lady, who had servants to do the household work and who had very little other activity of real significance to fill her life. Her husband would be away from the house during the day, and there still remained the chance that when he was at home they would not be personally very compatible, having finally got

to know each other only after the formalities of courtship. In the short fiction particularly it seems that Hardy's own awareness of the potential for loneliness even in relationships, presumably sharpened by his own marital situation,⁷⁷ particularly sensitizes him to the situation of so many women in his society; Rosemary Morgan suggests that Hardy's

sense of suffocation, frustration, and humiliation must surely have intensified ... his acute sensitivity towards, and sympathetic insight into, the plight of women curbed and bound to 'fit' the world of men.⁷⁸

Morgan is here referring to the novels, but the point is manifestly equally true of the short fiction, and now here more acutely than in the case of Ella Marchmill, the heroine of "An Imaginative Woman" (LLI).⁷⁹ It is a story which Norman Rodway (who played the role of Marchmill in a television production) shrewdly calls "an amazing little Freudian story -- written without any knowledge of Freud",⁸⁰ a story which Roger Ebbatson, in praising its quality sees as "centring on ... baulked feelings, lost opportunities and stifling emotions".⁸¹

77. D. F. Barber, Concerning Thomas Hardy (London: Charles Skilton, 1968), describes Hardy and Emma's marriage as "the unhappy marital association ... [that] had dragged itself out through nearly forty years of misery" (39). On this point see also, Robert Gittings, "Emma Hardy and the Giffords," Thomas Hardy and the Modern World: Papers Presented at the 1973 Summer School, ed. F. B. Pinion (Dorchester: The Thomas Hardy Society, 1973) 179.

78. See Morgan, Women and Sexuality 16.

79. Martin Ray, "'An Imaginative Woman': From Manuscript to Wessex Edition," Thomas Hardy Journal 9,3 (1993), points out that the story was "originally 'A Woman of Imagination' but this is scored out in favour of the present title [A] change which gives more prominence to Ella's imaginative faculty". (80).

80. Quoted in Angela Carter, "The Heroines of Hardy: Women Struggling to Love," Radio Times (22 Nov. 1973): 55.

81. Roger Ebbatson, Hardy: The Margin of the Unexpressed (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic P, 1993) 85. It seems possible that Hardy himself was not confident that the story was successful. He writes in a letter to Sydney Cockerell, 11 October 1911, "'The Imaginative Woman' (which you allocated to Aberdeen [university] I have kept back, in the hope of finding something better, or a page or two of verse to accompany it". See Collected Letters, Vol. 4 180.

The story opens with a married couple, William and Ella Marchmill, on holiday at "Solentsea in Upper Wessex" seeking lodgings to rent. From the outset it is evident that the couple have little in common. She is described by the narrator as an "impressionable, palpitating creature", an omnivorous reader of sentimental poetry.⁸² Marchmill, on the other hand, is man of the practical world, a businessman, whose business is making and selling guns; while his wife shrinks "humanely from detailed knowledge of her husband's trade whenever she reflected that everything he manufactured had for its purpose the destruction of life" (379), he is "supremely satisfied with a condition of sublunary things which made weapons a necessity" (380). Marchmill, a man who speaks "in squarely shaped sentences" evidently pays little attention to literature or emotional refinement; his wife's "delicate and ethereal emotions ... day-dreams, and night-sighs" we are told "would not much have disturbed William if he had known of them" (380). The reason for her daydreams and restlessness would presumably not be apparent to William Marchmill, even if he were to pay sufficient attention to his wife to notice them: already we have portrait of a woman stuck in a marriage which, while giving her financial security gives her no imaginative, emotional and, it is implied in the story, sexual fulfilment, though to the outside world they appeared to be "[i]n age well-balanced ... and in domestic requirements comfortable" (379).

82. Several studies examine the indebtedness of the portrayal of the character of Ella Marchmill to Mrs. Florence Henniker, the wife of professional^{soldier} Major-General Arthur Henry Henniker, whom Hardy first met (apparently fell for in Dublin on 19 May 1893), and whom he describes in his diary in the same year as "A charming, intuitive woman apparently" Life (254). Among these studies, see for example, Richard Little Purdy, "Thomas Hardy And Florence Henniker," Colby Literary Quarterly 26 (1944): 122-26; Martin Ray, "A Note on Florence Henniker And Solentsea," The Thomas Hardy Journal 10,2 (1944): 70-1; James Gibson, Thomas Hardy: A Literary Life (London: Macmillan, 1996) 126-30; and chapter 23 in Seymour-Smith.

When they eventually find lodgings at Coburg House (the name, echoing that of Prince Albert, suggesting again Victorian social respectability), they are given as part of their accommodation the apartment of a young poet who usually lodges there but who is temporarily away; to her amazement Ella discovers the young man's identity to be Robert Trewe, a poet alongside whose work in a magazine some of her own "[poetic] effusions" once appeared -- though under the masculine pseudonym, "John Ivy" (382).⁸³ The roots of her admiration of the work of Trewe -- described as "Neither *symboliste* nor *decadent*" but as "a pessimist in so far as that character applies to a man who looks at the worst contingencies as well as the best in the human condition" (383)⁸⁴ -- are already well-established. Ella has tried, with "sad and hopeless envy" (383), to imitate Trewe's verse; the fact that she chooses to try to emulate a poet with this particular apparently bleak outlook again suggests something of Ella's emotions. She chooses his room to "be my own little room" (382) and there she shuts herself off from the rest of the family, alone with Trewe's possessions; at one point she stands "testing the reflecting powers of the mirror in the wardrobe door" (381), an image of concern about the nature of her life and her own identity.

Her infatuation with Trewe -- or rather, since she has never met him with the idea of

83. Apparently the subjection of female writers (whom Hardy presumably patronized) to the patriarchal culture, could still be felt at the time by some female writers publishing under noms de plumes. Among these are Mrs. Frances Elizabeth MacFall (1862-1934), who wrote The Heavenly Twins under the pen-name Sarah Grand; Mary Chevelita Clairmonte (1859-1945) who wrote her famous short story volume keynotes under the pseudonym Geroge Egerton, and George Sand in France (1804-76). See Collected Letter, Vol. 2 12, 33, 48, 102.

84. Phyllis Bartlett, "'Seraph of Heaven: A Shelleyan Dream in Hardy's Fiction,'" Publications of Modern Language Association of America 50 (1955), comments on this passage as "the most arresting passage ... for it is remarkably like Hardy's own" (631).

Trewe, what she has constructed him as representing -- deepens, particularly when the landlady tells her of his being a "kind-hearted man" (383), confirming Ella's intuition that Trewe possesses qualities which she does not find in her "matter-of-fact" husband. While her external life with the family at Solentsea carries on in its "monotonous" way, she becomes more and more conscious of her "personal interest [in Trewe] rather than literary" and the nature of that interest is manifested in the imagery by which Hardy describes her mood; as she continues, alone, to read his poetry, she is

possessed by an inner flame which left her hardly conscious of what was proceeding around her The personal element in the magnetic attraction exercised by this circumambient, unapproachable master of hers was so much stronger than the intellectual and abstract that she could not understand it. To be sure, she was surrounded noon and night by his customary environment, which literally whispered to her at every moment ... (385)

She may not understand the feelings which she is exhibiting, but we do. She is, Hardy tells us, "a woman of very living ardours, that required sustenance of some sort" (386). Manifestly the emotional impulses allowed no outlet in her marriage to Marchmill are being focused on the figure she has constructed of the young poet. Her behaviour becomes increasingly self-involved -- to conventional society it would appear, were it to be discovered, to be distinctly abnormal, even unbalanced. Eventually, in what T. R. Wright characterizes as a fetishistically desperate gesture of "vanity and ... Lacanian Self-doubt",⁸⁵ Ella pulls from the closet Trewe's mackintosh and cap and puts them on:

'The mantle of Elijah!' she said. 'Would it might inspire me to rival him, glorious genius that he is!'

Her eyes always grew wet when she thought like that, and she turned to look at herself in the glass. *His* heart had beat inside that coat, and *his* brain had worked under that hat at levels of thought she would never reach. The consciousness of her weakness

85. Wright 98.

beside him made her feel quite sick. (386)

Again we notice the look in the glass; in her aching to be with Trewe, she seeks to be Trewe; in the context of Victorian fiction this is a revealing moment: the woman longs to be a man, to have the enabling power of a man. Indeed -- not for the only time in Hardy's fiction, as we shall see -- a woman puts on a man's clothing.

When her husband enters the room, breaks in on her "sweet delight", Ella attempts to rationalise her "freak", but in a way which touches directly on her isolation: "What have I else to do? You are always away!" (386). However, she refuses her husband's invitation to go for a trip on a yacht, when she hears that Trewe, "the poet she was now distinctly in love with" (387) is to visit the house, although, almost inevitably he does not turn up.

The true nature of Ella's feelings becomes even clearer when, in a remarkable scene which one critic has called an "orgy of eroticism",⁸⁶ alone in the room she takes a photograph of Trewe from where the landlady has told her it is hidden. Firstly "to gratify her passionate curiosity she made her preparations ... getting rid of superfluous garment and putting on her dressing-gown, then arranging a chair in front of the table and reading several pages of Trewe's tenderest utterances" (389), only then taking out the photograph; holding it rhapsodically, she murmurs in "her lowest, richest, tenderest tone: 'And it's you who've so cruelly eclipsed me these many times!'" (389) before touching the photograph with her lips. However, her conditioning by her society remains; in the midst of what is, after all, only a moment of emotional and erotic fancy, a kind of imaginative adultery, she feels guilt: "She thought how wicked she was, a woman having

86. Wright 98.

a husband and three children, to let her mind stray to a stranger in this unconscionable manner" (389). But she still tells herself that Trewe's "thoughts and feelings" -- actually those which she has projected onto him, of course -- are "in fact, the self-same thoughts and feelings as hers, which her husband distinctly lacked" (389). Motivated by her "subtle luxuriance of fancy" (388), she places the photograph beneath her pillow when her husband unexpectedly returns from his yacht trip and decides to spend the night with her: ironically her arousal by thoughts of Trewe -- she tells her husband she is "wicked!" (389) -- is briefly displaced onto the husband.

Returning home "heavy hearted" (392) after her holiday, she tries to correspond with Trewe; he almost comes to her house. But then she is plunged into misery by his sudden suicide; Trewe, it seems is, like herself, "dreamy, solitary, rather melancholy" (381). In her despondency, Ella attempts to rejuvenate her feelings by obtaining the photograph from the Solentsea landlady, along with a lock of his hair.⁸⁷ In another erotic scene Ella ties the lock of hair "with white ribbon and put[s] it in her bosom, whence she drew it and kissed it every now and then in some unobserved nook" (397). Her husband, still not fully aware of the real source of her emotional state, predictably dismisses her feelings as trivial when, again pregnant, she visits Trewe's grave: "It is too ridiculous that you, a married woman with three children and a fourth coming, should go losing your head like this over a dead lover!" (399). Walled in her "sad and listless mood", she can only await the birth of her child; not for nothing did the Victorians refer to pregnancy as

87. Significantly, Firor, Folkways, markedly observes that "to send or accept the gift of a lock of hair is fatal to lovers" (10). See also, Peter W. Coxon, "Hardy's Use of the Hair Motif," Thomas Hardy Annual No. 1, ed. Norman Page (London: Macmillan, 1982) 102. Compare Elfride in A Pair of Blue Eyes 289; Troy in Far from the Madding Crowd 282 and Heneford in The Mayor of Casterbridge 198. Compare also Hardy's poems "On a Discovered Curl of Hair"; "A Forgotten Miniature"; "A Dream or No", and "The Tresses". See Gibson, 669; 899; 348, 404.

"confinement". Her physical health declines as a result of her psychological and spiritual distress; at her death, after giving birth to her child, she sadly and guiltily, tells her husband, what has been at the root of her unhappiness: "I thought you had been unkind; that you had neglected me; that you weren't up to my intellectual level, while he was, and far above it I wanted a fuller appreciator, perhaps, rather than another lover -- " (400).

"An Imaginative Woman" is, thus, a fascinating study of the psychology of a woman who though she is, to judge from the outside, in Victorian terms financially and domestically comfortable, is starved emotionally and imaginatively, lacks any sense of being appreciated, respected and valued -- that is of being loved -- by her husband. Her only way to fill the ennui of her lonely life is through the world of the imagination, to use the imagination as a way of coping; but this can only help temporarily. Indeed her contact with Trewe, albeit by proxy, in fact exacerbates her pain and her loneliness. The story is a powerful study in alienation.

In her recent pioneering study, Ellen Lew Sprechman points out that:

Instead of the traditional heroine, so passively meek and mild, [Hardy] developed a new species better delineated as the 'woman hero'. Hardy's depiction of men as physically or morally weak brought about the naissance of a non-traditional male who resembles the heroine of the past.⁸⁸

Sprechman's study does not refer to the short stories, but her description interestingly fits the characters in "The Distracted Preacher" (WT) of the young Wesleyan minister, Richard Stockdale, and Lizzy Newberry, the young widow with whom, along with her mother, he finds lodgings at his appointment as minister to the local village of Nether-Moynton. Once again, the female protagonist is introduced as Stockdale and the narrator, gaze at her:

88. Sprechman 22-3.

He saw before him a fine and extremely well-made young woman, with dark hair, a wide, sensible, beautiful forehead ... and a mouth that was in itself a picture to all appreciative souls. (155)⁸⁹

The two gradually and inevitably are drawn together. The young Methodist minister is a "lonely fellow, who had for weeks felt a great craving for somebody on whom to throw away superfluous interest" (157), a mood which initiates in him a vulnerable readiness to accept without too much question "the sort of sin" (158) represented by the acceptance of smuggled liquor -- hidden indeed in the church -- when it was offered to him by Lizzy "to cure [his] cold" (158).⁹⁰ For all he is the "son of highly respectable parents, and brought up with a single eye to the ministry" (158), Stockdale is quickly embroiled in what he deems morally a "sinister mystery", the fact the villagers, including Lizzy are involved in smuggling. She shows him how to make a hole in a barrel and with his knees squeeze the barrel till the liquor comes out; then in a passage that is again suffused with a distinctly Hardyean eroticism, Lizzy shows him how to replace the liquor with water:

She produced a bottle of water, from which she took mouthfuls, conveying each keg by putting her pretty lips to the hole, where it was sucked in at each recovery of the cask from pressure. (159)

Stockdale realizes that he is being drawn to Lizzy and, feeling that "his mind [is] interested in her ... more than his serious duties" he attempts an act of "self-chastisement" by refusing to accept her offer of hot coals to make a fire in his room (161). But soon he surrenders to "a

89. Mitchell, points out that "In particular the narrator and implied reader of Hardy's texts share a gaze that is ineluctably male ... and looking is their predominant activity" (157).

90. One may find a clue to the origin of the story's motif in the smuggling stories, Hardy heard from the landlord of Swanage Mansion, and his grand father. See Life 107-8, 164; Hardy, Thomas Hardy's Notebooks 35-6 and Richard H. Taylor, ed., The Personal Notebooks of Thomas Hardy (London: Macmillan, 1978) 127-30.

budding" love (176) drawn by Lizzy's "seductive eyes" and, almost inevitably, her "pretty lips" (159). Surrounded by Lizzy's "coquetry" (163), spellbound by her "sweet temptation" (161), Stockdale's religious life is also disturbed: "Already he often said Romans for Corinthians in the pulpit and gave out hymns in strange cramped metres" (169). But for all his being a "young pastor -- in the aspen stage of attachment" (171), he grows suspicious of her nocturnal absences from the house, and even more suspicious when he discovers a man's clothes in her room, recently worn and splashed with mud. His uneasiness made greater by Lizzy's air of being "independent" (170), he follows her and discovers that not only is she actively involved in the smuggling but wears a man's clothes on her nocturnal forays; in fact Stockdale seems to be almost as upset by the latter as by her illegal activities, and he reprimands her: "You are in man's clothes and I am ashamed of you" (176). This is a remarkable episode, especially given Victorian gender codes as regards dressing; while Ella Marchmill dressed briefly in a man's clothes to try to emulate him, to imaginatively escape from her isolation, Lizzy does so in order to be active and independent of the constrictions both of women's dress and of women's sheltered role in life.⁹¹ However, directly confronted by Stockdale, she is vulnerable and defensive:

'I am only partly in man's clothes' It is only his great coat and hat and breeches that I've got on, which is no harm, as he was my husband I have got my own dress under just the same - it is only tucked in! Will you go away upstairs and let me pass? I didn't want

91. We might compare in *Jude the Obscure* Sue's emblematic act of putting on Jude's Sunday suit while her own clothes dry, after her escapade from her room, at the boarding school and wading through the river to Jude's lodgings: "I suppose, Jude, it is odd that you should see me like this and all my things hanging there? Yet what nonsense! They are only a woman's clothes - sexless cloth and linen" (105), says Sue. And when Jude looks at her while sleeping, she looks "boyish as Ganymedes" (159). Laura Green, "'Strange [in]difference of Sex': Thomas Hardy, the Victorian Man of Letters, and The Temptations of Androgyny," *Victorian Studies* 38, 4 (1995), points out aptly that on occasion Hardy's heroines' "eroticized boyishness participates in the Victorian mythology of feminine passionlessness" (452).

you to see me at such a time as this. (176)⁹²

But the point is that Lizzy, widowed and with a measure of independence, has found a way of functioning in the patriarchal world; indeed Guerard is largely correct when he sees her as "more independent than any of her contemporaries in the novels".⁹³ Her answer to Stockdale's words, "Lizzy, all this is very wrong ... 'Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's'" (177),⁹⁴ divulges the real nature of her character:

He's dead 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. (177)

It is not the financial gain that is the motive for Lizzy. It is the thrill of defying society's codes -- twice over : as smuggler and as a woman, and one feels that the latter, the sense of enablement which she achieves as a woman defying the mores of her times, is the more profound motive. She refuses to respond to Stockdale's entreaties and tells him "I must do my best to save this run I don't want to give you up -- you know that; but I don't want to lose my venture" (176).

Ultimately this is a choice between two ways of life for her: to give up the smuggling, become Richard's wife and accept, through him, society's *status quo* in matters of gender, or to continue to smuggle and to maintain the identity she has created for herself.

92. In 7 November, 1878, almost one year before the first publication of this story, Hardy writes in his diary: "In an account of a girl living with a man in boy's clothes, as his own son, her ... dress is described - she wore nankeen trousers, a yellow Marseilles waistcoat, & brown jacket, appeared as a youth of 14". See Taylor, The Personal Notebooks 134, Compare Liddy and Bathsheba conversation in Far from the Madding Crowd (209).

93. Guerard, Thomas Hardy 145.

94. Compare Jesus's insightful reply which resourcefully distinguishes the sacred claims and the secular demands (which ironically both Lizzy and Stockdale fail to assume). See Matthew 22: 15-20; Mark 12:17 and Luke 20:21-5.

In fact in this particular confrontation of gender codes, it is initially the independent woman who succeeds. Himself pulled in two directions, Stockdale yields to the "love [which] leads his moral sense far astray".⁹⁵ and he jeopardizes his clerical status in accompanying Lizzy to meet her cousin, the rum-smuggler, Owlett, at Lulwind Cove and he soon offers to help her further. Not only does he help the villagers in hiding the contraband liquor under the loose floor-boards at the church tower in Nether-Moynton, but contrary to his clerical ethics eavesdrops the customs-officers, and divulges to Lizzy their imminent plan of scrutinizing both the church and the orchard.⁹⁶ Lizzy becomes the mastermind of the whole operation to save the rum. Compared to Stockdale who seems relatively helpless and morally confused, Lizzy acts decisively and artfully, removing the linchpins from the carts upon which the rum, recaptured by the revenue men, is loaded. Within the world of smuggling -- that is outside the pale of lawful, respectable society -- Lizzy is freer than Sue Bridehead ever becomes. When Stockdale again begs her to "give this business up" in favour of marrying him, she firmly answers "Don't ask that ... what I make by that trade is all that I have to keep my mother and myself with" (199) (though of course, if she were to marry a Methodist minister, she and the mother would have a respectable income). The point is that Lizzy's real interest lies not in the conventions and constraints of marriage but in the "sheer physical strenuousness of a smuggling career",⁹⁷ and the independence it represents.

95. Chew 53.

96. Interestingly Hardy's source for the ploy of hiding the contraband liquor in a hole covered by an apple tree, is found in his 1896 Preface to Wessex Tales. See Orel, Personal Writings 31.

97. Hasan 121.

Realizing ultimately that Lizzy is far from being the girl of his dreams, Stockdale decides to leave her together with Nether-Moynton taking a position in another town. As he tells her: "We must part You know how I love you, and what I would do for you, but this is one thing I cannot do" (199). On the other hand Lizzy responds to Stockdale's decision of departure rather phlegmatically; another clear testimony of the disparity of "their respective moral outlooks".⁹⁸ However, after the lapse of two years, Stockdale returns to Nether-Moynton again, only to discover the extinction of the liquor trade. For one thing, Lizzy is left lonely after her providential escape from injury, Owlett's departure to America. As she tells Stockdale, "We were hunted down like rats" (303).

In the published story, therefore, Lizzy develops through suffering and repents her past actions, implicitly both the smuggling and, therefore, her inappropriate behaviour as a woman. Thus, she accepts Stockdale's renewed offer of marriage, and enters respectability as a minister's wife. One critic has described this ending as "a hoax for the Victorian conscience",⁹⁹ particularly given the previous differences evident in the temperaments of Stockdale and Lizzy. In fact Hardy himself asserts in a footnote which he added to the story in 1912, some thirty three years after its original publication: "The ending of this story with the marriage of Lizzy and the minister was almost *de rigueur* in an English magazine at the time of writing" (204). The fact that Hardy feels that he had to adhere ultimately "to public taste and prudery",¹⁰⁰ that he "lapses into virtue",¹⁰¹ is

98. Brady, The Short Stories of Thomas Hardy 36.

99. Hasan 121.

100. Peterson 24.

101. Howe 81.

again clear testimony to the social pressures on magazines, their editors and thus their writers in the period.

Thus, Hardy's portrayal of women in his short fiction is at least as complex as it is in his novels. Far from being a somewhat misogynistic treatment of women's coquetry and foibles, he shows a growing awareness of quite why it is that women in Victorian society, especially within the middle classes, behaved as they did. He was acutely aware of the degree to which the restriction of women to the roles of tender mother, dutiful wife and efficient housekeeper involved the constraint and repression of natural impulse. It is perhaps slightly surprising that Hardy, a man of reserved habits, a man who in many ways felt detached from the currents of fashion and society, was so aware of, indeed so sensitive to, the nature of women's situation in his time, their position as victims. Perhaps indeed, as we have suggested, his very detachment, as well as his origins in a community which was aware of somewhat different, non-bourgeois, modes of behaviour, contributed to his perspective on middle-class attitudes, made him aware of its artifice. Perhaps, too, his very reserve, his lack of commitment to the conventional construction of gender, including contemporary notions of masculinity, hearty, physical and worldly, contributed not only to this detachment but also to a sense of identification with women: seeing them, too, as marginalised members of a society whose values thus exacerbated the underlying sense of aloneness which in Hardy's fiction haunts all human individuals.

CHAPTER SIX

An Uncanny World : The Loneliness of Hardy's Metaphysical Vision

Hardy's life spanned very precisely that painful cultural shift, that "clash between orthodoxy and determinism",¹ which resulted in the slow ebb of Christian faith in England in the nineteenth century. Given his own upbringing and temperament, this was of course for Hardy no mere theoretical or external change: the contemporary turmoil of religious debate and uncertainty, especially as he experienced them in his early impressionable London years, were inevitably internalised, became part of Hardy's increasingly bleak inner, emotional landscape. The sense of loss -- of security, of roots, even of identity -- that he experienced, as the props of his youthful faith gradually fell away, fundamentally affects Hardy's short fiction, giving it, like his other writing, "a strain of unappeasable sadness".²

During his writing career and even more so after his death, the nature and effect of Hardy's philosophical vision have, of course, been a field for continual critical debate by critics. In the year of Hardy's death, he was called "an inverted nineteenth-century transcendentalist".³ Later critics have referred to him as "the most honest of doubters",⁴ employing in the turmoil of Victorian debate an "agnostic strategy".⁵ The present chapter

1. G. Roppen, Evolution and Poetic Belief (Oslo: Oslo UP, 1956) 297.

2. Julian Moynahan, ed., The Portable Thomas Hardy (New York: The Viking P, 1977) 31.

3. G. R. Eliott, "Hardy's Poetry and the Ghostly Moving Picture," South Atlantic Quarterly 28 (1928): 280.

4. David J. De Laura, "The Ache of Modernism in Hardy's Later Novels," Journal of English Literary History 34 (1967): 399.

5. Tess Cosslett, The Scientific Movement and Victorian Literature (Sussex : The Harvester P, 1982) 134.

will discuss the effect that Hardy's vision of the human individual's place in the universe has on the world of his short fiction, the ways in which his sense of the individual's essential and vulnerable alone-ness in a world governed by randomness and contingency is dramatized in the stories.

One needs to emphasize the fact that the waves of intellectual debate which broke on him in the 1860s swept around a young man for whom Christian faith was part of the fibre of his existence, as natural and certain as the rhythms of the seasons and the crops. The feasts of the church year, celebrated in Stinsford Church, marked the movement of the community's year. Even more than this, we notice the way in which Hardy consciously identified with these routines and rituals; they were in his youth an essential part of how he constructed who he was. Poignantly in the Life he recalls that

As a child, to be a parson had been his dream; moreover, he had had several clerical relatives who held livings; while his grandfather, father, uncle, brother, wife, cousin, and two sisters had been musicians in various Churches over a period covering altogether more than a hundred years. He himself had frequently read the church lessons, and had at one time as a young man begun reading for Cambridge with a view to taking orders.⁶

The roots of this intention, it seems, were deep; his sense of the drama of the Church appealed to the imaginative boy, again, in a very personal way, a boy who:

[O]n wet Sunday mornings should wrap himself in a tablecloth, and read the Morning Prayer standing in a chair, his cousin playing the clerk with loud Amens, and his grandmother representing the congregation. The sermon which followed was simply a patchwork of the sentences used by the vicar. Everybody said that Tommy would have to be a parson, being obviously no good for any practical pursuit; which remark caused his mother many misgivings.⁷

The reference to Hardy's mother in this context needs to be registered. Presumably

6. Life 376.

7. Life 15.

her misgivings about her son becoming a parson might have been based on the fact that this small businessman's wife might have had more material ambitions for her son. On the other hand, one might have thought that for the son to go to University and become a priest would have been a mark of social advancement -- she after all had been brought up on charity -- and thus of pride. One might wonder, though, about the nature of Mrs Hardy's own view of the world, and their subtle influence on her son. At the age of 30, his clerical ambitions long abandoned, Hardy writes in his notebook : "Mother's notion (and also mine) - that a figure stands in our van with arm uplifted, to knock us back from any pleasant prospect we indulge in as probable". Indeed the editorial comment of Evelyn Hardy on this lifelong formative note is all the more revealing, and worth quoting at quite some length:

A highly suggestive note. Jemima Hardy was the driving force behind her brilliant son who when he was maturing and she instilled into him her country-woman's fatalistic philosophy, together with her love of learning. No doubt much of Hardy's so-called pessimism finds its origin in this tersely expressed belief, one which may be found in many peasant communities, and which flavours the Greek tragedies.⁸

This was years ahead, of course, but the evidence that more melancholy aspects of Hardy's imagination found expression in the registers of religion is also present in the Life :

In those days the staircase at Bockhampton (later removed) had its walls coloured Venetian red by his father, and was so situated that the evening sun shone into it, adding to its colour a great intensity for a quarter of an hour or more. Tommy used to wait for this chromatic effect, and, sitting alone there, would recite to himself 'And now another day is gone' from Dr. Watt's Hymns, with great fervency, though perhaps not for any religious reason, but from a sense that the scene suited the lines.⁹

Here what one also sees is sensitivity and introversion, manifested in apartness.

8. Hardy, Thomas Hardy's Notebooks 32.

9. Life 15.

Beliefs which had up till then been intuitive and thereby unquestioned became more conscious, and one might suggest more vulnerable when, at the age of sixteen, Hardy was apprenticed to John Hicks, the Dorchester architect and church restorer. There he met a fellow apprentice, Henry Bastow, a contact which Carl J. Weber has suggested had "important results in the development of Hardy's mind".¹⁰ Hardy further writes in the Life:

It had so happened that Bastow, the other pupil (who strangely enough for an architect mostly occupied with church-work had been bred a Baptist), became very doctrinal during this time; he said he was going to be baptized, and in fact was baptized shortly after. He so impressed young Hardy with his earnestness and the necessity of doing likewise that, though the junior pupil had been brought up in High Church principles, he almost felt that he ought to be baptized again as an adult. He went to the vicar of his parish and stated the case. The vicar, an Oxford man, seemed bewildered, and said that the only book he possessed that might help Hardy was Hooker's Ecclesiastical Polity, which he lent his inquirer. Finding that this learned work did not help much in the peculiar circumstances, Hardy went to the Curate of another parish with whom he was acquainted. But all that curate had was a handbook on the sacraments of an elementary kind. However, he got hold of as many books and notes on Paedo-baptism as he could, and though he was appalled at the feebleness of the arguments for infant christening (assuming that New Testament practice must be followed) he incontinently determined to 'stick to his own side', as he considered the Church to be, at some costs of conscience.¹¹

Bastow's two friends, the Perkins brothers, sons of the local Baptist Minister, were also part of the debate among the young men in Hick's office; clearly ripples of the religious debates going on elsewhere had reached into the provinces and Hardy was already

10. Carl J. Weber, Hardy of Wessex: His Life and Literary Career (London: Routledge, 1965) 2.

11. Life 29. Indeed, Hardy's preoccupation with children's baptismal doctrines, the cause of his intellectual tussle with Bastow is reflected in his fiction. Compare, for example, Tess's baptizing of her child Sorrow shortly before his death (an incident which is cut from the serial version, for its scathing satire on clergymen, and vehemently ironic derision on the rite itself).(101) Compare also the adamant conversation on infant baptism between Mr. Woodwell and Somerset in A Laodicean, a dispute which divulges among other things their ironic and scathing "religious differences" See Thomas Hardy, A Laodicean, ed. Jane Gatewood (1881; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991). (64).

responding with what was to become characteristic scrupulosity. Faced by the Perkins's argument he carefully re-read the Greek New Testament:

[W]hile perceiving that there was not a shred of evidence for infant baptism in the New Testament, he saw that Christianity did not hang on temporary details that expediency might modify, and that the practice of an isolated few in the early ages could not be binding on its multitudes in differing circumstances, when it had grown to be the religion of the continents.¹²

Clearly the erosion of Hardy's religious and indeed psychological security was already beginning: he was already being up-rooted from the intuitive world of his boyhood community into a more challenging, more modern, and potentially more lonely world; looking back in later years, Hardy could see the shift:

Owing to the accident of his being an architect's pupil in a country-town of assizes and aldermen, which had advanced to railways and telegraphs and daily London Papers; yet not living there, but walking in everyday from a world of shepherds and ploughmen in a hamlet three miles off, where modern improvements were still regarded as wonders, he saw rustic and borough doings in a juxtaposition peculiarly close [A] triple existence unusual for a young man -- what he used to call, in looking back, a life twisted of three strands -- the professional life, the scholar's life, and the rustic life, combined in twenty-four hours of one day as it was with him through these years.¹³

Then into Hick's office, in 1857, came a man well-placed to open Hardy's mind to the full impact of the turmoil of contemporary intellectual debate. Horace Moule, whose friendship with Hardy was so timely and so influential, was an author, reviewer and a Fellow of Queen's College, Cambridge. The son of the Rev. Henry Moule of Fordingham, near Dorchester, Moule was to become "in many respects ... closer to [Hardy] than anyone

12. Life 30.

13. Life 31-2.

would ever be again".¹⁴ Moule's Anglican beliefs had been profoundly challenged by contemporary ideas and finally abandoned. This was a potent influence for Hardy to come in contact with: as well as helping Hardy with his studies of Greek, Moule gave him a copy of Jabez Hogg's Elements of Experimental and Natural Philosophy, thereby laying the foundation of Hardy's life-long interest in scientific subjects.¹⁵ Moule also encouraged Hardy to read The Saturday Review which, in Gittings' view, "had a determining effect on many of his basic attitudes and beliefs",¹⁶ as well as books such as Goethe's Faust. By encouraging Hardy to read Essays and Reviews of the 1860s, Moule was exposing him to the heart of the vigorous and fundamental challenges to orthodox faith then being made. Here, as Nathan Scott points out,

Hardy encountered, for example, by way of Frederick Temple's chapter, the notion that the Bible might be viewed as a kind of history book, merely recording the most significant religious developments that were contemporaneous with the time in which it was written And Baden Powell, in his chapter on "Evidence of Christianity", not only was putting forward the notion that miracles must be adjudicated in the light of our best scientific knowledge but also was suggesting that Darwin's researches had rendered untenable the account that is given in the Book of Genesis of the origination of the forms in life. And so on, throughout Essays and Reviews. Hardy was exposed to the kind of shock that the new radicalism was administering to the traditionally orientated imagination of the time.¹⁷

Moule, unsurprisingly, seems to have been influential in encouraging Hardy to go up to

14. Millgate, A Biography 155.

15. See Millgate, A Biography 66; and Seymour-Smith 47.

16. Gittings, Young Thomas Hardy 66.

17. Nathan A. Scott, JR. "The Literary Imagination and The Victorian Crisis of Faith: The Example of Thomas Hardy," Journal of Religion 40 (1960) : 274-75.

London, thus bringing him even closer to the ferment of debate that was taking place.¹⁸ But the resilience of Hardy's faith is indicated by the fact that when he went to London in 1862 he not only took with him his Bible and the Book of Common Prayer -- his life-line to Bockhampton and Stinsford Church, perhaps -- but regularly attended Church in London, scrupulously (and revealingly) recording his attendance in his Bible.¹⁹ However, by 23 August 1862, just four months after his arrival in London, with its museums and books, concerts and theatres, lectures and exhibitions, he writes that the idea of being a curate in a country village

fell through less because of its difficulty than from a conscientious feeling, after some theological study, that he could hardly take the step with honour while holding the views which on examination he found himself to hold. And so he allowed the curious scheme to drift out of sight, though not till after he had begun to practice orthodoxy.²⁰

But Moule's close friendship and influence continued; in July 1865 Hardy notes that he "worked at J.H. Newman's Apologia A great desire to be convinced by him, because Moule likes him so much".²¹ It was probably in this period that Moule encouraged Hardy to read Darwin's On the Origins of Species (1859). One senses Hardy struggling to keep his faith intact. At one point he is "turning the Book of Ecclesiastes into Spenserian

18. Webster, On A Darkling Plain 38.

19. For a more thorough examination on this point, see Kenneth Phelps, Annotations By Thomas Hardy in His Bibles and Prayer-Book (St. Peter Port, Guernsey: Toucan P, 1966).

20. Life 50.

21. Life 48.

stanzas",²² but through the 1860s he is sliding into agnosticism. In July 1865 he records "To Westminster Abbey morning service. Stayed to the Sacraments. A very odd experience, amid a crowd of strangers".²³ The alienation, it might be suggested, was not just social.

Moule's death on 24 September 1873 was a profound shock to Hardy. That he took his own life was even more disturbing. Millgate is likely to be right in suggesting that Hardy had found in Moule "for the first time a model for what he himself most deeply wished to become".²⁴ But if that is true, then the fact of his mentor's suicide must have thrown Hardy into even deeper uncertainty. His admired friend, it would seem, had finally been unable to cope with life, had opted out of an existence which Hardy himself was finding so challenging and uncertain. In a sense Moule's influence never left Hardy; as well as the poems in which he continued to remember his friend, one might indeed argue that the shadow of this episode darkens Hardy's vision and contributes to "the emergence of Hardy as a fully tragic artist".²⁵

With a chance symmetry that would not be out of place in one of Hardy's stories, in the year that Moule died, Hardy met one of the central figures of London intellectual life in the period, and one of the major intellectual figures of the second half of the century. While less intimate than Moule, Leslie Stephen became, in Hardy's own view, the friend "whose

22. Life 47.

23. Life 50.

24. Millgate, A Biography 68.

25. Gittings 264. Cf. Wing, Hardy 3. See Hardy's succession of poems celebrating his friendship with Moule: "An Experience" (615); "Before My Friend Arrived" (821); "Standing By The Mantlepiece" (887) and "She at His Funeral" (12).

philosophy was to influence his own for many years, indeed more than that of any other contemporary".²⁶ Indeed, the crucial presence of Stephen with his anguished doubts was to have for the most part a decisively bleak impact upon Hardy's hypersensitive nature. While Stephen discovered that "his Christianity was giving way to an agnostic condition",²⁷ he was there and then slowly abandoning Christian pieties. It seems that Leslie Stephen found Hardy sympathetic not only intellectually but also temperamentally: "a shared reticence was obviously one factor that drew the two men together".²⁸ The depth of Stephen's respect for and understanding of Hardy's philosophical position is indicated by one particular episode, itself something of a landmark in the shifts in Victorian faith:

One day (March 23, 1875) I received from Stephen a mysterious note asking me to call in the evening, as late as I liked. I went, and found him alone, wandering up and down his library in slippers; his thin figure wrapt in a heath-coloured dressing-gown. After a few remarks on our magazine arrangements he said he wanted me to witness his signature to what, for a moment, I thought was his will, but it turned out to be a deed renunciatory of holy-orders under the act of 1870. He said grimly that he was really a reverent gentleman still, little as he might look it, and that he thought it was well to cut himself adrift of a calling for which, to say the least, he had always been utterly unfit. The deed was executed with due formality He told me that he had "wasted" much time on systems of religion and metaphysics, and that the new theory

26. Life 100.

27. Orel, The Unknown Thomas Hardy 81. Noel Gilroy Annan, Leslie Stephen: His Thought and Character in Relation to his Time (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1951), comments that like Hardy's Stephen's agnosticism, is mainly attributed to "the books published during the crucial period". Among these was Darwin's On the Origin of Species, which "Stephen read ... as Evidence that confuted orthodoxy metaphysics" (162-66).

28. Millgate, A Biography 274. See also Meisel, The Return of the Repressed for a further discussion of Stephen's undeniable impact upon Hardy. Meisel points out that "His loss of faith and conversion to rationalism were similar to Hardy's, both temporarily and in the influences that shattered belief" (24).

of vortex rings had "a staggering fascination" for him.²⁹

Millgate rightly suggests that "it is an index of Stephen's respect for Hardy's integrity and intelligence that he should have chosen him as sole witness to a document so personal and so symbolic".³⁰ One might add that quite apart from Stephen's view of Hardy's personal qualities, he obviously thought that Hardy would be a sympathetic and understanding witness, which is an indication perhaps of Stephen's opinion of Hardy's own philosophical position by this time.³¹ Evidently Hardy's respect for Stephen and his views continued long after these early and significant years of their acquaintanceship; in May, 1901, only three years before Stephen's death, Hardy notes:

Leslie Stephen says: "The old ideals have become obsolete, and the new are not yet constructed We cannot write living poetry on the ancient model. The gods and heroes are too dead, and we cannot seriously sympathise with ... the idealized prize-fighter."³²

His affection for his friend and mentor is evident late in Hardy's own life when he writes to Virginia Woolf in 20 January 1915 that her father

had a peculiar attractiveness for me, & I used to suffer gladly his grim & severe

29. Life 105-6. On this point, and for a further examination of Stephen's impact on Hardy, see for example, Noel Annan, Leslie Stephen: The Godless Victorian (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1984).

30. Millgate, A Biography 172.

31. Cf. Gittings 288 Young Thomas Hardy who suggests that "it is notable that of all people in London, [Stephen] thought Hardy the most appropriate to witness this symbolic act".

32. Life 308.

criticisms of my contributions & his long silences, for the sake of sitting with him.³³

The tone of this letter is even more striking when one considers how hyper-sensitive Hardy normally was towards criticism of his work.

Thus by the mid-1870s the serenity and security of belief which he had had in the community of Bockhampton had irretrievably slipped away. While in some respects Hardy would see this as a necessary liberation from the constraints of doctrinal orthodoxy and the traditional moral and social values which went with it, giving him new perspectives on many aspects of his society, including prevailing sexual codes and marriage conventions, it was also an experience suffused with sadness and even pain. The loss of security in his faith, rooted in his boyhood community, was inseparable from the sense of social insecurity which Hardy, with his lower-class family origins, felt in London literary society; one might argue that, having lost his faith, Hardy was never to feel at home in the world again, a sense of alienation and isolation which is everywhere inscribed in his short fiction.

William R. Rutland suggests that by about this time Hardy had "reached a stage of spiritual vacuum" and "seems to have set out trying to fill it by reading philosophy".³⁴ An indication of the main strands of this reading are given in the reply he sent to Helen Garwood in 1911 when she sent him a copy of her book, Thomas Hardy, an Illustration of

33. Collected Letters, Vol. 5 76. Hardy celebrates Stephen (who himself had been an enthusiastic Alpine climber and the editor of The Alpine Journal, 1868-71), while climbing the Alps, by relating him to the mountains in its tenacity, solidity and aloofness in his sonnet "The Shreckhorn", written in 1897, and headed as "With thoughts of Leslie Stephen" : "Aloof, as if a thing of mood and whim;/ Now that its spare and desolate figure gleams/.... Of semblance to his personality/In its quaint glooms; keen lights, and rugged trim". See Gibson 322.

34. Rutland, A Study of his Writings 89.

the Philosophy of Schopenhauer: "My pages show harmony of view with Darwin, Huxley, Spencer, Hume, Mill and others, all of whom I used to read more than Schopenhauer"³⁵

Darwin, of course, he had read in the 1860s, under the influence of Moule. The impact of On the Origin of Species, especially given Hardy's state of mind at that point, was as at least as profound as it was on the faith of so many other readers in the period.³⁶ He realised that the implications of Darwin's theories went far beyond challenging the veracity of Genesis; it gave a new vision of the position of the human individual in the universe, a universe moreover in which the individual was not in the hands of a loving Creator but was ultimately merely an equal participant in -- or victim of -- the processes of life with the other, animal, creatures of the natural world. Human society and its values were an artifice, constructs with no bases in that natural world, which could ultimately be perceived to be hostile -- by its sheer indifference -- to such constructs; as Perry Meisel suggests, Hardy "perceived at this time not that the social order was in accordance with natural processes; his intellectual interpretation of Darwin ran just the other way: that nature was hostile to man".³⁷ Of course humans were separate from the animal world by virtue of one factor: their intellectual consciousness. But that very consciousness in such a Creator-less world

35. Quoted in Stewart A Criteria Biography 31. See also, Helen Garwood, Thomas Hardy : An Illustration of the Philosophy of Schopenhauer (Philadelphia : Winston, 1911).

36. In a note of 1882, Hardy records that during a stay in London he "attended ... the funeral of Darwin in Westminster Abbey. As a young man he had been among the earliest acclaimers of The Origin of Species". See Life 153.

37. Meisel 28.

could only be the source of pain, of a profound sense of vulnerability and isolation; the pervasive nature of the way Darwin coloured Hardy's perception of the world is evident in one of the key passages in the Life :

A woeful fact - that the human race is too extremely developed for its corporeal conditions, the nerves being evolved to an activity abnormal in such an environment. Even the higher are in excess in this respect. It may be questioned if Nature, or what we call Nature, so far back as when she crossed the line from invertebrates to vertebrates, did not exceed her mission. This planet does not supply the materials for happiness to higher existences. Other planets may, though one can hardly see how.³⁸

Darwin provided a narrative of existence which confirmed Hardy's darkest intuitions:

The world does not despise us; it neglects us All is vanity, saith the preacher. But if all were only vanity, who would mind? Alas, it is too often worse than vanity; agony, darkness, death also.³⁹

The effect of Darwinism with its scientific trend entails an acute awareness of man's vulnerability, smallness, insignificance, and his ill-adapted existence in the universe, in much the same way that it underlines a radical revision of man's place in Nature. Moreover -- it might be argued that this was Darwin's most fundamental influence on Hardy's vision -- underlying Darwin's theory of "natural selection" was the most subversive idea of all : random variation. There was no plan, no system, beyond randomness, chance. Capricious contingency is the supreme force in the universe which man inhabits. And these who prevail are merely the fittest of those random variations -- except that Hardy sardonically reflected that it depended on what one meant by "fittest": as Harvey Curtis Webster observes:

38. Life 218.

39. Life 48, 112.

Hardy did not feel that survivors were always the fittest. He believed that the law which determined survival operates on without regard for human criteria of fitness.⁴⁰

The other writers mentioned by Hardy in his letter to Helen Garwood, however, refract their influence across the world-vision that Hardy was constructing in the shadow of Darwin. Hardy's early reading of Herbert Spencer probably contributed to his conception of the Immanent Will and the view that "the power which the universe manifests to use is utterly inscrutable".⁴¹ Hardy's responsiveness to Spencer is indicated by a later letter, when he writes in 1893 to Lena Millman:

I am glad to find that you are interested in "First Principles" - a book which acts, or used to act, upon me as a sort of potent expander when I had been particularly narrowed down by the events of life. Whether the theories are true or false, their effect upon the imagination is unquestionable, and I think beneficial.⁴²

A few years earlier, in February 1888, he had received a letter from Rev. Dr. A. B. Grosart, enquiring about the possibility of achieving a reconciliation between "The horrors of human and animal life, particularly parasitic" and the "absolute goodness and non-limitation of God", Hardy adamantly and agnostically replies that:

Mr Hardy regrets that he is unable to suggest any hypothesis which would reconcile the existence of such evils as Dr. Grosart describes with the idea of omnipotent goodness. Perhaps Dr. Grosart might be helped to a provisional view of the universe by the recently published Life of Darwin, and the works of Herbert Spencer

40. Webster 65. Indeed, this view is endorsed by Hardy's note of 1893: "the doctrines of Darwin require readjusting largely; for instance, the survival of the fittest in the struggle for life". See Life 259.

41. Quoted in Howe, Thomas Hardy 13. Cf. Cosslett, The Scientific Movement 133.

42. Collected Letters, Vol. 2. 24-5.

and other agnostics.⁴³

Amongst those "other agnostics" was T.H. Huxley, whom Robin Gilmour has described as a man who

had a genuinely religious nature which was never entirely reconciled to the scientific materialism with which he has become identified. He is an example of the agnostic as stoic and scientist facing an indifferent universe with stoical courage and drawing comfort from science.⁴⁴

This could in many ways be a description of Hardy himself. Hardy knew Huxley, though not well, and liked him, as a man "who united a fearless mind with the warmest of hearts and the most modest of manners".⁴⁵ Huxley provided Hardy with a personal example as much as a set of ideas, an example of the necessity of courageous intellectual engagement with, and exploration of, the nature of the world, and the refusal to rest in conventions and easy, evasive compromises. Huxley confirmed for Hardy that "there is no alleviation for the sufferings of mankind except veracity of thought and action, and the resolute facing of the world as it is".⁴⁶ His response to Huxley is clearly illustrated in a letter to Edward Clodd in 27 February, 1902:

I have finished reading every word of your "Huxley", & must thank you for being so good as to send me such an interesting volume What is forced upon one again, after reading such a life as Huxley's, is the sad fact of the extent to which Theological lumber is still allowed to discredit religion, in spite of such devoted attempts as his to shake it off. If the doctrines of the supernatural were quietly abandoned to-morrow by the Church, & "reverence & love for an ethical ideal" alone retained, not one in ten thousand would object to the readjustment, while the enormous bulk of thinkers excluded by the old teaching would be brought into the

43. Life 205.

44. Robin Gilmour, The Victorian Period (London: Longman, 1993) 104.

45. Life 122.

46. Quoted in Brown, Hardy 21.

fold, & over venerable old churches & cathedrals would become centres of emotional life that they once were.

Well: what we gain by science is, after all, sadness, as the Preacher saith. The more we know of the laws & nature of Universe the more ghastly a business we perceive it all to be - & the non-necessity of it. As some philosopher says, if nothing at all existed, it would be a completely natural thing; but that the world exists is a fact absolutely logicless & Senseless.⁴⁷

The bleak sadness of Hardy's vision is obvious here, shadowed no doubt by his re-engagement with Huxley's thinking in reading Clodd's book. There is still a deep nostalgia for religion, a wish that the old community of belief and value could be re-instituted by the jettisoning of the necessity of faith in a supernatural reality and the basing of belief, and a church, on purely ethical values. But however deeply-felt, the longing is pushed aside in favour of a frank statement of the senseless randomness of existence.

John Stuart Mill's pungent views about the Church and about social conventions Hardy clearly saw as stimulating and liberating; Mill appealed to Hardy's sense of the absurdity of continuing to constrain men and women in the bonds of values which Hardy saw as no longer having any endorsement in the realities of the world in which he now believed; the doctrinal foundations on which such values had been built were being swept away. In fact Hardy's first contact with Mill had come not long after Hardy's arrival in London, during Mill's Parliamentary election campaign in 1864:

The appearance of the author of the treatise On Liberty (which we students of that date knew almost by heart) was so different from the look of persons who usually address crowds in the open air that it held the attention of people for whom such a gathering in itself had a little interest. Yet it was, primarily, that of a man out of place. The religious sincerity of his speech was jarred on by his environment The picture of him as personified earnestness surrounded for the most part by

47. Collected Letters: Vol. 3 5.

careless curiosity derived an added piquancy -- if it can be called such -- from the fact that the cameo clearness of his face chanced to be in relief against the blue shadow of a church, which on its transcendental side, his doctrines antagonised.⁴⁸

Mill's challenge to Victorian orthodoxies struck an echo in Hardy's impatience with the conventions of his society, an impatience which -- notoriously -- found its fullest expression in his final novel : Sue Bridehead implores her husband, Richard Phillotson, to liberate her from the shackles of their loveless marriage:

Why can't we agree to free each other? We made the compact and surely we can cancel it - not legally, of course; but we can morally, especially as no new interests, in the shape of children, have arisen to be looked after Why should I suffer for what I was born to be, if it doesn't hurt other people? (234)

Then few lines later she significantly quotes lines from Mill's On Liberty:

She, or he, who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation. (234)

This perspective written in 1890s is evidence of the deep and lasting attraction which Hardy seems to have had for Mill's view-point; as early as July 1868 it is evident that Hardy had recourse to Mill's writing at times of intellectual and personal struggle, when he writes in his journal that one of his "Cures for despair" was "To read Stuart Mill's 'Individuality' (in Liberty)".⁴⁹

But Mill's vision of the need for freedom did not, of course, lead to an optimistic or positive view of the human situation; Hardy is acutely aware of the plight of the individual seeking liberation, of the forces marshalled against individual freedom, and of the pain of the struggle. Mill deepened rather than alleviated Hardy's sense of the painfulness of

48. Life 330.

49. Life 58. Rutland, A Study of His Writings points out that Hardy was "a devoted admirer" of Mill (68).

existence. At the same time, as Philip Larkin shrewdly (and, in terms of his own writing revealingly) points out:

The presence of pain in Hardy's novels is a positive, not a negative, quality - not the mechanical working out of some pre-determined allegiance to pessimism or any other concept, but the continual imaginative celebration of what is both the truest and the most important element in life.⁵⁰

In other words, for Hardy, Larkin suggests, the pain is an indicator of the individual's existential struggle and the struggle in turn a measure of the individual's authenticity, of his/her vital refusal of the constraints of convention and of the negative lapse into the passivity of pessimism. But at the same time the sense of human vulnerability in the universe never goes away, the ultimate littleness of the human individual in an existence which governed by "Crass Casualty". Hardy's "Immanent Will" is not a conscious Prime Mover, good or evil, but mere indifferent Process. The evolution of human awareness, of consciousness of this Chance-governed existence is the ultimate source of pain, as the "Ancient Spirit of the Years" in The Dynasts Sums up:

The cognizance ye mourn, life's doom to feel,
If I report it meetly, came unmeant,
Emerging with blind gropes from impercipience
By listless sequence - luckless, tragic Chance;
In your more human tongue.⁵¹

Such a vision of human struggle as pain filled struggle would inevitably -- to return to Helen Garwood's thesis -- have drawn Hardy to Schopenhauer, whom he apparently read

50. Philip Larkin, "Wanted : Good Hardy Critic", Critical Quarterly 8 (1966) : 178.

51. Thomas Hardy, The Dynasts, ed. J.H. Fowler (1928; London: Macmillan, (1933) 36.

in translation in 1880s and to whom his notion of the Immanent Will is in part indebted.⁵² Schopenhauer's thinking was of course a major strand in late nineteenth century pessimism generally, and his dark vision inevitably coloured Hardy's sense of a blind will operating in the universe,⁵³ but as we have seen, to suggest as Garwood does that Schopenhauer was the major influence on Hardy's thinking is to simplify the complex process of Hardy's evolving thought, to undervalue other important aspects of his reading and, ultimately, to undervalue the authentic and personal way in which Hardy thought through his views for himself, rather than merely subscribing to the philosophical vision of others. However, the struggle to express that vision, both in the fiction and outside it, was a challenging one; a new vocabulary was being evolved and inevitably at times Hardy uses the terms, derived from other thinkers, which were becoming current in contemporary debate. Hardy addresses precisely this problem of expression as late as 1904, in a letter to Sir Henry Newbolt:

Just as the Original Cause did not (apparently) foresee the pitch of intelligence to which humanity would arrive in the course of the ages, & therefore did not prepare a world adequate to it, so the makers of language did not foresee the uses to which poor poets would wish to put words & stunted the supply.⁵⁴

For a man of Hardy's temperament and background, the actuality of contemplating

52. See Meisel, The Return of the Repressed 29; and Rutland 68. See also Millgate, A Biography, who points out that "the darker, more sceptical strain in Hardy's thinking continued to be fed meanwhile by some of his reading in general works on philosophy ... on such figures as Schopenhauer" (246).

53. Eleanor McCann, "Blind Will or Blind Hero: Philosophy and Myth in Hardy's 'The Return of the Native'", Criticism 3 (1961): 140. See also his pessimistic poem "He Never Expected Much".

54. Collected Letters, Vol. 3 113.

such a vision of life was not of course merely intellectual but emotionally real, urgent and painful and the one possible way of alleviating that pain, rather than transposing it into creative activity, had been shown him by Horace Moule. Moule's suicide left a shadow on Hardy's imagination which falls repeatedly across Hardy's fictional universe; as Frank Giordano has pointed out, Hardy's sense of the "fragility of human life, the emotional pain that man must endure in this irrational world" and his sense of "man's paradoxical will to intensify his suffering" almost includes the possibility of the individual taking his own life when his future seems hopeless.⁵⁵ That possibility seems to be there in Hardy's world as a simple fact in Hardy's writing, in poetry as well as in fiction; in "Tess's Lament", for instance, his heroine gives voice to a view which is wholly in keeping with her experience in the novel which bears her name: "I cannot bear my fate as writ,/I'd have my life unbe;".⁵⁶ Another intense pessimistic and suicidal poem is "For Life I had never cared Greatly": "For Life I had never cared greatly,/As worth a man's while".⁵⁷ We remember the doctor's comment on Little Father Time's suicide as marking "the beginning of the coming universal wish not to live" (355), a comment which owes nothing to contemporary medicine but

55. Frank R. Giordano, JR., "I'd Have My Life Unbe": Thomas Hardy's Self-destructive Characters (Alabama: The U of Alabama P, 1984) 13. Gittings, Young Thomas Hardy, observes that "we can date the emergence Hardy as ... an expounder of man's miseries from the suicide of his friend [Moule]" (264). Rutland, views that Hardy's indebtedness on this point to Schopenhauer is derived from the former's reading of "The World As Will And Idea [which] is devoted to the denial of the will to live" (99).

56. See Gibson 177.

57. See Gibson 537.

everything to Hardy's bleak vision by the 1890s.⁵⁸

It is perhaps worth remarking that the presence of such perspectives in Hardy's imagination is not always treated solemnly; Hardy's sense of humour was real albeit idiosyncratic and predictably dark; his tongue is clearly adjacent to his cheek when he relates his visit, with Emma, to Lady Catherine Milnes in August 1893:

On Sunday Hardy and lady C. walked till they were tired, when they sat down on the edge of a lonely sandpit and talked of suicide, pessimism, whether life was worth living, and kindred dismal subjects, till we were quite miserable.⁵⁹

Relatedly Carl Weber recounts Hardy's significant tour with some American ladies (the Owens), which reveals his life long interest in suicide:

As they retraced their steps towards Dorchester, they paused again at Gray's Bridge. The sun had now set, but Hardy wanted the ladies to see Ten Hatches Weir, where Henchard debated suicide. Only last week an old man attempted suicide there, so the novelist informed Rebekah. She later recorded that 'Mr. Hardy showed us another deep place further on, where he used to swim when a boy. It and Ten Hatches were always favourite spots for suicide.'⁶⁰

One senses Hardy playing up to his gloomy reputation. But such humour clearly confirms rather than diminishes the significance of this impulse in Hardy's imaginative perspective on

58. For a thorough examination on the suicide motif in Hardy's fiction see for example, Frank R. Giordano, JR., "Eustacia Vye's Suicide," Texas Studies in Literature and Language 30 (1980): 504-21; Frank R. Giordano, JR., "The Martyrdom of Giles Winterborne," Thomas Hardy Annual 2 (1984): 61-78; Frank R. Giordano, JR. "Farmer Boldwood: Hardy's portrait of a Suicide," English Literature in Transition 21 (1978): 244-53; and Evelyn Hardy, "Thomas Hardy and Horace Moule : Vindication of a Suicide", Times Literary Supplement 23 (1969) : 87-94.

59. See Life 259.

60. Carl J. Weber, Hardy and The Lady from Maddison Square (1952; Port Washington, N.Y. : Kennikat P, 1973) 66.

the world he inhabited; suicide is such an obvious, unquestioned reality that one can even make wry humour out of it.

Interestingly, it is in the short fiction that suicide as a way out of the social pressures and existential pain that beset Hardy's fictional characters is most apparent, perhaps confirming the way the short stories articulate the most central aspects of Hardy's imaginative world. "A Tragedy of Two Ambitions" (LLI), for instance, written in 1888, is another of Hardy's narratives about the worldly ambitions of humbly-born men: the toe hold which the brothers Cornelius and Joshua Halborough have gained in the respectable middle-class, by dint of their Jude-like self-education and then by virtue of the physical charms of their sister catching the eye of the young local squire, is threatened by the appearance of their drunken father, a failed millwright whom they had previously packed off to Canada while they advanced themselves in the Church. The father, in his cups, threatens to reveal not only the awful Henchard-secret of their humble origins, just as the squire is to propose to their sister Rosa, but that the two brothers were conceived illegitimately. As all their hard-won status threatens to collapse about their ears -- the father is determined to introduce himself to his prospective son-in-law -- he falls into the river and is caught in the weir; aware that this could solve all their problems, they hesitate before going to assist him and he is drowned. The final section of the story, set six months later, shows them both having made progress in the Church and their sister happily married to the squire. But as the sun shines down on them and their brother-in-law's fields are harvested, the awful price of their actions, motivated by social ambition, is already apparent. They can tell nothing of what has happened, of course, least of all to their sister. The two brothers' parishes are physically miles apart so that each is isolated with his own guilt, haunted by what they have

done. Even the social status they have gained has become meaningless and their faith -- albeit one senses their Christian profession was always a means to social advancement rather than a matter of profound faith -- has eroded; Joshua, the more socially-aware of the two finally admits to his brother:

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. A social regenerator has a better chance outside, where he is unhampered by dogma and tradition. As for me, I would rather have gone on mending mills, with my crust of bread and liberty. (453-54)

But there is no liberty now for either of them. The pain of guilt has made their lives empty and without meaning; each is isolated by his guilt:

"I see him every night," Cornelius murmured "Ah we read our Hebrews to little account, Jos!... To have endured the crass and despising the shame -- there lay greatness! But now I often feel that I should like to put an end to trouble here in this selfsame spot."

"I have thought of it myself," said Joshua.

"Perhaps we shall, some day," murmured his brother.

"Perhaps," said Joshua moodily.

With that contingency to consider in the silence of their nights and days they bent their steps homewards. (454)

It is a cold ending, as each faces a future imprisoned in his isolating guilt; lacking the faith which would allow them to seek forgiveness from a loving, redeeming God, their empty world offers them no way to alleviate their guilt, just, ultimately, Moule's way out.

"Alicia's Diary" (CM), also centres on guilt and a death in a weir. The guilt is that of Alicia, whose through whose diary entries the story is related, it is an unusual device in Hardy's fiction but one that is effective in that not only does Hardy show Alicia unconsciously reveal her growing ambiguities of feeling for her sister Caroline's fiancé, but the very form itself is a manifestation of her isolation. Alicia can speak to no one of her

feelings for Charles, of her plotting of an invalid marriage for Caroline so that (prior to the Deceased Wife's Sister Act of 1907) Alicia can marry Charles after Caroline's supposedly-imminent death; the diary is her only outlet: "I ... make up my diary to date in a hurried fashion, for the sake of the riddance it affords to ideas which otherwise remain suspended hotly in the brain" (654). In her concern to get Charles for herself without the guilt of hurting Caroline nor the public disgrace of stealing her sister's fiancé, Alicia's diary reveals little sensitivity to what Charles himself must be feeling : forced by the pressures of social respectability into marriage with a woman he no longer loves, compelled to do so by the woman he does love. The reader, especially the reader familiar with Hardy, notes the ominous tone of Charles's final agreement to marry Caroline: "I have nothing to gain by delay. But I will not answer for the consequences" (660). His subsequent death in the weir on his wedding is considered by the coroner and by the community to be an accident. Only Alicia realises what has happened: "This step out of life was as much a part of the day's plan as was the wedding in the church hard by" (662). She is left alone with her awareness of her responsibility for Charles's death. And again there is no sense of a spiritual life to which she might have recourse : the only church we see in the story is the Church of the Frari in Venice:

I found that whether a place to marry in or not, it was one to depress. The word which Venice speaks most constantly -- decay -- was in a sense accentuated here. The whole large fabric itself seemed sinking into an earth which was not solid enough to bear it. (658)

The place which becomes almost an emblem for the moral decay of Alicia herself, as she manipulates those around her to satisfy her own uncontrolled desire for Charles.

In "An Imaginative Woman" (LLI) two lonely, unfulfilled people fail, largely through the operation of chance, to make contact with each other. The result is, again, that a young man decides to kill himself, rather than carry on with his empty life. Ella, the young wife whose husband seems unaware of her emotional hunger, is herself lonely and, unfulfilled. It is presumably these emotions in the poetry of Robert Trewe, the young man whose rooms the family occupy during his absence, which in part draw her to him. The reasons for Trewe's state of mind are less clear; very much representative of 1890s literary pessimism, Trewe has no close friend or companion, and certainly no spiritual faith, to alleviate his intuitions of the world; there is surely personal resonance in Hardy's description of him: "He was a pessimist in so far as that character applies to a man who looks at the worst contingencies as well as the best in the human condition" (383). His poetry seems to suggest an emotional, and indeed sexual frustration, which echo Ella's to the extent that a "narrow-minded" (395) review objects strongly to the nature of the feelings expressed. Ella's attempts to meet Trewe repeatedly fail; how he would have responded to her the reader can only speculate, albeit the letter he leaves before shooting himself in his lonely lodgings inevitably leads Ella to believe that she could have saved him, as well as finding fulfilment for herself: "Perhaps had I been blessed with a mother, or a sister, or a female friend of another sort tenderly devoted to me, I might have thought it worth while to continue my present existence" (396).

"The Spectre of the Real" (1896) is a "very tragic",⁶¹ collaborative short story of atrophied love, marital incompatibility, abortive return, unfulfilled intention, disillusionment,

61. Collected Letters, Vol.. 2 39.

deceit and ultimate suicide. Though written in collaboration with Florence Henniker, the fact remains that "most of the actual writing of the story was done by Hardy himself".⁶²

Quite unexpectedly, and in absolute ignorance of Rosalys being once a wife and now a widow of her recently deceased secret husband Jim, Lord Parkhurst returns and de novo resumes a union with Rosalys, only to commit suicide, shortly after the consummation of that union. That the story ends on the tragic note of the suicide of Lord Parkhurst is unmistakably a typically salient Hardyean hallmark and a semiotic indicator of his major contribution to the collaboration.⁶³ As the narrator tells us:

We regret to announce that this distinguished nobleman and heroic naval officer who arrived with Lady Parkhurst ... entered his dressing-room very early this morning and shot himself through the head with a revolver No reasons can be assigned for the rash act. (Indiscretion 210-11)

"The Grave by the Handpost" (CM), one of Hardy's bleaker stories, beings with the burial of a suicide, Sergeant Holway, at the lonely crossroads outside the village. Holway has encouraged his son to follow his own career and to join the army. The son, sent to India and struck by illness, in his mood of deep depression writes a letter bitterly reproaching his father for advising him to embark on a military career; the Sergeant, a widower who lives alone, is "wounded to the quick" (667), by the letter and, in his remorse,

62. Jeffrey S. Cramer, "The spectre of the Real, "Thomas Hardy Year Book 13 (1986) : 8. Pamela Dalziel, ed., Thomas Hardy: The Excluded and Collaborative Stories (Oxford : Clarendon, 1992) also points out that "Hardy ... exclusively revised it and completely rewrote the conclusion (263).

63. In a letter of 28 October, 1893 Hardy writes to Florence Henniker that "the ending good or bad, has the merit of being in exact keeping with Lord P.'s character". See Collected Letters, Vol. 2 40.

withdraws even more into solitude and the consolations of alcohol before finally, as Christmas approaches, shooting himself. It is, of course, chance that caused the letter to be written when the son was temporarily in such a low mood, and it is chance that brings the son home just as the Chalk-Newton choir, in their compassion for the Sergeant, sing a carol over his unhallowed grave, their sense of fellowship and community contrasting the isolation which has culminated in his suicide. In a perfect Hardian moment, which epitomizes the mood of the story, "the wind swept over the isolated grave with its customary siffle of indifference" (668).

It is the wider indifference of things that causes the son's wish to have his father reburied in the churchyard not to be carried out after he has returned to his duties; Hardy's awareness not just of the act of suicide but of the macabre beliefs and rituals which followed it in the English countryside is evident as it becomes clear that not only was the Sergeant buried at the crossroads in an unmarked grave but was buried without a coffin but with a stake through him -- "They buried en wi' a new six-foot hurdle-saul drough's body, from the sheep-pen up in North Ewelease" (671) -- and so no one will undertake to move his corpse. Thus when the son returns after Waterloo a bemedalled hero, he learns that his attempt to alleviate his guilt for his letter by having his father re-buried has failed. Like his father before him, he slides into morbid isolation, renting an empty cottage where "he lived alone, becoming quite a hermit, and allowing no woman to enter the house" (673). Again with no sustaining faith to help him in his guilt and loneliness, his fate seems to have dark inevitability: but it is chance that leads him to hear the carol-singers sing the same carol as he had heard them sing over his father's grave, apparently precipitating his own act of self-destruction. Even then the contingency of things has not finished with him : he wished

to be buried at the crossroads with his father, together at last after death, but the piece of paper on which he writes his request is "accidentally swept to the floor, and overlooked till after his funeral, which took place in the ordinary way in the churchyard" (674). In such a random world, human loneliness, it seems, ultimately cannot even be escaped by ending one's life. This is Hardy at his darkest.

Such a sense of the world's emptiness did not, again, mean that Hardy closed his mind to the possibility of God's existence; indeed it perhaps made his longing that it "might be so",⁶⁴ all the more acute. In January 1890, at the age of fifty, Hardy writes:

I have been looking for God for 50 years, and I think that if he had existed I should have discovered him. As an external personality, of course - the only true meaning of the word.⁶⁵

Seventeen years later, the longings are still present, Hardy also expressing here his compassion for the human individual and his awareness of the need of human sympathy one to another to ameliorate the human's situation:

We enter church, and we have to say, "We have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep," When what we want to say is "Why are we made to err and stray like lost sheep?" Then we have to sing "My soul doth magnify the lord", when what we want to sing is "O that my soul could find some Lord that it could magnify!" Till it can, let us magnify good works, and develop all means of easing mortals' progress through a world not worthy of them.⁶⁶

We might also observe in passing how Hardy's spiritual wrestling through these years must have affected his relations with his first wife, Emma. It is possible, as Harvey Curtis

64. See Gibson 468.

65. Life 244.

66. Life 332.

Webster suggests, that the erosion of Hardy's own faith in the 1860s was a factor in his being drawn to her, given her own devoutness (and of course her familial links to the Church): "Hardy must have been drawn to her by faith that he would like to have kept but had lost".⁶⁷ Her faith remained with her throughout their marriage; in her Recollections, just a year before her death in 1911, she writes:

[A]ll showing that an Unseen power of great benevolence directs our ways; I have some philosophy, and mysticism, and an ardent belief in Christianity and the life beyond this present one, all which makes my existence curiously interesting. As one watches happenings (and even if should occur unhappy happenings), outward circumstances are less of importance if Christ is our highest ideal. A strange unearthly brilliance shines around our path penetrating and dispersing difficulties with its warmth and glow.⁶⁸

But clearly her husband's sense that those "outward circumstances" originated not in a loving Christ but in random chance was unchanged by Emma Hardy's beliefs and one can only assume that her faith, strongly expressed at times, must have become in fact a source of acute discomfort to Hardy. T.R.M. Creighton goes so far as to suggest that "The real iceberg which sank Hardy's religion was Emma's belief";⁶⁹ one might argue, however, given the tensions that their disparity of belief must have contributed to the relationship that what really foundered on that iceberg was their marriage.

Hardy's nostalgia for the kind of stability and reassurance he had found in the Church in his youth seems never to have left him -- "he was never to lose entirely his imaginative adherence to the Church, his love of its music and its services, and his belief in

67. Webster 81.

68. Emma Hardy, Some Recollections, ed. Evelyn Hardy and Robert Gittings (London: Oxford UP, 1961) 55-6.

69. T.R.M. Creighton, "Some thoughts on Hardy and Religion," Thomas Hardy After Fifty Years, ed. Lance St. John Butler (London: Macmillan, 1977) 72.

its civilizing and socializing function"⁷⁰ -- and his 1902 letter to Clodd, quoted above, indicates a wish for some kind of church which would provide the emotional comfort he needed -- the sense of community to alleviate his alienation -- without the demand for belief in a spiritual reality. (At the end of his life he again writes of his wish to make

The Established Church Comprehensive enough to include the majority of thinkers to the previous hundred years who had lost all belief in Supernatural).⁷¹

But at the same time, in his creative writing and elsewhere, Hardy repeatedly expresses his impatience, even his disgust, at the lack of Christian charity he saw in the clergy. The most famous example, of course, is the clergyman's refusal to baptise Tess's illegitimate child Sorrow in Tess of the d'Urbervilles, and his subsequent denial to give him "a Christian burial" in a consecrated ground; instead he is buried "in that shabby corner of God's allotment where He lets the nettles grow, and where all unbaptised infants, notorious drunkards, suicides, and others of the conjecturally damned are laid" (101). Again the sterility of Angel's family, especially his brothers, as opposed to Tess's vitality and genuine capacity for love, manifests the same attitude. But negative feelings about the clergy and their shortcomings are present even in the earlier fiction. In Under the Greenwood Tree, the modernizing vicar is seen as culpably ignorant of the impact on the community of the displacement of the Choir by the new-fangled organ. In A Laodicean, Hardy derides both mockingly and disdainfully the beliefs of the Baptist preacher, Rev. Woodwell, who seeks to rebaptize the Anglican heroine, Paula Power.

70. Millgate, A Biography 91.

71. Life 424.

Such negative attitudes to the clergy are even more evident in the short stories, where repeatedly the clergy are seen as more concerned with material rewards and social aspiration. These worldly concerns repeatedly result in a sense of painful alienation for the people around them which is in stark contrast to the love and comfort which they should be providing. There is no inevitable reason, for example, for Hardy to make the son in "The Son's Veto" (LLI) a priest -- he could ultimately have been a lawyer or an accountant -- but the fact that the Eton-educated son goes to Oxford and becomes an Anglican priest gives considerable ironic edge to the story and, again of course displays Hardy's distaste for the attitudes of some of the Anglican priesthood. Even as a schoolboy the son, Randolph, feels free to correct the rural, non-standard grammar of his mother: "He have been so comfortable these last few hours ... Has, dear mother -- not have!" exclaimed the public-schoolboy, with an impatient fastidiousness that was almost harsh" (403). Randolph constrains all naturalness and openness of feeling in his single-minded ambition of confirming and maintaining his position as a gentleman -- seen from his point-of-view, he has a terrible Henchard/Hardy secret of humble parentage to keep secret. The naturalness of Sophy, his mother, who is seen by her husband before marriage as "a kitten-like, flexuous, tender creature" (405),⁷² and later by the narrator as a "woman of pure instincts" (411), is constrained and suppressed by her son; her re-marriage, to Sam Hobson, the greengrocer from her native village, is out of the question to Randolph. The result of his singular lack of Christian charity towards his mother is to leave her isolated and unfulfilled

72. Compare, for instance, Hardy's description of Tess, after Angel's return, and while she is getting up for the afternoon skimming: "Having been lying down in her clothes she was warm as a sunned cat" (172).

emotionally and sexually, her feeling must remain "penned in her heart" (408). The only emotion Randolph shows is when he bursts into passionate tears on hearing his mother's desire to remarry; when she raises the matter again after he has been ordained as a priest, Hardy sardonically draws the following ironic image of him:

But by indignation and contempt for her taste he completely maintained his ascendancy; and finally taking her before a little cross and altar that he had erected in his bedroom for his private devotions, there bade her kneel, and swear that she would not wed Samuel Hobson without his consent. (414)

Hardy seems especially scathing towards the almost obsessive concern of some clergy for social status and the worldly well-being which goes with it, at the expense, again, of genuine feeling and the love and sensitivity to others which should be the essential ingredient of the true priest. This is in "For Conscience Sake" (LLI) when the lonely Mr. Millborne seeks out the woman he had deserted years before, an act born of a sense of social duty and not passion or even affection for the woman, Leonora. She, in turn, is caught between aspects of social propriety : his wish to put right his past action and her own sense of her "hard-won respectability" (427) which might be endangered if the exact nature of her previous relationship with Millborne became known. But above all what creates tension between the two, after their marriage, is the presence of the man to whom their daughter is about to become engaged. Again, this young man could have been of any profession, but Hardy makes him a "scanty-whiskered", fastidious young curate (423). The curate, Mr Cope, is, like Hardy's other priests, not over-endowed with natural passion; indeed it would seem once again that his anxieties about social position overweigh his desire to marry Frances, even before Millborne arrives on the scene, he has qualms as to her suitability. Leonora tells Millborne, "There have been friends of his who object, because of

our vocation [as dancing teachers]. However, he sees the absurdity of such an objection as that, and is not influenced by it" (424). But in fact these matters do seem to be causing Cope not to hasten the marriage; he "remains aloof, tantalizing Frances by his elusiveness" (429). She in turn is appalled to hear of the fact of her illegitimate birth: "How could a scrupulously correct clergyman and lover like Mr Cope ask her to be his wife after this discovery of her irregular birth?" (428). In fact despite her anguish, he never does find out this characteristic Hardy secret and, when Millborne sets her and her mother up in a fine house with a good allowance, "The first person to call upon them as new residents was Mr Cope" (429-30). After Millborne's departure, back to his old lonely life, Frances becomes "The Reverend Mrs. Cope" (430).

In "The Duchess of Hamptonshire" (GND) natural feeling is again repressed, again resulting in misery and loneliness, by the authority of a worldly Anglican priest. The "sweet and simple" Emmeline Oldbourne, daughter of the rector of Batton, falls for her father's young curate, a young man described in terms of rural naturalness: he has curly hair and eyes "so dreamy that to look long into them was like ascending and floating among summer clouds", while his complexion is "as fresh as a flower" (341). Emmeline's father, whose title indicates his social-stance -- he is "the Honourable and Reverend Mr Oldbourne" -- is another priest who is notably lacking in Christian charity; he is described carefully by the narrator: "a widower, over still and stern for a clergyman, whose severe white neckcloth, well-kept gray hair, and right-lined face betokened none of those sympathetic traits whereon depends so much of a person's power to do good among his fellow-creatures" (341). When Emmeline catches the eye of the Duke of Hamptonshire, her father's procedure is "cold, hard, and inexorable" (342). He ends her relationship with the curate, Alwyn Hill, who is

sent away from the parish, despite her anguished protests. Presumably under her father's firm influence, born of his sense of social status, Emmeline marries The Duke, who is considerably older than she is.

Inevitably the marriage proves to be a miserable, lonely prison for Emmeline; the narrator somewhat sardonically points out that she pays no attention to "overhauling her wardrobe" or "counting her rings", by implication the usual occupations of ladies of her station; she prays in her "great church-pew ... lonely and insignificant as a mouse in a cell" (343). When she eventually meets secretly with Alwyn and begs him to take her away with him on his journey to America, the young curate is inevitably caught between the natural impulses of his heart and the constraints of his conscience. There is a carefully-suggested ambivalence about his refusal. Having notes that such an adulterous relationship would be a "sin", when Emmeline points out her own essential innocence, Alwyn modulates his responses: "It is wrong" (344). We might feel that "wrong" is a matter of social error, the breaking of the social code, rather lacking the absolute spiritual weight of "sin"; this is perhaps confirmed when he then says "It would look wrong, at any rate, in this case" (344, emphasis added). Alwyn does not, it would seem, have the courage to follow his impulses, deciding ultimately that social codes are too strong a barrier to break through. Asserting frantically that what she proposes is indeed "forbidden in God's law" (345), he rushes away to his ship and to America. In his long years there he creates strategies to suppress his feelings of loneliness and misery, "but the kernel of his life, his secret, was kept as snugly shut as though he had been dumb" (346); again we notice the images of imprisonment.

The awful irony which he discovers only on his return to England years later, that Emmeline did indeed follow him onto the ship and that, when she died of a fever, he himself

had unknowingly carried out the funeral at sea of his disguised lover, seems in retrospect to be a punishment for Alwyn's lack of courage, his obedience to the contemporary respectable status quo; his obedience has only brought misery to them. Indeed it could be argued that not only is the curate culpable for Emmeline's and his own unhappiness and wasted lives, but also for her death; had he taken her with him, she would not have died in the anonymity of the steerage accommodation where she caught the fever which killed her. Thus, Emmeline can be seen as the victim of the lack of true human feeling of two clergymen; that of her father, due to his social pride and ambition, and Alwyn, due to his lack of courage, despite his lover for her. Again, the shortcomings of clergymen result in painful, unnatural -- and unnecessary -- isolation for a woman.

The two brothers in "A Tragedy of Two Ambitions" (LLI), Joshua and Cornelius Halborough, are in this context particularly interesting Hardy protagonists. They are like Jude Fawley in struggling to make their way to college or university, and then to become clergymen. Theirs too is a lonely struggle against economic circumstances and class advantage to educate themselves, getting up in the early morning to pore over the classics and works of the Church fathers. Also, like Henchard (and like Hardy himself, of course) there is the threat to their social advancement which originates in the nature of their origins, which must be kept a secret at all costs. Not only are the brothers the sons of a humble millwright, but he has turned to the bottle, resulting in the failure of his business and in his own irregular, rootless, and frequent dissolute life. We might therefore expect the narrative sympathy to lie with the struggle of the two young men. To some extent this is true, but the story ultimately gains in richness and complexity by the fact that, while the reader understands and even feels sympathy for their situation, at the same time we are aware of

the limits of their own human sympathies. Once again the true vocation of becoming clergyman is shadowed by the purely social ambition of the two men. The older brother, Joshua, who is ordained before his brother, is especially prim; he, unlike his father, is a teetotaler and the only time he feels passion in the story is when he sheds tears of frustration when the father appears, having previously been packed off to Canada, and threatens to bring social disgrace down on the aspiring young clergyman. And once again there is the terrible secret of illegitimacy to be concealed, when their father, in his cups, reveals that the brothers were born before their parents were married.

For such cold-bloodedly ambitious young men all this threatens catastrophe. But Hardy's criticism is not only aimed at them; it is also aimed at a society for whom non-respectability of birth -- for which neither young man can of course be held responsible -- would result in social ostracism. Again, as in Tess, Hardy's humane tolerance of such matters is at odds with his contemporary society. And it is the Church which is seen as the driving force of such prejudice. In this story Hardy's criticism of the community of churchgoers is sharp; Joshua tells his brother:

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. (439-40)

Initially Joshua, perhaps surprisingly, is a good preacher; his first sermon makes a considerable impact on the congregation and Hardy sardonically points out how rare this is:

Not within living memory till to-day had the subject of the sermon formed the topic of conversation from the church door to the churchyard gate, to the exclusion of personal remarks on those who had been present, and on the week's news in general. (440)

But by the end of the story Joshua's enthusiasm has gone. Continually gnawed by guilt for allowing their father to drown, the two men lack the beliefs which would give authenticity to their vocation; ultimately, given that their ambition was always ultimately social and not spiritual, when they fail to make progress through the ranks of the church, their lives are hollow and empty: "I would rather have gone on mending mills, with my crust of bread and liberty" (454). With no vocation or even deep faith, they are imprisoned and lonely in their roles as priests and in their guilt. Suicide may indeed be the only way out.

Hardy's impatience with the established church and its priests stemmed of course from his own philosophical and speculative restlessness, and from his sense that too many comfortably inside the church did not themselves apparently feel it necessary to confront the urgent spiritual issues which contemporary science and philosophical debate were raising, conscientious reflection on which had exiled Hardy himself from the Church. In a sense, of course, it was that exile and his continual reflection on the nature of the universe, and the way moral and social codes took incomplete account of what Hardy saw as the actuality of human existence in that universe, which made him a creative writer, which found expression in his poetry and fiction. It is a writing born of what he saw as the "disjunction between human consciousness and a natural universe quite indifferent to it",⁷³ while in turn the very fact that his unconventional views found expression in literature ultimately added to the pressures he felt under, added to his sense of himself as a lonely outsider in relation to his own society; as he writes in October 1895, following the hostile reception of Tess and Jude:

73. Lawrence Jones, "Imagery and the 'Idiosyncratic Mode of Regard': Eliott, Hardy, and Lawrence, "Ariel: A Quarterly Review of the Arts and Sciences in Israel 12 (1981): 30.

To cry out in a passionate poem that (for instance) the Supreme Mover or Movers, the Prime Force or Forces, must be either limited in Power, unknowing, or cruel -- which is obvious enough, and has been -- will cause them merely a shake of the head; but to put it in argumentative prose will make them sneer, or foam, and set all the literary contortionists jumping upon me, a harmless agnostic, as if I were a clamorous atheist If Galileo had said, in verse that the world moved, the Inquisition might have let him alone.⁷⁴

Hardy's views cause him, in his own time, and since, to have attached to him a variety of labels: "Nonconformist", "Agnostic", "Atheist", "Infidel", "Immoralist", "Heretic", and above all "Pessimist".⁷⁵ Hardy consistently defended himself against such labels, especially that of "pessimist", arguing that in fact his approach to life and literature was that of "the best consummation possible: briefly, evolutionary meliorism",⁷⁶ and labelling himself on one occasion as a "meliorist".⁷⁷ Hardy ultimately saw himself as seeking a reform in contemporary social attitudes -- especially in terms of class and gender -- in the light of a revised notion of humanity's true significance in the universe, however uncomfortable society might find that notion:

And what is to-day, in allusions to the present author's pages, alleged to be "pessimism" is, in truth, only such "questionings" in the exploration of reality, and it the first step towards the soul's betterment, and the body's also.

If I may be forgiven for quoting my own old words, let me repeat what I printed in this relation more than twenty years ago, and wrote much earlier, in a poem entitled "In Tenebris":

74. Life 284-85. For a thorough notion of the mechanical concept of the world and the dominance of the idea of the will, see for example, his poems "In Vision I Roamed"; "She to Him" and "At a Bridal", all written in (1866). For his austere concept of the indifference and purposelessness of Nature, See also "The Mother Mourns", and "The Lacking Sense".

75. Life 376.

76. Orel, Personal Writings 52.

77. Life 387.

If way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst.⁷⁸

Hardy's "look at the Worst" was counterpointed by his compassion for his fellow human beings; this is implicit in the passage just quoted as well as, of course, in his fiction and poetry. It is this compassion for his fellow humans which gives his writing much of its plangent richness. He is rarely if ever driven to cynicism or true pessimism, his humane concern is again evident in Apology to Later Lyrics and Earlier of 1922:

pain to all upon [the globe], tongued or dumb, shall be kept down to a minimum by loving-kindness, operating through scientific knowledge, and actuated by the modicum of free will conjecturally possessed by organic life when the mighty necessitating forces -- unconscious or other -- that have "the balancings of the clouds," happen to be in equilibrium, which may or may not be often.⁷⁹

But at the same time Hardy's compassion, his desire for "loving-kindness", can only have made his sense of pain at what he saw the plight of the individual as being in a "nonchalant universe".⁸⁰ Above all, that individual human being, or perhaps that individual and his/her loved one, seemed alone, minute and insignificant in the vastness of space. Such a vision is present even in the minor novels. For instance, in the Preface to the significantly-titled Two on a Tower, Hardy writes:

78. Orel, Personal Writings 52.

79. Orel, Personal Writings 53. Clarice Short, "Thomas Hardy and the Military Man," Nineteenth Century Fiction 4 (1949), observes that Hardy's "works reveal the tenderness which he felt toward those whose lives are controlled more obviously, than are those of most men by what seems like the purposeless workings of an inhuman will" (129). See also his poem "A Plaint to Man": "The fact of life with dependence placed / With loving kindness fully blown, / And visioned help unsought, unknown". See Gibson 326. See also his short story "Fellow-Townsmen" (WT); after the capsizing of the boat, the narrator comments ironically: "the circumstance that catastrophe which had befallen Mrs. Down was solely the result of her own and her husband's loving kindness towards himself" (96).

80. When publishing "Moments of Vision" in 1917, Hardy writes: "I do not expect much notice will be taken of these poems: They mortify the human sense of self-importance by showing, or suggesting, that human beings are of no matter or appreciable value in this nonchalant universe". See Life 378.

This slightly-built romance was the outcome of a wish to set the emotional history of two infinitesimal lives against the stupendous background of the stellar universe, and to import to readers the sentiment that of these contrasting magnitudes the smaller might be the greater to them as men.⁸¹

While standing on top of the tower, which is situated lonely "like a shadowy finger pointing to the upper constellations" (30), both Viviette, Lady Constantine, the lady of the manor and Swithin St. Cleeve express their acute vulnerability and minuteness: once "the dome that had covered the tower had been whirled off bodily" by a circular hurricane and tempestuous wind, "each held the other (107) agitatingly in an intense movement of consternation". Famously, Tess while arriving at Talbothays "stood still upon the hemmed expanse of verdant flatness", like "a fly on a billiard-table of indefinite length, and of no more consequence to the surroundings than that fly" (110). Such is the situation not only of humble anonymous milkmaids but also of heroes and emperors; the narrative perspective of "The Dynasts" shows Napoleon in his true proportion:

Napoleon; gone thy opportunity!
Such men as thou, who made across the world
To make an epoch, bless, confuse, appal,
Are in the elemental ages 'Chart
Like meanest insects on obscurest leaves. (111)⁸²

In the major tragic novels, and in Tess particularly, the lonely protagonists do indeed seem to be "as flies to wanton boys".⁸³

81. Orel, Personal Writings 16.

82. We see a similar perspective in Hardy's shorter poems. In "Drinking Song", for instance, Hardy traces the fragility and insignificance of man through several schools of philosophical thought, through Thales and Copernicus to Darwin and Einstein; the poem ends: "So here we are, in piteous Case:/ Like butterflies/Of many dyes/Upon an Alpine glacier's face". See Gibson 905-6.

83. King Lear, IV.I.38-9. The phrase is quoted in the Preface to the Fifth And Later Editions July 1829. See Orel, Personal Writings 28.

In fact, notoriously, Tess is seen, in the final chapter, to have been the plaything not of "the gods" -- or "God" -- but "the President of the Immortals". In fact, when one critic suggested that the phrase confirmed that Hardy believed in "an all-powerful being endowed with the baser human passions, who turns everything to evil and rejoices in the mischief he has wrought", Hardy dismissed the suggestion, pointing out that the phrase was a literal translation from Aeschylus's Prometheus Unbound.⁸⁴ In fact Hardy seems to have caused problems for himself in including this rhetorical phrase, presumably seeking to give an elevated register to the final paragraph of his tragedy. Indeed, the phrase had not appeared in the Graphic serialization of Tess, the passage reading instead: "Time, the Arch-satirist had had his joke out with Tess"⁸⁵ The earlier phrase still suggests an element of conscious intention, albeit whimsical and careless, but "Time" does suggest more the notion of mere mechanical process.

In fact "Time", the process by which the universe moved, seems for Hardy to have had two aspects, "chance and change": The inevitability of alteration, but alteration not according to any pre-set pattern, alteration which is mechanical, random, governed by chance and contingency.⁸⁶ This indeed is the force which governs the world of Tess and Hardy's other

84. See Life 243.

85. J.T. Laird, The Shaping of 'Tess of the D'Urbervilles' (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975) 75. Laird notes that the later version "is considered the most controversial of all the terms used by Hardy to express his anger at cosmic injustice and indifference" (76). In a letter of 19 December 1920, to Alfred Noyes, Hardy writes: "that I really believe the Prime Mover to be a malignant old gentleman ... is irresistibly comic". Life 409. Again, in the Preface to Tess he definitely asserts "Let me repeat that a novel is an impression, not an argument" (27).

86. In his Preface to Poems of the Past and Present of (1902), Hardy writes: "Unadjusted impressions have their value, and the road to a true philosophy of life seems to lie in humbly recording diverse readings of its phenomena as they are forced upon us by chance and change", See Orel, Personal Writings (39).

writing, and is especially evident in the short fiction. Tess, perhaps more than any of the other novels, is structured by chance: given the discovery of their ancient lineage, it is chance that her father is the weak man he is, chance that brings Angel along the road to Marlott as she is dancing with the other village girls (and ultimately chance that has made her so physically striking); it is chance that kills Prince the family horse, necessitating Tess's being sent to seek assistance from their "relative", Alec D'Urberville, and chance that he is the kind of sexually-exploitative man he is; it is of course chance that causes Tess to become pregnant, chance takes her to Talbothays, the very dairy farm where Angel works, chance that causes her confessional letter to slide under Angel's carpet before the wedding, and it is chance that Angel, despite his supposed radicalism, is still fastidiously bound to the mores of his time, demanding a virginal wife. It is a final awful chance that causes John Durberfield to die, forcing Tess to surrender to Alec just as we know that Angel is coming back to her. If any one of these chance events -- and indeed several more -- had not happened, then Tess's fate would have been different. But, relentlessly, they all do; it is small wonder that the possibility of a malignant fate is raised. But, manifestly, there is ultimately no President of the Immortals involved here; and, if Hardy ultimately saw arbitrary chance, contingency as the shaping force in the world, it is that force which shapes the narrative structures of his stories. This use of chance and, relatedly, of coincidence in the fiction has always caused irritation in some critics:

One begins to wonder, in fact, whether Hardy himself knew what coincidence signified in his novels or whether he wasn't simply trying to suborn a characteristic feature of early Victorian novels - pouring new wine into old bottles [H]is plots appear to often "convey" his characters to their doom, and why the plots interest us, to the extent that they do, only because we don't believe what Hardy is trying to make them say. Finally,

however, the arm-twisting becomes annoying.⁸⁷

But, while Hardy was no doubt aware of the enjoyment that Victorian readers, perhaps especially readers of magazine stories, derived from plots which turned on coincidence, ultimately such objections such as Goldknope's miss the connection between Hardy's world view and his aesthetics. Marlene Springer is on firmer ground when she argues that

While it is true that one is often amazed at the almost malign timing of some of Hardy's contrivances, [his] use of coincidence, and especially perverse coincidence, is not merely a superimposed device, nor is it evidence of amateurish artistic judgement. Rather it is the result of Hardy's personal philosophy, which saturates the novels and moulds his style.⁸⁸

David Morse is even more to our purpose. He contends that Hardy's

use of chance, coincidence and conjunction is intended to dissipate any conviction in the reader that his characters live in a world that is providentially governed, rational and predictable. It is designed to show just how powerfully our lives can be shaped by fortuitous events.⁸⁹

At the same time there is no doubt that at some level chance events and coincidence

87. David Goldknope, "Coincidence in the Victorian Novel: The Trajectory of a Narrative-Device," College English 31 (1961): 47-8. In the same vein, Walter Allen, The English Novel: A Short Critical History (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1954), believes that "Hardy's chief weakness in plot arises from his view of casualty. He is intent to show that the stars in their courses fight against the aspiring, the man or woman who would rise above the common through greatness of spirit, of ambition, or passion" (251).

88. Marlene Springer, Hardy's Use of Allusion (London: Macmillan, 1983) 7.

89. David Morse, High Victorian Culture (London; Macmillan, 1993) 494. Cf, for example, Hornback, The Metaphor of Chance 6; F. B. Pinion, "Chance, Choice and Charity: Hardy and the Future of Civilization," Thomas Hardy And The Modern World: Papers Presented at the 1973 Summer School, ed. F.B. Pinion (Dorchester: The Thomas Hardy Society, 1974) 76; Morton Dauwen Zabel, Craft And Character: Texts, Method And Vocation in Modern Fiction (London: Victor Gollanez, 1957) 97; M.A. Goldberg, "Hardy's Double-Visioned Universe," Essays in Criticism 7 (1957): 382; and Dale Kramer, Thomas Hardy: The Forms of Tragedy (London: Macmillan 1975) 14.

appealed to Hardy's temperament. In an entry of 1887, he writes:

In a work of art it is the accident which charms, not the intention; that we only like and admire. Instance the amber tones that pervade the folds of drapery in ancient marbles, the deadened polish of the surfaces, and the cracks and the scratches.⁹⁰

While this appeal is difficult to analyse, it is perhaps in part because such events, in life or in narrative fiction, chimed with Hardy's sense of how things are in the world and in part, and perhaps relatedly, with the shape and pattern of the stories and ballads with which he had been familiar from his youth in the Dorset countryside. Such narratives essentially depended on the oddness of event; it was the occurrence of the odd event, of chance or coincidence, which lodged the story in the community's memory. Hardy's aesthetic seems very much to accord with such a view, that it was the peculiarity of an event which justified its telling:

The writer's problem is, how to strike the balance between the uncommon and the ordinary so as on the one hand to give interest, on the other to give reality.

In working out this problem, human nature must never be made abnormal, which is introducing incredibility.⁹¹

It is this aesthetic, determined by the view of the world which we have been discussing, which especially governs Hardy's short stories, given that they are closer in form and length to the oral narratives to which several of them are strikingly similar. Again the effect of chance events is to manifest powerfully and poignantly the vulnerability of the human individual, often resulting in his/her separation from the community and, almost inevitably, from the loved one. The point is

90. Life 191.

91. Life 150. See also such poems as "The Gap in the White"; "The Newcomer's Wife"; "The Wedding Morning"; "The Contretemps"; "Ditty E.L.G.", and "Hap", which turn on chance occurrences which have a devastating effect.

true even of those stories set not in rural Wessex but in the world of contemporary towns and urban middle-class society. We have already considered the lonely plight and ultimate suicide of the young poet, Robert Trewe, in "An Imaginative Woman" (LLI), but we should note that it is by chance that, not once but several times, that Trewe -- himself described as a man who "looks at the worst contingencies as well as the best in the human condition" (383) -- and Ella Marchmill never meet. Mrs. Marchmill waits in when the landlady says that Trewe is to call to collect some books, but he sends a note to say he has changed his mind (387); she remains at the lodging to meet him, after her husband returns to London, but he doesn't call. Back in London, an editor friend of her husband's -- perhaps an unexpected acquaintance given his job as a gunmaker -- is on holiday with Trewe; when she invites them to call on their way home, Trewe gets as far as the gates but decides to carry on home without entering. Possibly this reflects his already depressed mood following a savage review, since a day or two later Mrs Marchmill reads of his suicide. In her grief at her loss of what Trewe has come to represent to her, Mrs. Marchmill's allocation of blame is perhaps predictable:

O, if I had only once met him -- only once ... let him know how I loved him! Perhaps it would have saved his dear life! But no -- God is a jealous God; and that happiness was not for him and me! (397)

Her exclamation, that of a romantic, overwrought woman, is understandable, but the narrator makes no reference to God. She is left isolated and unfulfilled in her marriage. And the last intervention of chance is yet to come: by chance she becomes pregnant, and dies. Ultimately her husband, already re-married, finds her photograph of Trewe, and by awful chance there is a resemblance to the little boy whom she has died in delivering; "Then she did play me false with

that fellow at the lodgings!" (400), he exclaims -- but in fact, as the reader knows, chance has not allowed it.

One of Hardy's more poignant stories, "A Committee - Man of 'the Terror'" (1895) (CM) is almost an epitome of Hardyean loneliness in an alien environment governed by chance. A Frenchman, Monsieur B___, who was formerly a member of the Robespierre's Committee of Public Safety has fled to England in the brief peace between England and France in 1802-3; crossing the street at Budmouth, a fashionable south coast resort he chances to meet Mademoiselle V___, who recognises him as part of the Committee responsible for sending several of her family to the guillotine and forcing her into exile; she is "alone in a foreign land" (727), working as a governess. Although she wants nothing to do with the man she sees as her enemy, their paths cross repeatedly; they even find themselves, by chance, sitting in adjacent seats at the theatre (728).⁹² And then, almost symbolically they come together at the ferry, from opposite sides of the river. These "two lonely exiles" (731) -- at one point she sees "his solitary figure" standing at the top of a cliff while she walks with the children (729) -- are drawn together, especially when the renewed outbreak of war causes the authorities to scrutinise the activities of French people living alone in the very town where the King comes to spend his summer. In order that they may flee to the safety of Canada together -- and also out of his growing affection for her -- Monsieur B___ proposes that they marry; eventually Mademoiselle V___'s feelings overcome her misgivings and she agrees. But this is Hardy's world and, almost inevitably,

A day or two before the one fixed for the wedding there chanced to come to her a letter

92. This is an echo of the chance meeting of Strong and his beloved in Hardy's first, unpublished novel, The Poor Man and the Lady; See Gittings, Young Thomas Hardy 149.

from the only acquaintance of her own sex and country she possessed in England This friend's misfortunes had been somewhat similar to her own, which fact had been one cause of their intimacy The writer had felt her position much again of late, since the renewal of the war, she said, and the letter wound up with a fresh denunciation of the authors of their mutual bereavement and subsequent troubles. (733, emphasis added).

The letter has "the effect of a pail of water upon a somnambulist" (733): conscience - stricken at what she is to do, no longer able to face marriage the man responsible for her own relatives' deaths, Mademoiselle V___ flees on the London coach, occupying the last inside seat; alone once more, she slowly has second thoughts, leaves the coach and returns to Budmouth. There she finds that chance has one more twist: she finds a letter from her fiancé saying that he feels that, much as he loves her, he does not feel that he can marry her when she still seems to have qualms -- and has left on the London coach. He has been an outside passenger on the same coach but in the dark neither of them has recognised the other and have been unaware of the 'frail travelling coincidence'⁹³ in which they are both involved. And this is the last they will be together: they have been brought together by chance and now chance has put them asunder. Monsieur B___'s fate we never learn; Mademoiselle V___ lives on alone, in her job as a governess, until her death.

In "Interlopers at the Knap" (WT), chance again plays a major role in estranging and isolating those about to be married. The very night that Charles Darton comes to King's Hintock to marry Sally Hall, Sally's brother Philip arrives home from Australia, destitute and desperate, with his wife and young children; Sally and her class-conscious mother are at the outset concerned as to the damage that Philip's return might do to her planned marriage to Darton, "a

93. Philip Larkin, "The Whitsun Weddings," The Whitsun Weddings (London: Faber 1964) 21.

gentleman farmer -- quite a wealthy man. Far better in station than she could have expected" (132). But Darton's class attitudes are the least of the problems of the evening. Again by chance, Darton meets the daughter-in-law, Helena, waiting in the stable, before Sally and her mother do: Sally comes upon her fiancé clasping the hand of Helena. Helena is wearing the dress that Darton has sent to Sally -- by chance the carrier has pressed it to Philip to deliver, and it is warmer than Helena's own tattered dress -- and, when she sees this little tableau, Sally is struck by one intuition: "If that scene meant anything, it meant, at least, that they had met before" (137). The point of view at this moment is Sally's and that "at least" marks her alarmed avoidance of what she really senses: that Darton and Helena have previously had an emotional relationship. And she is right; by a fantastic trick of chance, this woman who has come from the other side of the world to arrive on the very night that Darton has arrived to marry Helena, is a woman who turned down Darton's offer of marriage years ago. Darton is quite disorientated when he sees her:

Darton's eyes ... fell continually on the gown worn by Helena as if this were an added riddle to his perplexity; though to Sally it was the one feature in the case which was no mystery. He seemed to feel that fate had impishly changed his vis-a-vis in the lover's jig he was about to foot; that while the gown had been expected to enclose a Sally, a Helena's face looked out from the bodice; that some long-lost hand met his own from the sleeves. (137-38)

"We are the sport of fate" (139), says Helena. But not fate of course, at least not in the sense of any pre-ordained sequence of events, but chance, mere contingency. And these individuals continue to be battered by chance events: not only does Sally overhear Darton generously offer to help provide for Helena's children, but she does so at the point when Philip has died and Helena is therefore again free.

It is almost five years to the day -- a point explicitly referred to -- when the now-widowed Darton arrives for second time to ask for Sally's hand in marriage: Rebekah, the Halls' "skimmer and churner" answers the door to him and thinks that the "coincidence must have a grisly meaning in it" (147). The rural intuition of the woman is sound: by now Sally has decided that she does not need to marry anyone, neither Darton nor -- another coincidence -- Japheth Johns, who had not only come with Darton on that night five years previously but who also turns up this very night to offer marriage to Sally. Sally cannot ultimately explain her reasons for deciding not to marry Darton or anyone else (150). She is financially secure and thus does not have the pressures which drove many young women to marry. One wonders if at some unconscious level Sally has come to feel that it is simply not to be that she is to marry: the chance events of that night which brought her brother and Helena home, the night in which she and Darton should have been brought together but which by perverse chance reunited Darton with his lost love, have somehow shocked her into another route through life. Certainly the chance events result in both she and Darton ending up alone, she having chosen "a single life" (152).

The chance return of a character from the past, on the very eve of a wedding, a ghost-like visitant with whom one of the two people about to be married has had a past relationship (in "Interlopers at the Knap" it is Helena of course) recurs in a number of other stories, and always the effect is, as here, to leave the couple to live on apart from one another or to leave one of them alone. Quite why the motif recurs we can only speculate: the last hours before a couple's lives are changed forever in marriage might have appealed to the superstitious Hardy; perhaps, too, for a man for whom the past haunted the present in so much of his imaginative work, especially when it

held a secret (one thinks of Henchard, and perhaps Hardy's fears, in London society, about his own humble origins) such hours were especially vulnerable to intrusion from the past.

In "Enter a Dragoon" (CM), just as Selina Paddock is to marry her wheelwright fiancé, Mr Miller, quite by chance the soldier she was to marry before events took him off to the Crimean War on the eve of their wedding and whom she thought killed, returns. Chance -- or bad luck or bad health -- then causes him to collapse and die during that night's celebrations. But she cannot bring herself to marry her wheelwright; she creates a new life as the dragoon's "widow", starts a small business in another town and lives on, alone. None of which would have happened, of course, if her soldier had not returned quite when he did -- or indeed if a man with similar name in the same regiment had not been killed, causing Selina to assume her fiance was dead. In "The Waiting Supper" (CM), Nicholas Long himself returns to his home area to meet again the woman he was to marry fifteen years before, but on the very night that he and Christine are to sit down to their eve-of-wedding supper there is delivered to her house the trunk of the man she did marry and who has long disappeared and been assumed dead. Again the marriage does not take place as they wait for the husband to return; days pass, then months and finally years, before his skeletal remains are found in the river. By accident he had been drowned that wedding night; and by chance Nicholas and Christine have awaited him by the side of that same river. Ultimately yet again, time has removed the impulse to marriage, and they live on old friends, but never married.

"Fellow-Townsmen" (WT), is another poignant tale of marital incompatibility, of disappointment and isolation precipitated ultimately by chance; it is a story in which as Toby Herzog has suggested, "Hardy constructs an obviously elaborate plot that in its content and

structure echoes earlier works and anticipates later novels".⁹⁴ In the story *George Barnet*, an independently-wealthy gentleman, has had a relationship with Lucy Savile, the daughter of a retired naval lieutenant, and thus well below Barnet in the ranks of social class in the small town. When what seems to have been a small quarrel arose between them, based on a misunderstanding, Lucy feels that she might have misconceived the fact that Barnet wished to marry her -- "Everything was so indefinite, and feeling your position to be so much wealthier than mine, I fancied I might have mistaken your meaning" (87) -- and she does not write to him, feeling herself rejected; he, not hearing from her, assumes that she wants nothing more to do with him and ultimately becomes engaged to another woman of higher social standing. Already chance has intervened to sow the seeds of later unhappy events which will ultimately damage Barnet's life; when he visits Lucy some time later, after his marriage, Barnet reflects, "I suppose it was destiny -- accident -- I don't know what, that separated us, dear Lucy. Anyhow, you were the woman I ought to have made my wife -- and I let you slip, like the foolish man that I was!" (87). In fact the extent of his culpability is arguable: perhaps if he had loved Lucy, he should have had the confidence to go and see her even if he had not heard from her. Perhaps if his love was really so deep, he should not have married another, and one notes that his wife's social status does make that marriage less socially remarkable than a marriage to Lucy would have been. But ultimately, one feels, here again we have the vulnerability of human individuals, especially ones of deep feeling, in a world that is governed by mere chance or "accident".

Perhaps predictably the woman whom Barnet does marry turns out to be unscrupulously

94. Herzog, "A Primer for the Novels" 233.

domineering and imperious; Barnet's domestic unhappiness is made the more painful by the glimpses he has of the happy family life of his friend, the young, struggling lawyer, Downe. When, encouraged by Barnet, Mrs. Downe pays a call to Mrs. Barnet they walk by the shore of the seaside town and are tempted to go for a short sail in the bay. The boat capsizes in a squall; one woman is drowned and one saved: while young Mrs. Downe is lost, Mrs. Barnet is cast ashore. But chance -- or fate or contingency -- has not finished with Barnet. Mrs. Barnet appears to be beyond hope; when she is taken to her home unconscious, the local doctor -- who is not only, by chance aware of Barnet's relationship with Lucy but owes Barnet money -- declares that there is nothing more to be done for Mrs. Barnet, offers his condolences and leaves. Barnet's grief is limited and his thoughts immediately turn back to Lucy, whose house he can see from the window in which his wife lies:

His eye glanced through the window. Far down the road to the harbour a roof detained his gaze: out of it rose a red chimney, and out of the red chimney a curl of smoke, as from a fire newly kindled. (97)

It is a suggestive passage: the fires of his feelings are re-kindled, the promise of new happiness at a domestic hearth with Lucy.

But then he thinks he detects "a faint flutter of palpitation, gentle as that of a butterfly's wing" (98) when he again checks his wife's pulse and realises that she could indeed be revived if urgent action is taken. He turns from the sight of that chimney which continues "smoking cheerily" (98) and calls for medical assistance for his wife, who gradually recovers. Thus, in his honesty, he contributes to what follows. He inadvertently contributes further by his recommending to the bereaved Downe that Lucy would make an excellent governess for the

motherless young family. Barnet is genuinely concerned for the family; he feels guilty indeed that "the catastrophe which had befallen Mrs. Downe was solely the result of her own and her husband's loving kindness towards himself" (96) -- we notice the recurrence of that term. But he is also motivated by the fact that -- by chance -- Lucy is at this point thinking of leaving the town to become a governess. It is perhaps almost inevitable that Lucy and the widowed Downe should be drawn to one another, but the circumstances in which Barnet hears that they are to marry again points to the painful vulnerability of individuals like Barnet in Hardy's universe once things begin to go wrong. Mrs. Barnet has gone off for a protracted stay in London; Barnet is described as being "singularly lonely" (107), and in his loneliness he thinks again of what might have been if the relationship with Lucy had developed differently. When news comes of his wife's death in London, and he is free to approach Lucy again -- "At last!" he exclaims (110) -- the servant who brings the letter containing the news then gives him a second note, handed in by Downe when Barnet had been out: a letter giving news of Downe's engagement to Lucy, and inviting Barnet to the wedding the next morning. The death of the wife may not have meant that Barnet's relationship with Lucy could be resumed, even if her relationship with Downe had not developed; it is possible that the engagement with Downe might have been revealed before the wife's death -- or even some days later. But the painful confluence of the two letters does indeed suggest, as Barnet reflects

That curious refinement of cruelty in their engagement which often proceeds from the bosom of the whimsical god at other times know as blind Circumstance. That his four minutes of hope, between the reading of the first and second letters, had carried him to extraordinary heights of rapture was proved by the immensity of his suffering now. (112)

"Blind Circumstance" -- or blind, indifferent chance -- has left Barnet totally isolated; unable to face the prospect of living on in the same town and seeing the domestic bliss of Downe and Lucy, Barnet sells up his property and leaves. It is "twenty-one years and six months" (115), before this particular native returns to his home town, alone and rootless. He discovers that Lucy is now a widow, living in the house that Barnet and his wife had built. She is "a lonely old woman"; he is still "a lonely old man" (120) as the result of the events years previously. Attempting to rescue something of their lives, he asks her to marry him; but his impulsiveness is too sudden for her and she declines; when, the following morning and having reconsidered, she does what she should have done so many years before and writes to Barnet, he has left -- one final chance action. There is no forwarding address and so all she can do is wait -- "she did wait -- years and years" (124). But Barnet never comes back. She is left alone, and so is he. Where the solitary Barnet goes we are not told. But we feel that here is a man who for no apparent reason has had his life ruined by mere chance, indeed by a whole series of disastrous events -- there is no real sense of his being culpable for what has happened to him, except perhaps for his understandable impulsiveness at the end in proposing and then leaving when rejected. One might argue that there is a sort of inevitability, even a logic, in what happens, for example, to Michael Henchard, given his character. But Barnet, though he blames himself early in the story for the misunderstanding with Lucy, does not ultimately have a tragic flaw. Indeed, given the chance to be free of his wife after the boating accident, he chooses to act with morality and integrity and to seek help in reviving her. And yet he ends up alone. There is no sense in what happens to Barnet -- and that is ultimately the point; that is the way a logic-less universe is.

The world of Hardy's short fiction is, perhaps even more intensely than that of the novels, an uncanny one: unknowable, non-rational, non-logical, capable of events and phenomena that are bizarre, even grotesque. For David Cecil, "the grotesque is an essential of Hardy's imaginative make-up";⁹⁵ Penelope Vigor echoes this view: "the love of the bizarre and grotesque is an interesting and integral part of his intention as a novelist, and one which he treated at length".⁹⁶ But Charles May is more sharply to the point, and to the present argument, when he comments that "the world as Hardy sees it is the totally estranged world of the absurd and the grotesque".⁹⁷ The grotesque is one way of manifesting the alienating, non-logical world Hardy sees around him and portrays in the stories; the grotesque is a way of dramatising absurdity. Unsurprisingly we sometimes see flashes of that sense of the grotesqueness of the world -- and Hardy's alienation from it -- in his non-fictional writing: in 1879, for instance, he records what he sees when he looks down from an upper window at a crowd in the streets of Ludgate Hill:

[A]n organic whole, a molluscous black creature having nothing in common with humanity, that takes the shape of the streets along which it has lain itself, and throws out horrid excrescences and limbs into neighbouring alleys; a creature whose voice exudes from its scaly coat, and who has an eye in every pore of his body.⁹⁸

95. Cecil 53.

96. Penelope Vigor, The Novels of Thomas Hardy : Illusion And Reality (London: The Athlone P, 1974) 9. Relatedly, J.I.M. Stewart, Eight Modern Writers (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), contends that "Hardy's was a gothic imagination" (20).

97. Charles E. May, "Far from the Madding Crowd And The Woodlanders: Hardy's Grotesque Pastorals," English Literature in Transition 17 (1974): 155.

98. Life 131.

Almost inevitably such an imagination is going to find realism -- the accurate and logical delineation of the surface of life -- to be constraining and inadequate:

Art is a changing of the actual proportions and order of things, so as to bring out more forcibly than might otherwise be done that feature in them which appeals most strongly to the idiosyncrasy of the artist Art is a disproportioning -- (i.e. distorting, throwing out of proportion) -- of realities, to show more clearly the features that matter in those realities, which if merely copied or reported inventorially, might possibly be observed, but would more probably overlooked. Hence "realism" is not art.⁹⁹

Indeed, bare slices of ordinary life, are neither sufficient nor plausibly significant. This is further endorsed in another note of 23 February, 1893 which justifies the story on the ground of the uncommonness, and the unusual:

A story must be exceptional enough to justify its telling. We tale-tellers are all Ancient Mariners, and none of us is warranted in stopping Wedding Guests (in other words, the hurrying public) unless he has something more unusual to relate than the ordinary experience of every average man and woman.¹⁰⁰

Hardy consistently defends the author's right to be illogical and idiosyncratic, writing in 1888 in "The Profitable Reading of Fiction":

99. Life 228-29. Indeed, Mary Ellen Chase, Thomas Hardy from Serial to the Novel (Minneapolis: The U of Minnesota P, 1927), is clearly inaccurate when she writes of Hardy as "a great English realist" (6). J.B. Bullen, The Expressive Eye: Fiction and Perception in the Work of Thomas Hardy (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), believes that "True realism, for Hardy, resembles a mode of visual perception ... and penetrating to [the] inner essence" (14). Perhaps, more accurate is Albert J. Guerard, Thomas Hardy who describes Hardy as "something very different from a realist" (82), and suggests that to him "Anti-realist is an embarrassingly comprehensive term" (83), and ultimately that "he was an anti-realist on aesthetic grounds" (84), though we might want to argue that his aesthetic anti-realism has its roots in his metaphysical vision.

100. Life 252. Zabel, Craft And Fiction, rightly observes that "What is worth telling, is what recedes from the apparent, the external, the visible, It is the part of experience that withdraws into the private, the subjective, the subconscious, and hence into the mysterious energy of living matter" (80).

Behind the broad humour of one popular pen he discovers startling touches of weirdness; and amid the colossal fancies of another he sees strokes of the most exquisite tenderness; and the unobtrusive quality may grow to have more charm for him than the palpable one.¹⁰¹

We notice here the concern with feeling, not mere melodramatic sensation in the context of wild event and "colossal fancies", but the "exquisite tenderness" for, presumably, the individuals caught up in such a world. He continues:

[T]he reader [should] not be too critical. In other words, his author should be swallowed whole, like any other alternative pill. He should be believed in slavishly, implicitly. However profusely he may pour out his coincidences, his marvellous juxtapositions, his catastrophes, his conversions of bad people into good people at a stroke, and vice versa, let him never be doubted for a moment The aim should be the exercise of a generous imaginativeness, which shall find in a tale not only all that was put there by the author ... but which shall find there what was never inserted by him, never foreseen, never contemplated.¹⁰²

He invites a willing suspension of disbelief on the part of the reader towards narrative coincidences or the irrational operation of chance -- that this is a passage of apologia for his own practice hardly needs mentioning -- in order that the writer might reveal more profound imaginative and emotional truths about the human situation. Indeed, for all the oddness of the narrative, "the uncommonness must be in the events, not in the characters";¹⁰³ the characters must be recognisable human beings, for all the oddness and grotesqueness of the circumstances which beset them, loving and suffering as all humans do.

An unpredictable, non-logical, even grotesque world in which recognisable human

101. Orel, Personal Writings 117.

102. Orel, Personal Writings 111-12.

103. Life 113.

individuals are at the mercy of weird events: this is recognisably the world of the ballad or the folk tale, a world of course which Hardy had known from the impressionable years of early childhood.

The cottage at Bockhampton was a home richly familiar with the oral traditions of the rural community, father, mother and grandmother having a rich store of tales and sung ballads; as

Millgate emphasises:

Hardy was -- to an extraordinary degree -- a child of the oral tradition, and perhaps, in England, that tradition's last and greatest product.¹⁰⁴

The world of the English ballad is a world of strange chance -- the man who shoots his lover when he mistakes her for a swan ("Polly Vaughan") -- and the grotesque or supernatural -- the stranger on the road late at night who turns out to be the devil ("The False Knight upon the road"), the grotesque witch in "Allison Gross";¹⁰⁵ there are bizarre events and missed chances, usually happening to ordinary people, set in a rural world which is stark, featureless and isolated. Clearly Hardy's poetry, especially the narrative poems, at times reflects the ballads very directly.¹⁰⁶ But the short stories are frequently equally close to the ballad world in their precision of lyrical

104. Millgate, A Biography 37.

105. See The English and Scottish Popular Ballads, ed. Francis James Child, 5 Vols (1882-94; New York: Dover, 1965) Vol. 1, 20-22; 313-15.

106. See for example, "The Ruined Maid"; "The Turnip Hoer"; "The Statue of Liberty"; "Wife and Another"; "The Dark-eyed Gentleman"; "A Practical Woman"; "Her Death and After" and "The Burghers". On occasions the echoes are very direct. The Chorus of "Bereft", for instance, "leave the door unbarred,/The clock unwound,/Make my lone bed hard -/Would 'twere underground" (Gibson 206-7), echoes ballads such as "Little Sir Hugh" ("Mother, mother, make my bed,/Make for me a winding sheet/Wrap me up in a cloth of gold/See if I can sleep") and "Lord Randal" ("For I am sick at the heart, and I fain wad lie down". See The English and Scottish Popular Ballads, Vol. 1, 160).

narration, use of memory, the operation of chance, reference to the rhythms and customs of the rural folk. But the key issue is what exactly Hardy appears to be doing with the material of the ballad world. After all he is not a rural story-teller or a singer; he is a late-nineteenth century writer, operating in a modern capitalist publishing system and writing to an increasingly sophisticated, mainly urban, readership. But in the ballad Hardy had, ready-made as it were, a version of, an emblem for, the world which he felt himself to be inhabiting, a world to be found not just in the Wessex countryside but which ultimately surrounded even those people who lived -- like Ella Marchmill in "An Imaginative Woman" -- in the more sophisticated streets of middle-class London: an ultimately chance-governed universe in which men and women were utterly alone.

Though for the most part collected and written down only in the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many of the English ballads, have their roots in the late middle ages, in a society which still believed in a supernatural world, a world of faerie, witches and spirits who were accountable for the strange events of the human world; Hardy, in his familiarity with the ballads, was inevitably familiar with this supernatural world. Norman Page states that Hardy "needs no ghosts from the grave to set his imagination working: the most humdrum object will serve his purpose".¹⁰⁷ While Page is certainly right, at the same time, given the brooding, superstitious temperament that one senses in Hardy -- one thinks of his almost ritualistic annotation of his Bible, for instance --, his cherishing of objects and places -- it is perhaps unsurprising that Hardy's imagination was, in fact, responsive to the supernatural. In a

107. Norman Page, "Hardy and 'the world of little things'," Thomas Hardy Journal 5 (1987): 122.

conversation recorded with William Archer in February 1901, Hardy reportedly said:

I seriously assure you that I would give ten years of my life -- well, perhaps that offer is rather beyond my means -- but when I was a young man, I would cheerfully have given ten years of my life to see a ghost -- an authentic, indubitable spectre If ever a ghost wanted to manifest himself, I am the very man he should apply to.¹⁰⁸

This is not to say, clearly, that Hardy did believe in ghosts -- any more than he believed in the more orthodox spiritual realities of Christianity. But again the supernatural element within the folk story or the ghost story clearly resonated in the imagination of a man whose perception of the universe around him was of a place which was capable of the weird and the grotesque, a place for which there could be no neat, logical complete explanation:

A ghost-story that should convince me would make me a happier man. And if you come to that, I don't know that the grotesqueness, the incompleteness of the manifestations is at all conclusive against their genuineness. Is not this incompleteness a characteristic of all phenomena, of the universe at large?¹⁰⁹

Even in those fictions set firmly in the late nineteenth century, Hardy's world is one where the supernatural exists as a real possibility. It may be present in the background as not much more than local colour, though given the chance-dominated events of that fictional world, the

108. Archer, Real Conversations 37. Relatedly, in a letter of 2 February, 1915, to Caleb Saleeby, he writes: "You must not think me a hard-headed rationalist for all this. Half my time (particularly when I write verse) I believe ... in spectres, mysterious voices, intuitions, omens, dreams haunted places". See Collected Letters, Vol. 5 79. See also his letter of 8 July 1891 to the anonymous reviewer's condemnation of "Barbara of the House of Grebe" (GND), as "a grisly narrative", he writes: "A good horror has its place in art. Shall we, for instance, condemn 'Alonzo the brave'? For my part I would not give up a single worm of his skull". See "The Merry Wives of Wessex," Pall Mall Gazette 10 July (1891): 2.

109. Archer 45. Relatedly in an early note of 1852, Hardy underlines his deep fascination with ghosts; he writes he did not think "much of Hamlet because the ghost did not play his part up to the end as he ought to have done". See Life 24.

references to spirits and ghosts seem not to be out of place: the legend of the ghostly D'Urberville coach, for example, seems not to be so far-fetched in the world of inexplicable chance events in which Tess struggles, even though trains are reaching out into the countryside and manual labour is being replaced by machinery. But more often, particularly in the stories, the supernatural is more than just background. There are figures who "by reason of certain gifts or powers [are] able to exert an influence",¹¹⁰ on the inhabitants of Wessex. These may not be ghosts as such, but individuals with inexplicable knowledge:

Of all forms of superstitious belief none was more firmly impressed upon the minds of the country people than the belief of witchcraft, that is, in the existence of a malefic influence possessed by certain individuals (generally old women, though male witches, or wizards, were not uncommon) over the person and property of those with whom they might be brought in contact.¹¹¹

Old women with knowledge of herbal remedies and cures could by communal reputation very easily become figures who had the power to make curses, figures capable in other words of witch-craft: Kingsley Palmer observes that: "In folk tradition it was usually the witch who was able to execute the cures, and many of the traditions concerning medicinal cures centre on stories

110. See Hermann Lea, Some Dorset Superstitions (Mount Durand, Guernsey: The Toucan P, 1969) 349. See also, Joseph Wiesenforth, Gothic Manners and The Classic English Novel (London: The U of Wisconsin P, 1988).

111. John Symonds Udal, Dorsetshire Folk-Lore (1922; Mount Durand, Guernsey: Toucan P, 1970) 201. See also, Rodney Legg, A Guide to Dorset Ghosts (Redhill, Bournemouth: Dorset Publishing Company, 1969). The Book is an interesting account of "those who live in Dorset" that are not only interested in "seeing ghosts" but also know adequately how "to conjure them up in the first place" (5). A clear portrait of the milieu in which Hardy had been born, and brought up. See also, Oliver Knott, Witches of Wessex (Sturminster Newton: n.p.,n.d.) 1.

about witchcraft".¹¹² Hardy is, of course, responsive to such ideas -- more so than other, urban writers -- not just temperamentally but, relatedly perhaps, because of where he was born and brought up; there is perhaps an element of nostalgia in his recalling -- and recreation -- of the beliefs of the countryside. That he was interested, whatever the reason for that interest, is clear; in 1870, for instance, he notes:

St. Juliot is a romantic spot indeed of North Cornwall. It was sixteen miles away from a station then, [and a place] where the belief in witchcraft was carried out in actual practice among the primitive inhabitants. Traditions and strange gossips [were] the common talk ... indulged in by these isolated natives [of a parish] where newspapers rarely penetrated
.....¹¹³

Hardy's fictional characters not infrequently have recourse to this realm of mysterious knowledge: Fancy Day, for instance, seeks Elizabeth's advice about matters of the heart when her ambitious father demands that she marry a "gentleman" (156) in Under the Greenwood Tree. In The Mayor of Casterbridge, Henchard consults a conjuror, with disastrous consequences (187). In A Pair of Blue Eyes, Elfride fears that Mrs. Jethaway has the "evil eye" and that her "over-looking" (322), will curse Elfride.

Given the date at which he is writing, and given that he does not finally believe in the actuality of witches and demons, Hardy is alert to the possibility that many supernatural phenomena are actually the product not of mysterious realities in the external world but of the

112. See Kingsley Palmer, Oral Folk-Tales of Wessex (Newton Appot, Great Britain: David & Charles, 1973) 82. See also, John Camp, Magic, Myth and Medicine (London: Priory P, 1973), which provides a persuasive account on Folk-medicine.

113. See Life 68. See also Hardy's Preface of 1896 to Under the Greenwood Tree in which he establishes magic practices as a "fairly true picture, at first hand, of ways, and customs which were common ... in villages of fifty or sixty years ago". See Orel, Personal Writings 4. See also Ronald Holmes, Witchcraft in British History (London: Frederick Muller, 1974), which depicts minutely the development of witchcraft and its various practices in Britain.

equally mysterious drives and impulses within the human individual, which were, of course, beginning to be investigated at the end of the century; as above all a writer interested in the movement of human feelings, especially in adversity, Hardy, it would seem, began to realise (as American contemporaries like Hawthorne and Poe had) that the machinery of the supernatural could be used to articulate the irrational world within. Thus as J. O. Bailey observes, Hardy's ghosts

appear in various guises, as a walking vision, or as a dream, or as a real sight that suggests guilt to the character's mind, or most subtly, as a mental image that the reader may surmise from materials Hardy provided.¹¹⁴

Guilt is a recurring theme in Hardy's work and not infrequently it is associated with the supernatural; perhaps the most vivid example of this, "The Withered Arm", will be considered later in this chapter.¹¹⁵ What we have in other words, in some stories, is a mysterious, and perhaps at times uneasy, coalition of the supernatural and the psychological: the best example of this is again, perhaps, "An Imaginative Woman", where Ella Marchmill's frustrated longing for Trewe, and her guilt at her feelings, is powerful enough for his image mysteriously to be projected onto the child that she has by her husband, the boy becoming almost literally as well as spiritually the off-spring of his mother's pent-up passion for Trewe.

It has been suggested above that Hardy was drawn to write about the weird, sometimes gothic, world of the ballad by reason of his temperament and his upbringing. (We are perhaps

114. J.O. Bailey, "Hardy's Visions of the Self," Studies in Philosophy 56 (1959): 75.

115. Compare Hardy's poems: "A Trampwoman's Tragedy"; "A Sound in the Night"; "The Sacrilege"; "At Shag's Heath", and "The Catching Ballet of the Wedding Clothes".

not surprised to find that he steeped himself in James Macpherson's Ossian as a boy,¹¹⁶ as well as the gothic work of William Harrison Ainsworth, particularly his "Windsor Castle".¹¹⁷) We should not ignore one further factor in addition to those: the market-place. The writing of fiction was, after all, for Hardy the source of his income; he wrote short stories in order to publish them, for a fee, in the numerous magazines of the period. As we have noted in the first chapter, the predominantly urban readership of these magazines did not want to be reading unvaryingly about the issues and problems confronting them in their contemporary world - though such issues, such as the role of women, did of course find expression in short fiction the late nineteenth century. The popularity not only of stories set in the rural areas of the British Isles, areas where the mysterious, the uncanny, the supernatural still supposedly existed, but also of stories of ghosts and hauntings reflect that urban, middle-class reader's taste for escape; the popularity of the short stories of Le Fanu, Bram Stoker, Robert Louis Stevenson, Francis Crawford and, after the turn of the century, M.R. James and Algernon Blackwood is testimony to the popularity of this mood of fiction in the period in which Hardy was publishing. Harold Orel notes that many of Hardy's stories were thus "told to an expectant audience already familiar with similar unusual, even horrifying, narratives told by generations of storytellers".¹¹⁸ Hardy could scarcely be unaware of this market and in fact he shows his understanding of this area of magazine readership taste when

116. Evelyn Hardy, A Critical Biography, points out that "there are ... two small volumes of this poet's work, with tentative markings by the young Hardy" (39).

117. Life 25. For a further thorough examination of Hardy's indebtedness to the Gothic novelist Ainsworth see Carl J. Weber, "Ainsworth And Thomas Hardy," Review of English Studies 17 (1941): 193-200.

118. See Orel, The Victorian Short Story 96.

he writes to Arthur Symons on 20 October 1905:

You have shown in one or two places that you have unusual power in the weird. The music dancing like a snake over the piano, the scar on the lady's face ... show very plainly that if you cared to write popular fiction -- or, not to use the horrid word popular, fiction observing to the man in his slippers over the fire tale at night.¹¹⁹

But though market considerations should not be ignored, the reasons for Hardy's recreations in so many of his stories of the non-logical world of the ballad, in which "uncommon" things happen, is, as has already been suggested, more profound. One way in which humans can make sense of their situation in a seemingly senseless world is to create a spiritual or supernatural reality, although the very existence of such a reality is in turn threatening or alienating.

Ultimately, the portrayal of the grotesque and the supernatural in Hardy is another device by means of which to convey human beings' insignificance and vulnerability and loneliness; in this sense Richard Carpenter is right when he suggests that "the grotesque increases [Hardy's] wrenching and twisting of the frame of the real to provide a more penetrating vision, a more significant experience".¹²⁰

"The Withered Arm" (WT), is one of Hardy's most powerful pieces in the supernatural genre -- and it is at the same time interesting to find Hardy, in writing to the publisher, William Blackwood on 1 December 1889 about this story, again showing his awareness of the market:

119. See Collected Letters, Vol. 3 184.

120. Richard C. Carpenter, "Hardy's Gurgoyles," Modern Fiction Studies 6 (1960): 231. See also, Jeffrey S. Cramer, "The Grotesque in Thomas Hardy's "The Woodlanders"", Thomas Hardy Yearbook 8 (1978): 29.

It is of rather a weird -- but as the taste of readers seems to run in that direction just now perhaps its character is no disqualification I may add that the cardinal incidents are true, both the women who figure in the story having been known to me.¹²¹

"The Withered Arm" is a story set not in the timeless countryside of uncertain reality but in a clear, contemporary setting; indeed as J.F. Scott suggests it is "one of Hardy's finest short stories" precisely because the "supernatural aspects are held firmly in place by the social realism of the presentation".¹²² The supernatural is, perhaps, all the more arresting when it intrudes, as here, into what seems otherwise to be a normal, rational setting -- and, in the context of our discussion of the significance of the supernatural in Hardy's fiction, we might suggest that the juxtaposition again underlines the arbitrariness of that apparently "normal", rational world, that the weird and the uncanny are never far away.

The story opens with Rhoda Brooke living in her remote home with her illegitimate son from her relationship with Farmer Lodge, who has subsequently rejected her and is now about to marry Gertrude, a woman whom the milkmaids describe as "a rosy-cheeked, tisty-tosty little body enough" (52). Rhoda is gripped by pangs of corrosive jealousy.

Unable or perhaps unconsciously unwilling to go and see Gertrude "though she might easily have seen [her] for herself" (57), Rhoda sends her son to see the bride, only to be more and more debilitated. As her son tells her: "she is very pretty - very. In fact, she's lovely" (56). For one thing Rhoda's accumulation of all the picturesque details of the woman

121. See Collected Letters, Vol. 1 168.

122. J.F. Scott, "Thomas Hardy's Use of the Gothic: A Examination of Five Representative Works," Nineteenth-Century Fiction 17, 4 (1963): 371. Roger Ebbatson, "'The Withered Arm' And History," Critical Survey 5,2 (1993), makes essentially the same point when he writes of "Hardy's ability to domesticate the occult by giving it a realistic backdrop" (131).

whose "youthful freshness ... had evidently made an impression even on the somewhat hard nature of the boy" (56), and the one who first and foremost usurped and displaced her in Farmer Lodge's affection, makes her "raise a mental image of ... [her] that was realistic as a photograph" (57). At this point the "uncanny" aspects of Hardy's story begin to intervene¹²³:

For the first time Gertrude Lodge visited the supplanted woman in her dreams. Rhoda Brook dreamed -- since her assertion that she really saw, before falling asleep, was not to be believed -- that the young wife, in the pale silk dress and white bonnet, but with features shockingly distorted and wrinkled as by age, was sitting upon her chest as she lay. The pressure of Mrs. Lodge's person grew heavier, the blue eyes peered cruelly into her face; and then the figure thrust forward its left hand mockingly, so as to make the wedding-ring it wore glitter in Rhoda's eyes

Grasping for breath, Rhoda, in a last desperate effort, swung out her right hand, seized the confronting spectre by its obtrusive left arm, and whirled it backward to the floor, starting up herself as she did so with a low cry. (57-8)

The precise nature of the apparition is kept disturbingly ambiguous. The appearance of Gertrude is clearly more than just a dream. But to what extent is it a projection of Rhoda's powerful rage and jealousy? The sense of suffocation and physical pressure would seem to suggest some psychomatic state, generated by her anguish. But at this point, of course, Rhoda has not seen Gertrude, she does not know what she looks like, so how can she create such a realistic picture of her rival? The suggestion is present that she has in fact been visited by, has perhaps by some

123. Romey T. Keys, "Hardy's Uncanny Narrative: A Reading of 'The Withered Arm'," Texas Studies in Literature 27,1 (1985): 112.

mysterious process summoned up, a succubus.¹²⁴

The fact that there is some kind of physical visitation is endorsed by her son's enquiry the following morning: "What was the noise in your chimney, mother, last night You fell off the bed, surely?" (58), although, of course, the ambiguity remains: maybe what he heard was his mother's thrashing about in her vivid dreams.¹²⁵ When Gertrude, Lodge's new wife, visits Rhoda and reveals her "unearthly" ailment, a painful arm which shows "faint marks of an unhealthy colour, as if produced by a rough grasp" (60), it could, again, just be a matter of chance -- and Rhoda's guilty viewpoint -- though the degenerative ailment which afflicts Gertrude, gradually damages her looks and thus undermines her marriage, remains mysterious, without rational explanation.

It is at this point that we hear for the first time that Rhoda does indeed have a reputation in the community for being a witch -- "she knew that she had been slyly called a witch since her fall; but never having understood why that particular stigma had been attached to her, it had

124. Nicholas Kiessling, The Incubus in English Literature: Provenance and Progeny (n.p. Washington State UP, 1977), observes that "the monstrous demon of the night, the night 'mare' or incubus, stalked through the dreams of primitive Western man straight into the myths and writings of poets and theologians, proving that the imagination of the dreamer, like that of 'the lunatic', the lover and the poet ... apprehend[s] more than a cool person ever comprehends. The omnipresence of this sinister figure ... was the father of all mythology of the incubus at any rate, derived from dreams" (1). Relatedly, Fivor, Folkways relates Rhoda's incubus to the folkloric thaumaturgy: "Nightmare, that is the oppression felt at such times, was believed to be a sort of incubus; our Teutonic ancestors called the night-riding spirit an 'alb', which also means a witch; and still more picturesquely, the 'on-leaper'. Rhoda Brook was hag-ridden, a victim of a dreadful nightmare" (97).

125. See also, "The Superstitious Man's Story" (FCC); another uncanny tale which, in the form of the ballad and oral tradition, tells of the appearance of the ghost of Mr William Privett, after his death both in the Church (his entrance of the Church without getting out is a semiotic indicator of his forthcoming death) and near the spring where his son drowned simultaneously and at the identical time of his death (532-35).

passed disregarded. Could this be the explanation, and had such things as this ever happened before?" (60) -- though once more, of course, this presumably just amounts, in rational fact, to the community's speculation about, and suspicion of, a woman who lives alone and who has a mysterious past (the mystery of the son's father). Clearly Gertrude has heard similar stories about Rhoda, for she asks Rhoda to accompany her to Conjuror Trendle (the same man she once ridiculed: "Oh, how could my people be so superstitious as to recommend a man of that sort I shall think no more of him" (62-3); in the recesses of Egdon Heath; a white wizard who "[has] powers other folks have not" (62).¹²⁶

Having deduced that Gertrude's malady is "the work of an enemy", and that "Medicine can't cure it" (65), Conjuror Trendle offers to divulge Gertrude's oppressor through a quack

126. Brady, The Short Stories of Thomas Hardy, points out aptly that: "Hardy may have been attempting to give a special authority to the Conjuror's powers by calling him 'Trendle', a form of the Anglo-Saxon word meaning circle - a mystical symbol in magic and religion. 'Trendle' is also the name of a hill near Cerne Abbas displaying a primitive human figure of huge dimensions connected even during Hardy's lifetime with fertility rituals" (23). Compare, Conjuror Fall in The Mayor of Casterbridge, whom Henchard consults in reading bad weather for the harvest: "I've long heard that you can -- do things of a sort" (187).

melange of a white fluid of an egg, to seep into a water glass.¹²⁷

Having divined the identity of the cause of her affliction or "the malignant influence" (63), though she does not reveal it directly, Gertrude is overwhelmed with spiritual anguish and physical pain through and through. And when rumours spread about Gertrude's "being 'over-looked' by Rhoda Brook" (66), Rhoda and her son disappear from the vicinity for six years.

That Gertrude is excruciated by the slow mutilation of her arm, the maiming of her beauty, the loss of sexual allure, and hence Mr. Lodge's affections, is all the more apparent in her desperate searches of mystically primitive cures "of counter-spells" (68), as well as "every quack remedy she came across" (66), yet to no avail.

In her continued anguish, in "a last desperate effort" to regain "at least some of her personal beauty" (66) and out of her "craving for renewed love" (69) from her husband, Gertrude decides on a second visit to Conjuror Trendle. His suggestion to her, of a cure, introduces another grisly superstitious note into her tale: she must go to the gallows, and touch the

127. Compare the wizardly superstitious practices, notoriously widespread in Hardy's Wessex. For example, Susan Nunsuch's fabrication of a wax image of Eustacia, as well as the farmer's pricking of the latter with a needle in the church in The Return of the Native. Indeed, Hardy's notes reflect the permeation of the belief in the person with supernatural gifts in Wessex which for one thing underlines the superstitious tinge of the story. For example, in a note of 5 February, 1887, he writes: "Heard a story of who was 'overlooked' [malignantly affected] by himself. He used to go and examine his stock every morning before breakfast with anxious scrutiny. The animals pined away. He went to a Conjuror or white witch who told him he had no enemy; that the evil was of his own causing ... he should eat a 'dew-bit'" See Life 204-5. Interestingly, Evelyn Hardy and Robert Gittings, ed., Some Recollections by Emma Hardy, relate a further prophetic episode by Emma about a sorceress who "brought out three tumblers of cold water, full up-one for my sister, one for me, and one for the parlour-maid Into one of these tumblers set before us we each broke an egg, letting the white only drop into the water, then watching what form it would take which should signify the occupation of our future spouses Ann said firmly, 'You will marry a writer'. And so I did! Now how did those eggs reveal it all? A most mysterious matter that" (40-1).

neck of a newly hanged man, a macabre remedy which, according to Trendle, though^{it} "is hard to carry out, and especially for a woman has never failed in kindred afflictions" (68). As Trendle tells her: "It will turn the blood and change the constitution" (68).¹²⁸ The depth of Gertrude's self-absorption, and the measure of her torment, is shown by the fact she is not only willing to undertake this dreadful "cure" but that impatiently she "well nigh longed for the death of a fellow-creature. Instead of her formal prayers each night, her unconscious prayer was, 'O Lord, hang some guilty or innocent person soon!'" (69-70). Having made arrangements with the "lonely" (73) hangman, and seizing the opportunity of her husband's absence, Gertrude decides to accomplish her diabolic "cure" (74). It is highly ironic indeed that "on Friday" (71),¹²⁹ she decides to go on with her "ghastly errand" (70), only to touch the young convict's neck,¹³⁰ who happens "to be present by chance when the rick was fired" (75),¹³¹ on

128. Firor, Folkways, contends that "The widespread use of the dead had for various cures well up to 1900 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 executions" (111). See also Hardy's Preface to Wessex Tales, which establishes the oral foundations of the story: "In those days, too, there was still living an old woman who, for the cure of some eating disease, had been taken in her youth to have her 'blood turned' by a convict's corpse, in the manner described in 'The Withered Arm'" See Orel, Personal Writings 22.

129. Firor, Folkways, rightly observes that "Friday is the most famous of 'Egyptian days', as unlucky days have been termed all the way down from late classical through medieval medicine, and as days of witchcraft are still called in Yorkshire Friday's ill repute has been fancifully accounted for as resulting the fact that it was the day of the crucifixion or the day when Eve ate the fatal apple" (9).

130. Ebbatson, "The Withered Arm" points out that: "The Dorchester hangman, William Calcroft [W]as once rebuked by the authorities for allowing a man to come to the scaffold to have a wart touched by the dead man's hand" (132).

131. W. Rothenstein, Man And Memories (New York: Tudor, n.d.) quotes Hardy's saying that "My father knew a man who was hanged for saying to a farmer 'it will be a light night'," (164).

Saturday which proves to be "the witches' Sabbath".¹³²

At this climatic point, as she touches her arm to the executed man's throat -- graphically described by Hardy as bearing on it "a live the colour of an unripe blackberry" (76) -- chance breaks devastatingly into the story: the young man is the son of Rhoda and Lodge. As Rhoda's scream mixes with that of Gertrude, Rhoda's earlier vision -- or visitation -- is repeated: Gertrude in her shock and in her pain resembles the version of her that Rhoda had seen. And once again, almost inevitably, the intervention of chance results in alienation and isolation for the individuals involved in the three-way relationship: enervated both by the pain of her arm and by the shock of what has happened, Gertrude collapses and she dies soon afterwards, while Lodge sells his property at Holmstoke and moves away to live at Port-Bredy "in solitary lodgings till his death" (77), leaving a small annuity for Rhoda, who has subsequently disappeared. When she does return she will have nothing to do with Lodge's money and lives on in poverty and loneliness for the rest of her life.

Here, sometimes, those who knew her experiences would stand and observe her, and wonder what sombre thoughts were beating inside that impassive, wrinkled brow, to the rhythm of alternating milk-streams. (78)

Again what has happened makes no sense, reveals no moral pattern. Gayla R. Steel suggests that "the witch figure materializes out of the mind of [the] characters and becomes the visual image of their rebellion, their errors and their failed life".¹³³ But it is hard to see what rebellion takes place here, and the only "errors" are Lodge's jilting of Rhoda and their child and

132. Gayla R. Steel, Sexual Tyranny in Wessex: Hardy's Witches and Demons of Folklore (New York: Peter Lang, 1993) 88.

133. Steel 88.

her (understandable) jealousy of Gertrude. Gertrude is innocent of any error and yet suffers most of all; Rhoda is culpable only of natural and yet not only suffers the visitation of "Gertrude" in her sleep and the profound sense of guilt at what happens to Gertrude, but also loses her son and ends in lonely poverty. The supernatural element it would seem add vividness, and give a thrill to the Victorian reader, but they do not ultimately add very much more to a sense of the world that is devoid of logic or any sense of providential concern for individual human beings.

"The Withered Arm", as we have seen, hovers at an ambiguous border between the explicable and the supernatural at several points, though it certainly lurches into the grotesque. This ambiguous, and imaginatively-creative, border is one Hardy walks in a number of other stories. In fact, two stories, "The Fiddler of the Reels" (LLI), and "The Romantic Adventures of a Milkmaid" (CM), are teasing fantasies in the sense that Tzvetan Todorov defines the word "fantastic":

First, the text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described. Second, this hesitation may also be experienced by a character, thus the reader's role is so to speak entrusted to a character, and at the same time the hesitation is represented, it becomes one of the themes of the work.¹³⁴

This would seem to describe with some precision the experience of reading "The Romantic Adventures of a Milkmaid": from the mysterious opening in the dense fog which cloaks the rural valley, we enter a world which might be visited by the supernatural, but which is at the same time, it would seem, subject to the randomness and chance that characterizes Hardy's world in other

134. Tzvetan Todorov, The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP, 1975) 99.

stories. It is chance that brings the milkmaid Margery to cross the grounds of the house rented by the mysterious Baron Von Xanten just as he is about to shoot himself, out of anxiety and depression; it is chance that brings him -- only minutes later -- a letter bearing news that relieves him. It is a whim that causes him to offer her "some kindness, some votive offering" (794) in gratitude for her saving him.

Indeed, when she asks that she be able to attend a local yeomanry Ball and the Baron, after some hesitation, tells her "you shall go to the Yeomanry Ball" (798), we feel we are on recognizable territory; the sense of folk-tale or nursery, with the Baron playing the role of supernatural agency -- or Fairy Godfather -- is reinforced when Margery is not only transformed by the clothes he brings her (the dress is gossamer light, "a sort of heavenly cobweb", 408) and whisked off in his coach through the night to the ball, but also when he insists that she leave the ball on schedule: "Margery, our time is up" (809), with her being returned to her old clothes before she returns home in the dawn.

But the story is not just a reworking of Cinderella; at times it touches on more profound, almost mythic dimensions. Margery changes into her beautiful clothes, is transformed from milkmaid into lady, in the hollow of a large tree deep in the woods. When she cannot get out through the hole in the side of the tree without damaging the dress, the Baron makes the hole bigger. Not only do we sense that something mysterious is happening to transform Margery within the depths of the natural world, but the imagery of her release by the Baron is that of a rebirth, in this case birth into new experience and a (temporary) new identity.

More importantly, the reader is never sure as to the exact nature of the Baron. He is clearly foreign and thus, in this provincial English community, exotic and alien; he is pale,

moustached and sophisticated (as opposed to Margery's fresh, rural naturalness) and exerts over her a power which she feels is "more than human, something magical and compulsory" (800). Of course the point-of-view here is that of Margery, but again although she might be ambitious she is not a malleable young woman; she has a mind of her own, but the "mysterious influence" of the Baron is insisted upon. That that influence may not be benign is also suggested; when she meets up with her fiancé, Jim, the day after the ball and talks of her ambitions to live in a house with luxurious ornaments and furnishings, Jim comments "Anybody would think the devil had showed you all the kingdoms of the world since I saw you last!" (816).

Once again this is a story in which chance intervenes on a wedding day, when the Baron, without knowing and by chance, calls Margery to him on the day that she is to marry Jim; she of course, tellingly, has no hesitation in going to the Baron. Indeed the Baron's power "over this innocent girl was so masterful that the sexual element was almost eliminated. It was that of Prospero over the gentle Ariel. And yet it was probably only that of the cosmopolite over the recluse, of the experienced man over the simple maid" (827); again, having raised the possibility of the supernatural, Hardy offers the reader -- we remember Todorov -- a more rational alternative explanation. But the Baron's power is inescapable -- "she had obeyed the call with an unreasoning obedience worthy of a discipline in primitive times" (829). Again, in perhaps the most ominous moment of all, the words of the Baron himself directly associate him with the supernatural, indeed the demonic: towards the end of the story Baron Von Xanten asks Margery, now utterly convinced of Jim's unfaithfulness and drawn more than ever to the exotic stranger, to promise never to come to him again; when she cannot promise, he insists: "But you must; your salvation depends on it! You don't know what I am!" (829). Again, perhaps he simply means

that to come to him, when she is married to Jim, would be a sin; he, himself, may be no more than a man who feels himself easily tempted. But the register suggests something more ominous than this, and that suggestion is carefully enforced in descriptive passages in the final sections of the story: Vine, Jim's friend, tells him that Margery has been spirited away by the Baron and he doesn't know to where: "That's more than earthly man can tell! I never seen such a thing! Twas a stroke o' the black art ..." (860), while the narrator describes the Baron's horses as "black and daemonic against the slanting fires of the western sun" (863), while the "ruddy light of the setting sun [burns] with more than earthly fire on the Baron's face" (864) as he makes his final pledge to Jim to leave him and Margery alone.

Ultimately this story ends in conventionally "happy" domesticity: in the last scene Margery and Jim watch their infant child in his cradle. But there is a clear suggestion that their marriage will, as it were, be haunted by what has happened and by their memory of the Baron; "He was like a magician to me" (868), reflects Margery. And the Baron -- wherever he went -- we assume is alone; if he is isolated and depressed at the opening of the story, how much more alone he must feel now, given his evident love for Margery. In Todorov's terms the story -- almost a novella -- is "fantastic" in that there is always, just about, the possibility that the reader, and the characters, can frame a rational explanation, but the sense of the supernatural is overtly present, once again colouring a world that is unpredictable to the point of the uncanny: not only is it by chance that Margery comes on the Baron when she does at the beginning, or that he calls her to him on her wedding day, but the events of the last frantic chase across the Wessex countryside, with wrong roads taken, misdirections and misunderstandings, are so uncertain as to take the conclusion close

to farce. The end is only brought about, one almost feels, because of where the ball stops when the roulette wheel stops spinning.

The disruption caused to the settled, rural community by the intrusion of an outsider with other, alien, more sophisticated ideas and values is, of course, a recurrent one in Hardy's novels -- Farfrae in The Mayor of Casterbridge, Troy in Far from the Madding Crowd, Fitzpiers in The Woodlanders, for example. In the short fiction the impact of the intruder seems to be even more dramatic, ominous and directly sexual in his effects. If the Baron fits this pattern, so does Mop in "The Fiddler of the Reels". Like the Baron, this mysterious stranger is not from Wessex, but seems foreign: "Personally he was not ill-favoured, though rather un-English, his complexion being a rich olive, his rank hair dark and rather clammy" (494-95). And, like the Baron, he has a mesmeric effects on the young country woman at the centre of the story -- and again he is associated with the uncanny.

The story is set, like so many others in the past. But not a distant, mysterious, rural past, but a one which was at the cutting edge of scientific and technical advancement: the Great Exhibition of 1851, in London's Hyde Park. Thus, what one critic has rightly called "the ballad-like timelessness",¹³⁵ of the tale is juxtaposed with the modern, is rooted in the realistic. The Exhibition is, of course, a measure of technological development already achieved and a sign of things to come, the intrusion of the outer world on the "old rural way of life",¹³⁶ in Wessex:

135. Martin Ray, "The Fiddler of the Reels': A Textual Study," Thomas Hardy Journal 9,2 (1993): 59. Again, Carpenter, Thomas Hardy, classifies the story among those in which Hardy "deal[s] quite frankly with the supernatural, more so than he does anywhere in the novels" (78).

136. Michael Benazon, "Dark and Fair: Character Contrast in Hardy's 'Fiddler of the Reels'", Ariel: A Review of International English Literature 9,2 (1978): 79.

For South Wessex, the year formed in many ways an extraordinary chronological frontier of transit-line, at which there occurred what one might call a precipice in Time. 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. (494)¹³⁷

Clearly the Fiddler of the title -- Wat Ollamoor, known to all by his nickname "Mop"¹³⁸ -- the mesmeric intruder, comes out of that older world; he is indeed the sinister seducer of maids whom we find in the ballads:

He was a woman's man, they said,-- supremely so -- extremely little else. To men he was not attractive; perhaps a little repulsive at times. Musician, dandy, and company man in practice; veterinary surgeon in theory, he lodged a while in Mellstock village, coming from nobody knew 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. (494)

In fact Mop's weirdness is most apparent in his actual playing, capable of "plaintive passages" and "supplicatory expressions" that "would ... have drawn an ache from the heart of a gate-post" (495). To outward seeming, his fiddling is in many ways "like that in a moving preacher" (495), but in fact this is a man who has

never once sat in the gallery of Mellstock Church where the others had turned their venerable psalmody so many hundreds of times [He] had never, in all likelihood, entered a church at all. All were devil's tunes in his repertory. (495-96)

137. Interestingly, Hardy writes to Charles Scribner's Sons in a letter of 20 November, 1892: "I am in receipt of your letter of the 28th ult. asking for a short story for the Exhibition number of the Magazine: & I will during the next week or two ascertain if I can think of such a story, & could get it written in time". See Collected Letters, Vol. 1 289.

138. Frank R. Giordano, JR., "Characterization and Conflict in Hardy's 'The Fiddler of the Reels'", Texas Studies in Literature And Language 17,1 (1975), observes that "His nickname, 'Mop' was assigned to him by ... women. What is more, even the fiddler's names suggest his mythical origins. His given first name associates him with the greek god of brilliance and light, while his nickname is a short form of Mopsus, a mythological seer of Apollo" (621).

The impact of this "fantastical tunes" on the "young and fragile" (495) women of lower Mellstock is immediate, and on Car'line Aspent it is overwhelming; unable to ward off Mop's "insidious" tunes she is spell-bound: "Presently the aching of the heart seized simultaneously with a wild desire to glide airily in the mazes of an infinite dance" (496); later, at home, when a thought of the music -- and hence presumably of Mop -- insinuates itself into her mind "she would start from her seat in the chimney-corner as if she had received some galvanic shock, and spring convulsively towards the ceiling; then she would burst into tears" (497) taking some half an hour to recover. What her family -- and presumably the Victorian reader -- considers "hysterical", the late-twentieth-century reader would assume was sexual in origin, born of the guilty repression of the impulses which Mop has aroused; certainly the registers in which her reaction to the music is expressed would suggest as much. When she hears of Mop's "Intended" who lives in another village, Car'line burns with jealousy: "'O-O-O-!' she cried. 'He's going to her, and not coming to me!' (497). Mop's intrusion has disrupted the routines of her hum-drum life, and arrests her drift towards the "supposedly ordered control of the passions known as marriage".¹³⁹ For the first time in her life Car'line starts rejecting both courting and marriage proposal of, expressing there and then, "coldness" to her "manly and simple wooer" (498), though quite "measured and methodical" (499) native (Wessex), and "respectable mechanic" (498), Edward Ned Hipcroft. As in the novels (Gabriel Oak, Giles Winterbourne) and in other stories (Bartholomew Miller, the Wheelwright, in "Enter a Dragoon" (CM), for instance), the worthy, hard-working craftsman is pushed aside in favour of the more exotic figure from outside. Ned, who has "not the slightest ear

139. Benazon, "Dark and Fair" 75.

for music" cannot compete with the mesmeric, and possibly daemonic, effects that Mop can achieve; Ned cannot "play the fiddle so as to draw your soul out of your body like a spider's thread, as Mop did, till you felt as limp as withywind and yearned for something to cling to" (498);¹⁴⁰ again the sexual connotation of this scarcely needs comment. Accepting the refusal of his proposal, by Car'line, with "his usual outward placidity", and "rigid silence" (499), Ned leaves his home in Stickleford, and goes to London, becoming a mechanic workman. After the lapse of four years and during the inauguration of the Great Exhibition, Ned receives a letter from the now "repentant Car'line",¹⁴¹ informing him of her regret about her past capriciousness, there and then, her readiness to be his dutiful wife if he wishes.

Arriving in London in an "excursion train" (500), in "a pitiable condition" (501), together with Mop's illegitimate child Carry, Car'line tries to justify the cause of her downfall which divulges her own victimization, in much the same way as it bespeaks the seductive nature of Mop's fiddling:

But he's been gone away for years! And I never had a young man before! And I was so unlucky to be caught the first time he took advantage o'me, though some of the girls down there go on like anything. (502)¹⁴²

140. The image of "withywind" underlines Car'line's vulnerability. Compare Barbara's sense of fragility and loneliness after the mutilation of her first husband Edmond Willowes in "Barbara of the House of Grebe" (GND): "Barbara did not love [Lord Uplandtowers], but hers was essentially one of those sweet-pea or with-wind natures which require a twig of stouter fibre than its own to hang upon and bloom" (262). Compare also, his poem: "Voices From Things Growing in A Churchyard": "I, who as innocent withwind climbs,/Sir or Madam".

141. Steel, Sexual Tyranny in Wessex 89.

142. Michael Roland, "Thomas Hardy And Folk Music," The Thomas Hardy Journal 8, 1 (1992), points out that Hardy "had personally known girls who had paid the price of dabbling in the morning dew, and knew how easy it was to sow the seeds of love under the influence of wild country music in some great barn" (43).

Moved vehemently by the acute vulnerability of both the mother and the child as a "pair of helpless creatures" (502), (whom Hardy makes all the more revealing by their "humble class" ride "without any protection whatever from the wind and rain; and damp weather" (501)), driven by his retiring and "parental" (503), as well as "tractable" (508) nature,¹⁴³ Ned Hipcroft "tactfully acquiesced in the fate Heaven had sent him" (503), and gives them food and shelter, marrying Car'line in the end.

But the mysterious disruptive influence of Mop is not easily escaped: visiting the Exhibition after her marriage to Ned, Car'line thinks she glimpses Mop's reflection in a mirror, perhaps she does, or perhaps the explanation is, again, less supernatural than psychological, the haunting presence of Mop having its origin in the desires which she is still repressing.

Some months afterwards, Ned finds himself out of work, and seeing little opportunities of any in London, he decides to return to his native land in Wessex. And whereas he looks for employment at Casterbridge, Car'line and her little child Carry stop to rest at the Quiet Woman Inn, near Egdon Heath only to be encountered by a group of people about to dance at the tunes of Mop's bow. Of all the pubs in all of Wessex she has to come to this one: there is no plan, just chance, the chance event which is going to change her life again.

For all her disguise under "a veil" (505), and amidst her "triumph" (504) and vaingloriousness of her "return to where she had once been despised, a smiling London wife with a distinct London accent" (504), Car'line is "thrilled" by and experiences "a tremor" (505) of the

143. Benazon, "Dark and Fair" observes that "Ned Hipcroft'[s] surname ... stands for home, cozy domesticity, and security" (77); a nature which is obviously diametrically opposed to Mop's.

"witchery" of Mop's tunes, only to enter a state of "paralyzed reverie" (505). Soon she starts to dance "convulsively" (505).

Losing now all her "independant will", spellbound by Mop's "acoustic magnetism", as well as "chromatic subtleties" (507), Car'line continues to dance "slavishly and abjectly, subject to every wave of ... her fascinator" (507), in a "blatantly phallic",¹⁴⁴ and "Bacchic orgy"¹⁴⁵ scene that starkly marks "the seduction of the dance":¹⁴⁶

[T]he Fiddler introducing into his notes the wild and agonizing sweetness of a living voice in one too highly wrought, its pathos running high and running low in endless variation, projecting through her nerves excruciating spasms, a sort of blissful torture. (506)

Car'line ultimately falls to the floor in a faint seizure. Ironically, this collapse is followed by Mop fiddle emitting "an elfin shriek of finality" (507-8). And when Ned resolves to rescue her from her swoon, he discovers that the child Carry and Mop have disappeared in "a place of Dantesque gloom" (508). Indeed, Ned's protracted search for the little child who to him "is the whole world" (509), comes to no avail.

This again is the stuff of the supernatural world of the ballad, the elfin stealing of a child. Ned may search the lanes of Wessex and, ultimately, the streets of London, but he will never find the child whom he now loves so passionately, though not his own. Again, the operation of

144. Benazon, "Dark and Fair" 67.

145. Giordano, JR., "Characterization and Conflict" 617.

146. Steel, Sexual Tyranny in Wessex 88. In addition to the famous music motif in Tess, The Return and The Mayor, compare Hardy's poems: "The Fiddler" and "The Dance At the Phoenix". Compare also the impact of music and dancing on the four lovers and the consequence of marrying the wrong spouse in "The History of the Hardcomes" (FCC) (523-32). Compare also the impact of music of the Messiah performance on Egbert Mayne in "An Indiscretion in the Life of An Heiress" (86).

chance, whether Mop is truly daemonic or not has left the main figures bereft and lonely. Car'line seems to lose her maternal feelings, seems indeed to subside into lethargy with Mop's departure; this seems unlikely to be much of a marriage, as Ned travels around to hunt for the missing child. And, again, one wonders why Ned should suffer so; rejected by Car'line, then forgiving her and making a home for her and her child, he has done no ill, yet he suffers quite as much as she does. It makes no moral sense.

Clearly, Hardy had learned intensely the universal lesson of the vulnerability of men and women, the limitations of the human will, in the face of the mindless processes of a universe that allocates sorrow and pain without choice or purpose. Stemming originally -- as we have seen -- partly from his innate temperament, partly from his Dorset local upbringing, his dissatisfaction with life, his sense of uprootedness, his movement between classes which ultimately isolated him from a secure place in either the culture of working class Dorset or comfortable middle class London, and, above all perhaps, from his loss of the faith of his youth, Hardy seems to have been ill-at-ease in the world. It is this lack of ease that is, one might argue, one of the main pressures which causes to become a creative artist. It is in the stories that we see very directly the manifestation of Hardy's loss of security and his consequent restless awareness of human loneliness. As Jagdish Chandra Dave precisely sums up:

In the vast background of Nature shorn of all metaphysical meaning and silent to human hopes, man has to live his lonely life threatened by complete nihilism. That is the human predicament. Victims of circumstance no less than the victims of their own self-created miseries, Hardy's characters struggle weakly under the empty Wessex sky, hope and pray, clench fists and curse, fight and fall, or stand invincible stoics content with whatever chance brings.¹⁴⁷

147. Jagdish Chandra Dave, The Human Predicament in Hardy's Novels (London: Macmillan, 1985) 17.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has thought to indicate something of what is distinctive about Thomas Hardy's short fiction. In terms of his settings and his narrative techniques in the stories, Hardy's relation to the short stories being published alongside his in the magazines which proliferated at the end of the nineteenth century, is as we have suggested, quite a complex one. Given the new explorations of the potentialities of the form which were going on in the decades around the turn of the century -- the interest in "unity of impression", with the economical evocation of mood, with inner states of mind rather than events in the outer world -- explorations which were to culminate in the experiments of Modernists like Joyce, Woolf, Mansfield and Rhys, Hardy can look distinctly old-fashioned. But while Hardy seems to have taken as little interest in contemporary theories of short fiction as in theories of the novel -- the former were anyway very scarce -- this is not to say that he was unaware of the nature and techniques of the stories being published alongside his.

As we have seen, for Hardy a short story was almost inevitably first and foremost a tale, a narrative of events, usually of an unusual or quirky nature, usually in the past and usually in a rural village setting -- a tale, in other words, which was not unlike the kind of oral narrative he was familiar with from the communities around Bockhampton. This, it seems is what Hardy thought of when he sat down to write a story, as opposed to a novel. But at the same time, that technique was far from out of keeping with the times or with the nature of the issues which Hardy wanted to express. The voice of the story-teller, either when directly personified as in A Group of Noble Dames or A Few Crusted Characters, or simply a first-person narrator in stories like "The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion" or "A Tradition of Eighteen Hundred and Four" is a single, vulnerable, remembering voice,

without the omniscience and confidence of the narrator of the Victorian novel, expressing human feelings of wonder, fascination, sorrow and pity for the people caught up in the events related. It is a voice that has a sense that these events took place in the same indifferent, chance-governed universe that the narrator inhabits, and so, he assumes, does the listener/reader. The technique may be rooted in tradition, but the consciousness of the narrative has much of the awareness of alone-ness and uncertainty with which we are familiar in writing through the twentieth century. Though at the same time, of course, the tale of rural events, perhaps with an occasional suggestion of the supernatural, could be read by a contemporary reader who lived in a very different, urban, world with something of the same escapist pleasure with which he or she reads tales of the even more remote Celtic fringes.

But it is that underlying awareness, that vision of human protagonists as being ultimately alone, that is the distinctive core of Hardy's short fiction. This is not to say, of course, that that awareness is not present in Hardy's novels, especially his later ones. But in the short fiction we see that sense of inevitable alone-ness portrayed with an imaginative power and an emotional intensity that belies the comparative critical neglect that Hardy's short stories have received. As we have seen, Hardy's stories vividly exemplify Frank O'Connor's characterisation of the short story as the genre which most frequently expresses the experience of the "submerged population group",¹ those "not part of official or 'high' cultural hegemony"². They exemplify it not only in their concern with the small rural communities of Wessex, far from the forces of political, industrial and cultural power in

1. O'Connor 18.

2. Hanson, ed., Re-reading the Short Story 2.

Victorian England, but in the way the stories so frequently focus on those who are in one way or another isolated from, or even within, those communities; not just "losers and loners, exiles ..." ³ -- though clearly there are such figures, Rhoda Brook at the end of "The Withered Arm"; Mademoiselle V____, in "A Committee-Man of 'the Terror'"; Sophy Twycott in "The Son's Veto" -- but characters who are painfully alienated by the emotional toll which events have taken of them: figures like Ella Marchmill in "An Imaginative Woman"; Edith Harnham in "On the Western Circuit", and Barnet in "Fellow-Townsmen".

We have suggested some of the biographical and social factors which might have helped construct Hardy's sense of unease, his detachment and reserve from his society -- the introverted temperament visible as a boy, the uprooting from his relatively humble social background, his entering into a social and cultural scene which he felt would condescend, if it knew of his real origins -- but these are problematic areas, ultimately the realm of the psychologist rather than the literary critic. But what we do see, in the journals and letters as well as the short stories, is a mind and an imagination *sensitized* to states of loneliness and alienation created by the structures and conventions of the bourgeois society he was in but did not feel himself wholly part of: the alienation of the poor young men who could not achieve their ambitions, be they professional or emotional, simply because of their origins; of the men and women who because of social circumstances or some adjudged moral failing were doomed to live lonely and unfulfilled lives; of the young women caught in the rituals necessitated to avoid the emptiness of spinsterhood only to be trapped in a marriage which was at best unfulfilling and at worse emotionally, even physically, painful.

3. Hanson, ed., Re-reading the Short Story 2-3.

And, beyond the social rituals, the awareness that humanity ultimately existed in a state of even more profound alone-ness, in a universe which lacked a divine presence and thus any coherent pattern or meaning. Thus, the social rituals, whatever values they were originally founded on, were to Hardy essentially arbitrary and artificial, sources of constraint on that which was all that humanity had in common with its environment: those impulses and emotions which were natural and which, given human consciousness, could at least manifest themselves in human sympathy, compassion and understanding, albeit such feelings and relationships would still be at the mercy of chance. It is, though, a human consciousness which is itself a source of pain in such a universe, a source of loneliness:

Everything in these tales seems to concentrate on making unhappiness for those who are forced to live in the Universe. A thick blanket hangs over everyone. Groping wearily through a dense fog, the emerging merely reveals in the distance a fog of still greater intensity. There appears to be no way out.⁴

4. Braybrooke 75.

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