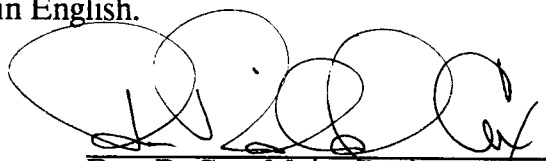
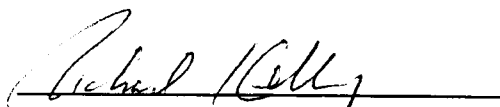
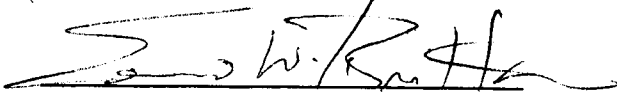


To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Lawana F. Day entitled "Patterns in the Carpet: Idiosyncratic Repetition in Thomas Hardy's Short Stories." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.


Don R. Cox, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:


Accepted for the Council:


Associate Vice Chancellor
and Dean of The Graduate School

PATTERNS IN THE CARPET: IDIOSYNCRATIC REPETITION
IN THOMAS HARDY'S SHORT STORIES

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Lawana F. Day
May 1992

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For Lolei--my sister, friend, and patient ally

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For their assistance in connection with this dissertation, I am particularly indebted to Professors Don Cox, Edward Bratton, Richard Kelly, and Phil Hamlin, who served as my director and committee respectively. With their patience, encouragement, and tactful criticism, I was able to achieve results otherwise impossible. Whatever errors remain in my work, however, are solely my responsibility.

Deepest of all is the debt I owe to my parents, Marjorie and Curtis Day, for their confidence in my abilities and encouragement of my endeavors. They opened for me the first doors of discovery and lighted my way toward many others.

ABSTRACT

Too long ignored by scholars of the short story in general and Thomas Hardy's work in particular, the four volumes which Hardy devoted to short fiction represent significant claims on the attention of both. The stories show him grappling with the technical demands of a spatially constricted and (at the time) none too regimented genre as well as with the clear expression of his own view of human experience. His response to both challenges was to rely on various patterns of narrative technique, characterization, and thematic development which lent themselves generally to an economic presentation of his philosophical stance. The present study examines the artistic and thematic effects of those patterns.

Most discussions of Hardy's philosophy have emphasized his belief in the dominance of chance in an indifferent universe, but the short story patterns consistently reflect his additional awareness that human beings contribute significantly to the shape of their destinies by their specific responses to chance and circumstance. His plot patterns demonstrate the fateful influence of both inexplicable cosmic coincidence and problematical human constructs such as conventional marriages and class prejudice. His preference for an external narrative perspective, through either an omniscient narrator or a superimposed frame persona, permits him to analyze both influences directly, though without long, novel-like digressions. The setting patterns, too, show Hardy striving for both economy and thematic clarity, as--aside from an occasional poetic evocation of nature's power over humanity--he sketches in only those ordinary details of his characters' surroundings that somehow reflect the quality and outcome of their interaction with chance.

The characters themselves present the most noticeable patterns in the stories and emphasize most clearly the importance of individual choice and action. Five recurrent types illustrate Hardy's impressions of the primary human responses to life--from the aggressive manipulators and schemers, driven by ego and ambition, to the passive stoics, drifters, and imaginative women, characterized respectively by endurance, avoidance, and escapism. Subtle patterns of emblematic imagery highlight the choices each mind-set inspires. All of Hardy's fundamental patterns, however, produce continual insightful variations that allow him to reflect universal truths through individual experiences.

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ABBREVIATIONS

All references to Hardy's four collected volumes of short stories are taken from the Anniversary Edition of his works issued in 1920 by Harper & Brothers. Essentially a reissue of Harper's 1915 American Edition, it combines The Well-Beloved and A Group of Noble Dames in a single volume, but otherwise reproduces the definitive Wessex Edition--the American issue being "partly printed from the English plates and partly reset in America (in the case of volumes already copyright there)," according to Richard Little Purdy's Thomas Hardy: A Bibliographical Study (London: Oxford UP, 1954) 286. References to these volumes and to other frequently cited sources will be identified by the following 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 Few Crusted Characters</u>	<u>FCC</u>
<u>A Changed Man</u>	<u>CM</u>
<u>Old Mrs. Chundle and Other Stories</u>	<u>OMC</u>
<u>The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy</u>	<u>CL</u>
<u>The Early Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840-1891</u>	<u>EL</u>
<u>The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, 1892-1928</u>	<u>LY</u>

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the three decades that saw the publication of his fourteen novels, Thomas Hardy was also busy writing and publishing, in a wide variety of newspapers and magazines, some fifty short stories. Dating the first at 1874, Richard Little Purdy describes forty-four stories in his bibliographical study of Hardy's works.¹ Norman Page brings the count up to fifty by including such ambiguous extras as Hardy's first published piece of fiction, the 1865 sketch "How I Built Myself a House," and the two sketches which were extracted from Tess of the D'Urbervilles to appease Mrs. Grundy and revised for separate publication ("Reconsideration" 75). By the time Hardy submitted his last short story for magazine publication in 1900 and turned his creative energies toward poetry, he had produced enough short fiction to fill several of his long novels. Yet, despite the considerable portion they represent of his life's work, little critical attention has been paid to Hardy's short stories. The only full-length discussions to date are Kristin Brady's excellent and insightful 1982 study, The Short Stories of Thomas Hardy: Tales of Past and Present, and a handful of unpublished doctoral dissertations.² Detailed analyses of individual stories are

¹ Richard Little Purdy, Thomas Hardy: A Bibliographical Study (London: Oxford UP, 1954).

² Brady's serious and detailed treatment of virtually all of Hardy's stories, in specific relation to the volumes in which they appear, is a valuable, ground-breaking work to which this and any future studies of Hardy's short fiction must be indebted. Two dissertations may also be mentioned here: Janice Stewart Bohi, "Thomas Hardy's Short Stories: A Critical Approach," diss., Case Western Reserve U, 1973; and Alexander Fischler, "Thomas Hardy's Short Stories: Their Relation to Major Trends and Interests in the Criticism of His Works," diss., U of Washington, 1961. Bohi examines the thematic emphases in a selection of fifteen stories, while Fischler discusses a broader range of stories in terms of theme, characterization, and

available in a fair number of journal articles, though what one gains in depth here, one loses in breadth, since the articles tend to focus on the same eight or ten stories generally acknowledged as Hardy's best. Even less space is devoted to the stories in most of the numerous scholarly books on Hardy and his work--occasionally a brief chapter (Howe, Page, Wing), but more often, just a few scattered pages, paragraphs, or dismissive sentences--and what space is allotted is frequently given over to mere plot summary rather than to actual analysis.

Hardy himself deemed only thirty-seven of these short fictions worthy of collection into the four volumes he devoted to them and, in fact, reprinted those in the miscellaneous fourth volume, A Changed Man (1913), only "in order to render them accessible to readers" who had pressed him to reclaim the stories from widely scattered English and American periodicals and include them for convenience "in the complete series issued by [his] publishers" (CM, Prefatory Note). But the ones he gathered for the three earlier volumes he selected and arranged with far greater care and deliberateness, writing in February of 1888 to offer the first group to Macmillan & Co. for publication, saying with typical self-effacement that "Some well-known critics have often advised me to reprint them, informing me that they are as good as anything I have ever written (however good that may be)" (CL 1: 174). Published in the same year, that first volume was Wessex Tales, a collection in which Hardy drew heavily upon his extensive knowledge of local traditions, superstitions, and strange occurrences. In 1891, Hardy published in book form A Group of Noble Dames, adding four stories to the six commissioned earlier by the Graphic for its 1890 Christmas number, revising the narrative frame to

dramatic technique. He later mined the dissertation for his persuasive article on "Theatrical Techniques in Thomas Hardy's Short Stories," Studies in Short Fiction 3 (1966): 435-45.

accommodate the additions, and restoring the others to their original versions, which had been bowdlerized to meet magazine requirements (Purdy, Bibliog. Study 65-66). The thematic emphasis here on the often painful nature of human relationships, especially in marriage, also dominates the third volume, Life's Little Ironies, which appeared in 1894, although the principal characters are no longer drawn from the titled nobility. In arranging his works for the definitive 1912 Wessex Edition, Hardy exchanged two of the Ironies for one of the Wessex Tales, thus forming the volumes as we have them now. Of the stories Hardy chose not to collect, most have been available since 1977 in the New Wessex Edition volume Old Mrs. Chundle and Other Stories, with the Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall, edited by F. B. Pinion. It is primarily with the stories Hardy himself selected, however, that the present study is concerned.

The general lack of concern for so large a portion of a major writer's work is due primarily to the dominant, too casually dismissive critical view--despite occasional praise for individual stories--that Hardy's short stories are mere "pot-boilers" (Stewart 147), "shavings from his workshop" (Wain xiv-xv), or "novels in miniature" (E. Hardy 183), which have "little to do with the main line of the modern short story" (Howe, Hardy 76). There are several reasons for this view. As Harold Orel explains in The Victorian Short Story, serialized novels were still entrenched as "the central commodity" for Victorian periodicals when Hardy began writing his short stories in the 1870s, the shorter fictions being regarded merely as "a by-product, filler material" (2), which was less profitable for writers and "attracted little critical attention" (ix). Placing Hardy firmly within this historical context, many critics have read his own early comment, in a letter to Leslie Stephen, that he wished "merely to be considered a good hand at a serial" (EL 131), as an admission of the

profit motive rather than serious artistry as the compelling force behind his fiction-writing. Page rightly defends Hardy against this charge, pointing out that all Hardy's fiction, short stories included, was "opportunist and commercial" in the same sense as were Shakespeare's plays, a reality which is "hardly a damaging consideration in estimating their literary worth" ("Reconsideration" 75). As for Hardy's comment, like so many of his statements about his art, and especially his fiction, it is somewhat misleading with its studiously casual and unassuming air. Nevertheless, he does at times seem to reinforce the common perception of his stories as "mere journeywork" (Howe, Hardy 76) through his own casual indiscrimination in labelling them variously as "tales," "sketches," "short stories," and even "minor novels." Such arbitrariness is apt to disturb modern readers unnecessarily, though:

Distinctions among such terms . . . mean more to us in this century than they ever did in Victorian England. . . . Edgar Allan Poe's no-nonsense views on what a short story should do were not much discussed, and certainly not subscribed to, by Victorian authors for most of the century. (Orel, Vict. Short Story 3)

Here, in this retrospective evaluation of modern and non-modern, lies the central issue for most critics regarding Hardy's short stories: their sense that the writer is dabbling in a modern genre whose basic rules are neither apparent nor important to him. In determining those rules, most studies of the modern short story take as their starting point those very "no nonsense views" set forth by Poe in his 1847 review of Hawthorne's Twice-Told Tales: his conviction that a story should not be so long that its "perusal cannot be completed at one sitting," in a period of "a half-hour to one or two hours"; and, above all, that its incidents and tone should be combined so selectively and economically as to produce a "single effect," unique and carefully preconceived (93-95).³ At an average of twenty-five to thirty pages,

³ For additional discussions of length, see Frank O'Connor, The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story (Cleveland: World, 1962) 27; Barry Pain, The

Hardy's stories almost all comply with Poe's criterion of length, though they can be as short as the three or four pages of some of the sketches in "A Few Crusted Characters" (LLI) or as long as the one-hundred-page "Romantic Adventures of a Milkmaid" (CM). Nevertheless, in the introduction to his selection of Hardy's stories, John Wain, like many a Hardy scholar, finds their length objectionable, declaring that "the decision to tell the story shortly is evidently an arbitrary choice on the author's part, rather than an artistic necessity inherent in the material chosen" (xiv).⁴ Though not without economy of presentation, Hardy's stories do often proceed at a more leisurely pace than that usually associated with the genre and, thus, are less apt to achieve the kind of pithy, gemlike compactness that best conveys the "singleness of effect" which has become a modern standard.

Such effects are by no means always absent from Hardy's short stories; and, in general, Hardy refrains from the kind of philosophical discursiveness that marks the novels, and allows the incidents of the stories to speak for themselves. But their frequent difference in pace and approach from most twentieth-century work in the genre has prompted Brady to insist that Hardy's stories be evaluated according to

Short Story (London: Secker, 1916) 38; H. G. Wells, introduction, The Country of the Blind and Other Stories, by Wells (London: Nelson, 1911) viii. While Wells, like Poe, stipulates a time limit for the story ("from fifteen to fifty minutes to read aloud"), O'Connor and Pain insist that the only limitation on length is that dictated by the material itself. On the necessity of a single unified "impression," see Henry Seidel Canby, The Short Story in English (New York: Holt, 1909) 303; Brander Matthews, The Philosophy of the Short Story (1901; New York: Longmans, 1912) 15-17; W. Somerset Maugham, "The Short Story," Essays by Divers Hands: Being the Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature of the United Kingdom ns 25 (1950): 134; Sean O'Faolain, The Short Story (London: Collins, 1948) 179.

⁴ See also Elizabeth Bowen, ed., "Introduction: The Short Story," The Faber Book of Modern Stories (London: Faber, 1937) 8; Samuel Hynes, ed., "Introduction: Notes on the Parish Historian," Great Short Works of Thomas Hardy (New York: Harper, 1967) vii. For a contrasting view, see Patrick Braybrooke, Thomas Hardy and His Philosophy (1928; New York: Russell, 1969) 63. Braybrooke sees in Hardy's stories no question of "cramping or an unsatisfying finish. We do not feel that Hardy had so much more to say that his short story ought to have been a novel."

criteria more suited to the works of an artist "whose sense of form developed from a different tradition altogether, and who was more concerned with 'story' than with 'effect'" (199). She shares this view with such long-established scholars as Albert J. Guerard, Irving Howe, and Douglas Brown, to all of whom Hardy is "preeminently a traditional teller of tales" (Guerard 1). For, in the short stories as in the novels, Hardy is often the devoted recorder of the rapidly fading folklore and traditions of rural Wessex life. Drawing upon his own experience and observation, and especially upon the tales recounted to him by his mother and other elderly residents of Dorset, Hardy reproduces in his own stories not only the substance, but frequently the style as well of that oral tradition. As a result, Howe detects an even stronger "pastoral impulse" in the stories than in the novels, as Hardy "relaxes into nostalgia and anecdote" (Hardy 77), while Brown traces the roots of Hardy's imagination and "art as a story-teller" to the "tradition of balladry," with its strong emphasis upon scene, coincidence, and the "easy alliance of the grotesque and disproportionate with the substantial and natural" (110-11). By linking Hardy to an earlier narrative tradition, these critics seek to justify his non-modern approach to storytelling, and yet--with the notable exception of Brady--they are just as hesitant to praise Hardy's stories as those scholars who condemn them for falling short of twentieth-century standards. Even in his appreciation of the stories' balladry techniques, Douglas Brown is damning in his praise: "a few are memorable and distinguished by-products of [Hardy's] art," he writes, devoting only one or two paragraphs to each of the few "by-products" he mentions (115).

Indeed, beyond this sort of grudging approval of a few individual stories, most of the scholarly response to Hardy's short fiction has been, in varying degrees, negative. Perhaps the harshest judgment of all is the single sentence with which

John Berryman dismisses the entire collection: according to him, Hardy "wrote one thousand pages of the worst short stories that the world has ever seen" (243).

William Rutland shares Berryman's dislike, but reveals rather more fastidious sensibilities in his condemnation of the stories--notwithstanding the "undeniable power of the writing"--on the basis of their "improbability and unpleasantness." It "seems a misapplication of energy," he declares, "that so much ingenuity . . . should be directed merely to creating a nasty taste in the mouth" (218-19). It is interesting that he should single out what are now generally considered to be three of Hardy's finest stories for his particular charge of "repulsiveness": "An Imaginative Woman," "The Son's Veto," and "A Tragedy of Two Ambitions." The perceptive and poignant presentation in these stories of human hearts, their needs, ambitions, and wasted potential, strikes Rutland as mere ironic "overstatement" of Hardy's own "jaundiced" view of life (219). More concerned with stylistic matters, other critics specify as Hardy's primary weakness the "wooden words, . . . wooden explanations and wooden plots of which volumes like A Changed Man and Wessex Tales are full" (Bates 40), or his general failure "to be concise" in both language and incident (E. Hardy 183). The basic sentiment of most of Hardy's detractors, however--insofar as the short stories are concerned--is perhaps best expressed by Irving Howe. Though Howe credits seven or eight stories as being "very fine" and claims that "one, 'The Fiddler of the Reels,' can be called great," he feels that most "are not worth salvaging":

That Hardy's stories are little read is not a scandal, it is merely a pity. . . . To write a history of modern fiction or modern poetry without seriously considering Hardy would be unthinkable. To omit his name from a study of the modern short story would be plausible. (Hardy 75-76)

Of course, Hardy has his wholehearted defenders as well, though they are few and have an unfortunate tendency to gush their praise, which often weakens

their credibility and blinds them to flaws that undeniably mar some of the stories. This tendency is most noticeable in a few of the scholars who were writing about Hardy and his works during his own lifetime and during the sensitive period immediately following his death. For example, in a short essay on Hardy's stories, published in 1929, just one year after Hardy's death, Joseph J. Reilly enthusiastically proclaims that, "were it not for the fame of his longer masterpieces, [Hardy] would have been accounted one of the greatest of modern short-story writers" (407).⁵ Such a complete contradiction of Howe's 1967 opinion is due in part perhaps to what was in 1929 still a relatively recent acceptance, in England at least, of the short story as an important art form worthy of critical attention. This suggestion certainly helps to explain Annie Macdonnell's much earlier, and lavishly generous, assertion in 1895 that "In short stories . . . Mr. Hardy is the master, in England" (74-75). With few established standards for evaluating and analyzing the developing art, Macdonnell spreads her praise too evenly, seeing "triumphs in structure" and "fine cut and finish" where a more balanced view might discern some imperfections. Few readers would be likely now to share her judgment that "neither in style nor structure has [Hardy] reached a higher level of craftsmanship than in 'A Group of Noble Dames'" (75-76), a volume now generally thought to be weakened by considerable clumsiness and mechanical writing.⁶ Nevertheless, even some of Hardy's less approving readers are occasionally tempted into similarly lavish praise by some specific feature of the stories, above all, by their almost universally applauded depiction of the ways of

⁵ See Desmond Hawkins, Hardy: Novelist and Poet (London: David, 1976) 113. Hawkins considers most of Hardy's stories as inferior works, but admits that the best of them "would have made a respectable reputation for a lesser man."

⁶ Purdy attributes this weakness of Dames to Hardy's undertaking its composition during the period of exhaustion which followed his completion of Tess of the D'Urbervilles (Bibliography 65).

rural Wessex life. For all her dislike of Hardy's lack of concision, Evelyn Hardy cannot restrain her delight in his presentation of those rustic traditions:

Yet how delicious Hardy's best stories are, and how beautifully does he weave into them the stuff of vanishing legend and superstition . . . and how exquisite are the vignettes of country life and the rural scene. (184)

The praise is legitimate, as always, but has been too long emphasized at the expense of much else that is worthy in the stories.

More telling finally than such half-indulgent views or the extravagant accolades of admirers like Macdonnell is the simpler, economical commendation given the short stories by A. E. Coppard, a fellow practitioner of the art who credits Hardy with inspiring his career. Writing of the occasion when a friend lent him a copy of Hardy's Life's Little Ironies, Coppard calls the volume

a book that marks a great date in my life, for it contains two short stories, 'A Son's Veto' and 'Andrey Satchel, the parson and the clerk,' that held for me at once the same startling enchantment as the Keats poem 'La Belle Dame' had yielded earlier, and determined for me a new and lasting ambition. (63)

That a respected, albeit minor, writer of modern British short stories should have recognized instinctively among Hardy's stories instances of such inspiring excellence is at once the highest of compliments and a credible indication of their worth. But such a gauge should not be necessary to attract serious consideration to so large a body of a major author's work. The stories have by right "a distinguished place in any assessment of Hardy's writings. . . . they themselves are a justification of their own existence" (Wing, Hardy 16-17). Thus, all the debate as to whether Hardy is "legitimately" modern or merely a holdover from an old-fashioned mode of storytelling is ultimately neither very useful nor very important. Like any writer, he must be allowed to follow his own "idiosyncrasy," as Hardy himself declared in a notebook entry of June 1882:

As, in looking at a carpet, by following one colour a certain pattern is suggested, by following another colour, another; so in life the seer should watch that pattern among general things which his idiosyncrasy moves him to observe, and describe that alone. (EL 198)

What remains then for the readers of Hardy's short stories is not to measure them against one tradition or another, but to examine them for what they accomplish in themselves, for what Hardy has achieved in following his chosen pattern in the carpet.

As his readers have long recognized, the pattern Hardy perceived "among general things" led him to a predominantly dark view of human existence in a universe indifferent at best. And as Hardy was ever obedient to his own dictum to "describe that alone" which he observed, one sees running pervasively through his works--the short stories no less than the rest--the same emphasis on the unpredictable, inexplicable, and inescapable play of ironic forces in the lives of human beings. Indeed, in examining Hardy's short story output as a whole, it seems to me that the continual reiteration of this theme was of greater importance and interest to him than any systematic exploration of the possibilities of the genre itself. And, it is for this reason, I believe, that, faced with the short story's constrictions of space for the development of such essentials as situation, character, and theme, Hardy often gravitates toward repetitious plots and toward "formula" characters of a sort. These basic human situations and personality types enable him to focus intensely upon that persistent governing theme. In addition to such plots and character types, I have also observed similar idiosyncratic repetitions throughout the stories in Hardy's use of narrative perspective, setting, imagery, and symbolism, all of which contribute directly to his thematic emphasis. Thus, in tracing the large pattern, he produces smaller technical ones within the various aspects of the stories' construction. The purpose of this study is to provide a systematic description of

these patterns and to conduct a detailed exploration of their significance to Hardy's theme and to his overall achievement in his short stories.

Although some critics have referred occasionally to a few of Hardy's repetitions of character types and plot emphases, no such systematic examination of patterns in all the major structural devices in the stories has yet been ventured.⁷ In fact, the impression of "sameness" which the patterns are apt to produce when whole volumes of the stories are read in succession has led generally to the annoyance of most scholars who mention it, rather than to any close scrutiny of its cause or purpose. For these readers, the repetition makes Hardy's irony--otherwise "sharp and pungent"--"somewhat obvious and monotonous" (Beach, English Literature 234), and makes the stories themselves "palatable in small doses only" (Cassis 288).⁸ There is some justice in these opinions, but from a critical standpoint, a more useful view to take of Hardy's composing habits is that voiced by an early reviewer, who astutely discerned beneath the superficial limitations of "a certain sameness of impression" Hardy's imaginative concern with "the inner life of his characters." Types though they often appear, they are, like the imaginary Wessex they inhabit, "spiritually as wide as human nature" (Minto 177). In this way, however artificial they may seem to modern readers, the repetitious and sometimes outright "stock" devices of the stories are Hardy's means of pointing always to the universal in human experience.

⁷ Fischler's dissertation comes closest to providing such a study, though, with the exception of one or two general character types, his analytic concerns, categories, and emphases differ substantially from mine.

⁸ See also Richard Carpenter, Thomas Hardy (New York: Twayne, 1964) 69. Although Carpenter agrees that Hardy's irony can be "tiresome" in its continual appearance, and he limits his own short section on the stories to a few pages, he does insist that "some half-dozen or more" are "eminently worth reading and discussing" and should not be overlooked.

To understand Hardy's logic in using such devices so persistently for thematic purposes, one must examine his own notions of what fiction should be. These views appear in rather widely dispersed locations in his notebooks, correspondence, prefaces, literary essays, and autobiography; and, although these sources include few references to the short stories in particular, there is little reason to suppose that Hardy applied his rules any less to them than to his long fiction. Among the most important of Hardy's theories about fiction-writing--especially in light of his extensive, oft-criticized use of coincidence and elements of the strange, mysterious, and supernatural--are his seemingly paradoxical emphases on the necessity of both "vraisemblance" and the reader's suspension of judgment when faced with unlikely coincidences and other such turns of events. In his view, the "author should be swallowed whole. . . . He should be believed in slavishly, implicitly," if the reader is to be able to enter that author's vision of life completely and perceptively. The paradox resolves itself when one realizes that Hardy's verisimilitude is no photographic or "scientific" kind of realism that merely records externals (however accurately), but a representation of life, "construed, though not distorted, by the light of imagination"--in short, a faithfulness to universal truths and "the perennial procedure of humanity" (Personal Writings 111, 114, 118). Both points pertain directly to the patterns in the short story elements to be examined here, especially to the character types, for as types, sometimes only faintly developed as individual beings, they demand of the reader suspension of judgment. But that very suspension of judgment reveals that these Wessex characters are, thematically, more even than individuals. They are, in Hardy's words, "meant to be typically and essentially those of any and every place . . . beings in whose hearts and minds that which is apparently local should be really universal" (Personal Writings 46).

It was a natural impulse in Hardy to elevate such "apparently local" personages to the stature of symbols: for him, the "elementary passions" of human nature "throbbed in Wessex nooks with as much intensity as in the palaces of Europe." There, in even the humblest figures, were to be found the same feelings of love, pride, ambition, jealousy, impulsiveness, cruelty, prejudice, loneliness, uncertainty, selfishness, complacency, and strength that influence the lives of men and women the world over. And it is in this universal representativeness of Hardy's character types that the heart of his theme lies. All the threads of the other patterns are ultimately woven together with these types into a unified picture designed to "impress the reader with the inevitableness of character and environment in working out destiny, whether that destiny be just or unjust, enviable or cruel" (Personal Writings 45, 118).

The emphasis here is important; for, although the continual ironic intrusions of chance and coincidence into human lives firmly establish Hardy's belief that "This planet does not supply the materials for happiness" (EL 286), there is something more at work in the stories than blind fate. In his biography of Hardy, Michael Millgate describes both man and writer as being "haunted by the sheer irrevocability of moments of decision and choice--the opportunity lost, the word unuttered, the road not taken, the beloved recognized or reclaimed too late" (Biography 295). These are precisely the kinds of situations that repeatedly befall the protagonists in Hardy's stories, but as Millgate suggests, such situations are not mere chance occurrences, but the results of personal choices and actions. The deterministic influence of social circumstance, environment, heredity, and sheer accident remains strong, but the link between personality and destiny is equally undeniable in the stories. They bear out Jacqueline Hooi's assertion (in reference to the novels) that

"Too much blame for the tragic turn of events in Hardy's fiction has been laid at the door of Fate or Chance by Hardy's critics, when Hardy actually shows us that there is almost always room enough for significant human choice" (94).⁹ Indeed, illustration of the influence of character on fate seems to me one of the most distinguishing features of Hardy's short stories. Almost without exception, they indicate that the characters' misfortunes and generally bleak "destinies" are in large part due to their own flawed perceptions, motives, and behavior. It is as often a matter of personality as of "crass casualty" that creates their painful circumstances.

This presentation of imperfect human beings rather than mere innocent victims of fate strengthens the stories and gives them much of their interest. It also frequently renders the repetition of extraordinary coincidences and other patterns in the stories less obvious and more credible, effective instruments of Hardy's theme. In perhaps his most famous statement about the art of fiction, Hardy insists that

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. (LY 15-16)

He thus shares with the balladists and with the storytellers he encountered during his youth the desire to thrill his audience with strange incidents and twists of fate; but he is also a conscious artist for whom the "whole secret of fiction . . . lies in the adjustment of things unusual to things eternal and universal" (LY 16). The emphasis in this study on the recurrent patterns which assist Hardy in effecting this

⁹ Roy Morrell bases his entire book, Thomas Hardy: The Will and the Way (Kuala Lumpur: U of Malaya P, 1965), on this element of human choice in Hardy's works, though he has, unfortunately, very little to say about the short stories. He strongly and persuasively opposes the dominant critical view of Hardy as presenting human fate as utterly determined and unalterable. Rather, he points out the many reprieves and second chances Hardy's characters are given with which they might act so as to redirect their destinies.

"adjustment" is intended to confirm his justification in stopping the *Wedding Guests* with his short stories. For the "something more unusual" which he has to relate in the experiences of his characters is designed, like the *Ancient Mariner's* eerie tale, not merely to entertain, but to make its way thematically back round to "every average man and woman" in its universal implications regarding the condition of all humankind. Herein lies the "beauty of shape" which Hardy believed so necessary to the noteworthy story (Personal Writings 120).

In isolating specific patterns in the stories for analysis, however, one must of necessity disturb the original organization of the volumes, a disruption which raises objections from some scholars. Norman Page's classification of the stories into four basic types--humorous vignettes of rustic life, tales of the "romantic or supernatural," realistic tragedies of modern life, and "historical tales" of the Napoleonic era--has left a few readers dissatisfied ("*Reconsideration*" 77). Harold Orel insists that "Hardy must be considered the best judge of how to group his stories," that "attempts to disregard . . . his unifying links . . . are unfair both to Hardy and to the unified impact of each gathering of tales" (Vict. Short Story 111-12). Kristin Brady views Page's categories somewhat more favorably, but rejects them nonetheless for "yoking together stories" arbitrarily removed "from their chronological context and from the thematic context which Hardy himself chose to give them" (197). Such objections arise from the sense that the first three volumes at least-- Wessex Tales, A Group of Noble Dames, and Life's Little Ironies--are, in Brady's words, "artistic wholes in their own right" and that any consideration of the stories without reference to the unities of the parent volumes unprofitably sacrifices some part of each story's worth. Accordingly, Brady has arranged her own study so as to respect Hardy's groupings and to discover what they show about "his

developing conception of the short story as a literary form." What she discovers is a distinctive dominant voice unifying each of the first three volumes, making them, respectively, "pastoral histories," "ambivalent exempla," and "tragedies of circumstance" (ix, x).

There is no denying the relevance of Hardy's painstaking arrangement of his stories; and Brady's very specific discussion of the stories, not only in the order of their succession in each volume, but also in terms of the thematic juxtapositions and relationships between them, is immensely valuable and perceptive. But however rewarding and necessary such analyses of Hardy's groupings may be, there is much to be learned about his achievement in the genre from other approaches as well. The very frequency with which he resorts to similar plots, characters, and other devices illuminates the particular qualities of temperament, taste, and opinion that distinguish Hardy as a short story writer. A close examination of such pervasive and revealing patterns cannot, therefore, be unproductive, even though it means de-emphasizing the volumes as units.

In conducting that examination, it is not my goal to treat every device exhaustively or to suggest that the patterns identified are necessarily to be found in every story. Rather, it is to demonstrate how Hardy's handling of those patterns, together with the universality of his theme, renders many of the stories striking and effective examples of the art. Almost all of them are at least touched by some subtle use of detail or technique which derives a distinctive, powerful effect from the general patterns, gives a glimpse of Hardy's skill at its best, and leaves a lasting impression in the reader's mind of Hardy's view of the human condition.

Every pattern speaks of that Hardyan view. The focus of plot in almost every story on strained marriage and family relationships is for Hardy a favorite means of

illustrating the ironic influence of chance, heredity, and personal choice in human lives. So too are his emphasis on the blighting effects of coincidence and his repetition of certain stock devices. (It is interesting to note, for instance, the number of characters in Hardy's stories who are tragically or conveniently drowned in service to his theme.) What events reveal by illustration, Hardy's narrative stance often conveys directly, through interpretive omniscient narrators or ironically self-revealing speakers. And the powerful evocations of landscape and atmosphere which frequently open the stories serve to produce immediately, with neither complex action nor intrusive commentary, an unmistakable impression of what nature of things is about to befall the actors upon the scene. Among the characters themselves, the thematic suggestiveness of patterns is especially strong. Here one finds mysterious and often menacing figures, men like the demon lovers of balladry, who exercise a mesmerizing control over their victims and seem the very embodiment of some destructive force of fate. The remaining character types, on the other hand, are entirely of the human world--ranging from the quiet sufferers who courageously endure unmerited blows dealt them by fate to those individuals who by their own propensities for ambition, indecision, or exceptionally intense imagination help, for good or ill, to shape their own destinies. In Hardy's world, the results are usually "for ill," and to underscore the sobering plight of humanity, he exploits the suggestive power of even the smallest details and images, a collection of ironic emblems of the accidents and choices that determine people's lives.

Each of these devices will be addressed individually in the discussion which follows, the first three chapters being devoted to a consideration of the patterns that characterize, respectively, Hardy's favorite subjects, situations, and plot motifs; his most frequent manipulations of (and problems with) point of view; and his repeated

use of setting to create a telling atmosphere and tone. The next two chapters will treat the five most important and intriguing of Hardy's recurrent character types: in chapter 5, the demonic mesmerizers and the destructively ambitious characters; and in chapter 6, those figures I have labelled stoics, drifters, and (in a version of Hardy's own phrase) imaginative women. Chapter 7 will explore the image patterns and often striking use of emblems that punctuate the stories. And the culminating chapter on theme will discuss more explicitly Hardy's view of fate and universal human experience--the most pervasive "pattern" of all and, at once, both the major reason for and the most significant result of his repetitious use of all the others in telling his "Ancient Mariner's" tales.

The honest surveyor of these tales, however admiring, cannot escape the valid observation of his detractors that Hardy's achievement in them is uneven; but if, as one early essayist put it, the "short story is a tiny glowing stage, microcosm of our mortal existence, across which, from one invisibility to another, pass the little people of the play" ("Modern Short Story" 62), then the majority of Hardy's stories surely meet the requirements of the genre. For all their repetitious elements--and indeed, largely because of them--those stories and their characters focus attention with great sensitivity upon the most essential aspects of "mortal existence." Beneath the irony of often bizarre events and circumstances, one perceives in all the stories Hardy's deep and consistent sympathy for the very real disappointment, suffering, and even foolishness of human beings in an unkind world.

CHAPTER 2

PLOT: TYPICAL SITUATIONS AND THE ROLE OF COINCIDENCE

Much has been written about Thomas Hardy's penchant in his novels for involved plots laden with ironic chance occurrences and often bizarre twists in the fated lives of his characters. For many critics, such structural convolutions place too great a strain on credibility to make even the best of the novels entirely satisfactory, despite the force of their thematic and emotional impact. For those readers, the merit of that impact is diminished by their dissatisfied impression that "Plot was, for Hardy, the one thing needful" and that he was too often

carried away by his audacity. However interesting his theme, however true to life his characters, he insists on embroiling them in action so strange and tangled as to produce on the reader's mind an impression of artificial contrivance. (Beach, Technique 12-13)

Although there is much less criticism on the short stories than on the novels, the objections to intricate plots and fatal coincidences are perhaps even more adamant, considering the higher visibility of plot machinery in the shorter genre. In his essay on "English Short Fiction in the 19th Century," Wendell V. Harris finds in that machinery "a clear example of the unsophisticated approach it was still possible for an excellent writer to take toward the short story even in the 1880s and 1890s." Harris acknowledges the "picturesque local color" of Hardy's stories but complains that "the great majority are unsatisfying": "Again and again Hardy spun tales about potentially interesting situations that, despite the copious application of coincidence, remained lifeless because they were directed toward no central effect or theme" (47). Ironically, the same plot "weaknesses" raise precisely opposite objections from

other critics, who see the basic problem not in the absence of a central, Poesque effect or theme, but in a heavy-handed over-insistence on theme:

Hardy was so determined to show life as inescapably grim that he often wrenched probability to make the picture more horrifying. The pessimistic fatalism of his stories has a loud creak. Things will turn out badly for the chief characters, not necessarily because they are the kind of people who invite disaster, but because in a Hardy story they could not turn out otherwise. (Wain xviii)

There is no denying that Hardy's short story plots are filled with strange twists of fate and painful ironies of coincidence and circumstance; and a few do groan audibly under the weight. But, as I wish to demonstrate in this chapter, Hardy's manipulations of his plot devices, though oft-repeated and sometimes extreme, are seldom gratuitous. If they seem so to some scholars, it is perhaps because their view "pays too much attention to the outline of the story as planned by Hardy" and as reduced to paraphrase by critics, "and too little attention to the story itself," where the incidents may "cease to exist as so many cases of the author's wilful planning to become resonant parts of a meaningfully integrated whole" (Haarder 227). Here, indeed, is the key to Hardy's short stories. Reduced to plot summary, they can be rendered ridiculous; but when structure is treated as inseparable from the emotional content, they become effective expressions of Hardy's view of human experience. His plots are, frequently, "an agglomeration of incident and coincident" which makes the stories interesting, readable, and vigorously paced, even if sometimes "monstrously involved" (Wing, Hardy 26). But they are more. As Jean R. Brooks notes of all Hardy's fiction, a "strong plot . . . was Hardy's formal correlative for the tragic vision of man confronting his destiny" (16). This confrontation is the essential thing in the short stories, whether it consists of the agonized silence of acquiescence of a Sophy Twycott ("The Sons's Veto"); the impotent ragings of protest of a Ned Hipcroft ("The Fiddler of the Reels"); or the misguided and too-

long-postponed attempts at circumvention of a Maria Icenway ("The Lady Icenway").

Hardy himself perhaps best describes his conception of plot as realized in his stories. In a note dated April 1878, the same year that saw the magazine publication of the first of his stories that would eventually be collected, Hardy wrote:

A Plot, or Tragedy, should arise from the gradual closing in of a situation that comes of ordinary human passions, prejudices, and ambitions, by reason of the characters taking no trouble to ward off the disastrous events produced by the said passions, prejudices, and ambitions. (EL 157)

In almost all of Hardy's stories, it is just such a "closing in of a situation" that besets his characters. Very occasionally, the constriction is comic, as in "The Distracted Preacher" (WT) or "Tony Kytes, the Arch-Deceiver" (FCC). But usually, as Hardy's note suggests, such a plot is "tragic" and the effects of its ever-narrowing circumstances distressingly abrasive and often claustrophobically oppressive. Such is the grim imprisoning effect one senses, for example, in "Barbara of the House of Grebe" (GND), "A Tragedy of Two Ambitions" (LLI), and "On the Western Circuit" (LLI), in all of which the uncurbed force of the passions or ambitions of the central characters culminates in the virtual destruction of the characters themselves.

Actually, Hardy's note explains a good deal more about his short stories than just his view of plot-making. It does, certainly, indicate his reasons for using such a liberal hand with the strange, coincidental events that crowd his plots: they provide him with the means for "closing in" his situations. But it also suggests the nature of the situations themselves and of the types of characters they envelop. Both are infused with the ordinary but very powerful "passions, prejudices, and ambitions" which he insists can produce disaster, and he presents clearly the role the characters themselves play in determining their own destinies. Part, but not all, of life's misery

is due to the workings of blind Fate. It is the reflection of this view in all of Hardy's fiction that has led Roy Morrell to contend that Hardy did not believe, as so many scholars insist, "that the worst must happen, but that it could happen: and so could the best" (xi).¹ The passions themselves are creations and components of Nature, with its unconscious laws and indifference toward man's happiness, but the very fact of human consciousness--for all that Hardy deemed it a cruelly ironic achievement of evolution (Millgate, Biography 410)--allows for the possibility of individual exertion of control over passion. What Hardy's stories continually show, of course, is the further irony that passion is strong, that such conscious exertion is considerably weaker in most people, and that it is generally applied too late.

I mention these last several points, which lie ostensibly outside the realm of plot itself, in order to establish the nature of my discussion of plot in Hardy's short stories. As the preceding paragraph indicates, the basic patterns of situation and coincidence in Hardy's plots are inextricable from those of character and theme (and the methods of their presentation) that will occupy the remaining chapters of this study. Thus, while this chapter will discuss specifically the repeated subjects and plot devices that structure the stories, it will also serve as a broad introduction to the stories themselves, providing a useful frame of reference for the later analyses of all the other patterns and illustrating at the outset the variety and richness Hardy often achieved, paradoxically, through his adherence to such seemingly stock patterns.

Rather than begin my discussion of plot with a particular story, I think it helpful to draw attention first to an even more basic source of insight into Hardy's

¹ Morrell provides copious illustrations, especially from the novels, to show that, despite Hardy's ruthless use of coincidence, bad luck is not inevitable and "man has reprieves he fails to make use of" (51). The irony of the coincidences comes not from their occurrence, but from the fact that the characters often "give in just too soon" or throw away a chance to choose differently (42-43).

plot-making habits. Students of Hardy's short stories are fortunate in having at their disposal a small but intriguing collection of plot outlines and notes (dating from 1871 to 1916) for several short stories which Hardy never carried to completion. Spared from the huge bonfire at Max Gate which, at Hardy's direction, consumed so much of his notebook material and personal correspondence after his death, these notes were first published by Evelyn Hardy in The London Magazine in November 1958, and are now more readily available in F. B. Pinion's New Wessex Edition of Old Mrs. Chundle and Other Stories (117-28). Some of the later outlines are interesting for their experiments with point of view, but for the purposes of this chapter, the earliest of the group--plot "A"--is especially pertinent as a "bare-bones" illustration of almost all the major situations and devices that characterize the typical Hardy plot and of the options he was most likely to consider in terms of development. I quote the outline in full:

(i) Plot--Girl goes to be schoolmistress: leaves her village lover: loves a school-master: he meets old lady in cathedral: she proposes.

(ii) Plot--Violinist in country town: poorish: is going to marry neighboring village girl (school-mistress) or one of same town: loses his finger: hopeless case: strolls into cathedral or abbey: old lady meets him there, day after day: she proposes to him--he ascertains that her words are true--muses and muses and puts off [quick?] answer--at last he says he will marry her in a month: they marry privately: go away to her house. Another man, a school-master, who has long secretly loved the school-mistress now hopes to make way with her--but no: she is firm: meanwhile old lady's husband, the quondam violinist absents himself: she jealously watches him--after a deal of trouble traces him to the school of the town he left: before the lady has seen school-mistress latter leaves the place:

Schoolmaster, at loss of school-mistress, is disconsolate: goes looking for her: suspects the musician: goes to old lady's place (or better, is introduced as living there--a sad lonely man crossed in love): discovers her in beautifully furnished little place: old lady discovers her here (instead of at first school): this schoolhouse is either in the lady's own parish or the adjoining one according as the following is introduced, or not--When schoolmistress is discovered she vanishes: Old lady's husband affects to make love to the maid:

she is dismissed--a new one, prettier, yet chosen because husband says he doesn't like her.

The discovery first is that the 1st sweet heart here is chère amie of old lady's husband--then that she is really wife: old lady poisons herself: man convicted: dies: girl marries other lover.

Mysterious noises heard at the school (being the rich furniture) nobody, of course, ever goes upstairs in the schoolmistress's, and here is the furniture, plate, etc., jewellery. It is here she dresses to receive him: her evasions etc., to prevent people going upstairs: Could it be managed that she doesn't know he had actually married the other woman.

All the furniture of the lighter kind, because of getting it there. Old lady titled widow.

In opening, the description of schoolmistress's arrival, or house. state the government requirements--and that it argues well for the courage of English maids that (so many) are every year drafted off to lonely residence, etc. (OMC 117-18)

One can just trace here the progression of the standard short story plot from exposition to complication, climactic crisis, and dénouement. In its basic terms, this is generally the progression of Hardy's stories, too. But, as plot "A" demonstrates, in a Hardy story the "complication" stage occupies a considerable portion of the whole, and does so with perhaps more ironic convolutions than are usually met with in short fiction. In the specific convolutions of plot "A," furthermore, one finds almost every pattern in Hardy's repertoire. There is, of course, the fundamental situation of the love/marriage relationships which lies at the center of virtually all the short stories. And, as usual, it manifests itself in the geometric configuration of the triangle--or, in this case, a double triangle, with the schoolmistress linked both to the musician and his aristocratic wife and to the musician and the love-lorn schoolmaster. J. Hillis Miller has noted the consistency of this pattern in all Hardy's fiction; as he explains, the "most important and pervasive barrier between Hardy's lovers . . . is neither accident nor physical obstacle nor social convention, but the presence of a third person" (Distance and Desire 158). But, of course, these other typical obstacles take their toll on the lovers as well. Social convention demands for appearance's sake that the "titled" lady wed her poor, common lover in a private

ceremony (another favorite Hardy device), and it is the flouting of social law that condemns her bigamous husband to imprisonment and lonely death at the end.

Long before this point, however, the whole chain of events is set in motion by the chance intrusion of a physical obstacle into the marriage plans of the apparently well-suited and socially equal young couple. The violinist loses a finger. He suffers the very injury--of so many other possibilities--that could at one stroke inhibit his livelihood and his ability to support a wife. All that follows stems (typically) from this one tiny irony of fate. With so few characterizing details sketched in with the essential facts of the plot, it is difficult to know how much responsibility one might impute to the characters themselves. Nevertheless, those facts suggest strongly that the musician, far from bowing meekly beneath the hand of Fate, actively seizes and manipulates the other "chances" that come his way. Surprised by the proposal of a lonely, desperate old woman, he "muses" for some time before finally agreeing to marry her and "go away to her house." After-events, coupled with this careful deliberation, make one wonder if he had not the whole plan of the second secret marriage, financed by his first lady's fortune, already in his mind.

Certainly, the string of deceptions begins swiftly. The luckless schoolmaster is given little time, it seems, to win the young lady before his rival returns and whisks her away to the richly furnished lodgings he has prepared for her practically beneath his suspicious wife's nose. The more sharply ironic--even grotesque--ruse of actually installing his second wife under the roof of his first as a maid is introduced into the plot as an option and is the sort of twist that often appealed to Hardy as a means of heightening his thematic effects. But here, a second option seems to have supplanted the first in his own preference: near the end appears a description of the mistress-wife's hideaway and the notation, "Could it be managed that she doesn't

know he has actually married the other woman." Subtler, more credible, this option provides a more moving climactic effect, for the painful discovery of betrayal descends upon two women at once. With the first option, only the older woman suffers in this respect, for the masquerading maid could not but be aware of the true household relationships. And Hardy sought always for the particular plot twist that would express most intensely the ironies of character and circumstance that exercise such sway over human happiness. Thus, after a flurry of secret journeys, sudden disappearances and jealous pursuits which gather the four principals all in one place, the inevitable discoveries hasten a melodramatic end to the foregoing melodramatic events: two deaths, one a suicide and one the result of social retribution; and the belated reward of the pining suitor with the hand of his beloved. As in most Hardy plots, one is left with little sense of poetic justice, but rather with considerable doubt as to the happiness of a union in which the love may still be one-sided.

Though less important in terms of specific plot patterns than the points discussed above, one other aspect of the plot "A" outline is worth mentioning: Hardy's use of his own family background as artistic material. The two references are slight here, but both reflect experiences of great emotional importance to him. First, he makes his protagonist a country-town violinist, a role he filled himself with great pleasure in his youth, playing with his father and others at community gatherings and celebrations (EL 29-30). The other personal reference comes in the last paragraph, where Hardy makes a point of directing sympathy (for which none of the preceding outline has prepared us) toward the lonely plight of the schoolmistress and all her English counterparts. That plight was for a time that of his own sisters, a situation he deplored for the misery it caused them and from which he freed them as soon as he was financially able (Millgate, Biography 83, 213-14).

Despite the addition of these autobiographical touches, so bare an outline does little to explain Hardy's seeming dependence on the sort of melodramatic, even hackneyed plot elements from which plot "A" is constructed. For that explanation, one must turn to the stories themselves, for even one of his least successful illustrates how Hardy could flesh out and direct his skeleton plots so as to transcend, even as he repeated, those stock situations, achieving through them original and varied effects. Just such a story is "The Duchess of Hamptonsire" (GND), the earliest of Hardy's "collected" stories to be published.² Here are the familiar elements from plot "A": the happiness of young lovers spoiled by external forces; the mismating of social unequals in an unhappy marriage; the secret rendezvous of the first pair--though this time the elopement goes awry; the inflexible power of social convention and appearances in the characters' lives; and the sudden, ironic death toward which all these circumstances propel the human victim. In addition, there are several other important patterns not found in plot "A," but frequently met with in the other stories: the parental ambition which forces the heroine against her will into marriage with the cruel Duke--her unhappiness and mistreatment at his hands being judged of little consequence when weighed against the superficial glories of social advancement; the negotiations between parent and suitor which reduce the child to a bargaining chip; the cowardly sacrifice of the victim to her fate by the supposed "hero" on conventional moral grounds; and the touch of ironic grotesquerie in Hardy's having the girl's funeral service performed by the unworthy lover whom she has secretly followed in a desperate bid for freedom.

² In 1878, according to Purdy's Bibliographical Study 63-64, the story appeared in a shorter version under the title of "The Impulsive Lady of Croome Castle" in both England (Light) and America (Harper's Weekly); and again in a longer form, entitled "Emmeline; or Passion versus Principle," in America (Independent) in 1884. Hardy revised the story a third time when he added it and three others to the original half-dozen tales of A Group of Noble Dames in 1891.

The tide of melodrama runs high when the story is reduced in this way to its basic plot. Viewed as a whole, however, the story produces from the melodramatic elements some interesting and unexpected effects. The character of the Duchess, for example, is drawn with such broad strokes that she attains no real stature as an individual being, but rather remains a melodramatic archetype of the sweet, helpless victim of equally one-dimensional villains. Emmeline's simple nature, "bred in comparative solitude," confused by encounters with men, and marked by "a natural inappetency for evil things" (193), is caught in the cruel trap devised for her by her father--whose stern face "betokened none of those sympathetic traits whereon depends so much of a parson's power to do good among his fellow-creatures" (192)--and by the crude Duke, who is given to "good bomb-like oath[s]" and "the virtues of cock-fighting and baiting the bull" (191). With these flat, exaggerated characters, however, Hardy achieves a surprisingly moving evocation of the misery life held in store, even in the early nineteenth century, for many innocent girls who were, like Emmeline, auctioned off to the highest bidder by their socially ambitious parents. This effect arises in part from the absolute inflexibility with which the male authority of Emmeline's two persecutors is invested. Her father's procedure is "cold, hard, and inexorable" when he rejects the suit of Alwyn Hill, the handsome young curate Emmeline loves, and dismisses him from the parish. And even less movable is the Duke who, as "incontestably the head man in his county," has but to declare that "Emmeline Oldbourne must be his" for the statement to become fact (191, 193).

But the primary details that raise this part of the story's plot above mere formula are the images which describe Emmeline herself. Again and again, they present her as a powerless victim who nowhere encounters support or sympathy. When her lover is sent away, her unheeded sobs are likened to "the cries of the dying

in the din of battle" (194). Similarly, when the truth is revealed at the end of the story--that hers was the corpse over which Alwyn Hill had read the burial service aboard the Western Glory--Hill realizes that, after he had refused to help her escape from her brutal husband, she "must have followed at his heels silently through the darkness, like a poor pet animal that will not be driven back" (205). And the misery which led her to such desperate action is presented in terms which tellingly contrast her meek innocence to the less sensitive natures whose materialism would have made them better suited, or at least oblivious, to so coarse a husband:

Her maids and men said that she was in the habit of turning to the wainscot and shedding stupid scalding tears at a time when a rightminded lady would have been overhauling her wardrobe. She prayed earnestly in the great church-pew, where she sat lonely and insignificant as a mouse in a cell, instead of counting her rings, falling asleep, or amusing herself in silent laughter at the queer old people in the congregation, as previous beauties of the family had done in their time. She seemed to care no more for eating and drinking out of crystal and silver than from a service of earthen vessels. (195)

Deriving no comfort from her new wealth and stature, and unable to understand why trouble has come to her when she was "doing no harm, injuring no one, helping many people, and expecting happiness," Emmeline asks, "Can it be that God holds me in derision?" (197). But Hardy makes it clear that it is neither God nor Fate that ruins her happiness, but the combined selfishness of the only three men she knows, men whose controlling power it is beyond her limited strength and experience to resist. Thus defeated, she holds death to be preferable to continued life with a husband who takes apparently sadistic measures to force from her confessions of an infidelity she has not committed. These "strange scenes" the fastidious "quiet gentleman" who narrates the tale insists delicately "need not be detailed" (195); but there is in the tone of the passage a hint of the same grotesque psycho-sexual manipulation that dominates the most notorious of the Noble Dames

stories--"Barbara of the House of Grebe." Such perverse cruelty is, ironically, less blameworthy to the narrator than Emmeline's attempt to escape her tormenter. Although becoming a runaway wife is her only means of self-defense, he can only see, like Alwyn Hill to whom she appeals for assistance, that it "would look wrong" in the eyes of the world (197). Only after voicing this consideration does Alwyn remember hypocritically to invoke God's law, too, as he beats a hasty, selfish retreat.

That Hill's desertion of Emmeline is selfish and socially rather than morally motivated is borne out by the nature of the girl's request. She has not asked him to take her away as his mistress, but has asked merely to go "under your direction, or by your help in some way!" (196). Though Hill does not, apparently, share the narrator's callously conventional view--made clear in the narrative bridge at the end of the preceding story--that Emmeline's fate "ought to be quite clearly recognized as a chastisement" (188), he certainly shows that he is concerned with appearances rather than the girl's well-being, and that he is most anxious to avoid attaching to himself any suggestions of impropriety.

In fact, despite the emphasis upon Emmeline in its title and opening pages, the story finally has more to do with this undercutting of Alwyn Hill's character than with her melodramatic fate. Notwithstanding the detailed attention given over at the end to solving the mystery of her disappearance, Emmeline retires forever from the story's central focus at the precise moment that Hill bids her farewell and vanishes into the trees of her husband's estate. More than half the story remains, and from this point on, the narrator merges into Alwyn's consciousness and reveals irrefutably, albeit unwittingly, that the curate is woefully unlike the romantic hero Emmeline needed him--and he imagines himself--to be. George Wing observes this same failing in Alwyn in his recent article on the entire collection of Noble

Dames stories, writing of the young cleric that he "has no natural nobility" (83), but is marked by a "sickly romanticism" and "inadequacy and flaccidness of purpose which is far from being heroic" (84). More than anything else, this shift in the story's focus, with its continual ironic undercutting of romantic clichés, lifts the tale artistically, even if not brilliantly so, above its fundamentally stereotypical plot.

Hill immediately reveals his unworthiness of Emmeline's trust. Unaware that she is dying in the unsanitary hold of the same ship on which he has booked his escapist's passage to Boston, he indulges in some sentimental play-acting which proves the weakness of his love for the young Duchess. Even more important, it demonstrates the maudlin pleasure he extracts from imagining that what he actually feels is a fiery passion which only his moral fortitude and romantic stoicism have enabled him to combat so as to preserve their honor and their very souls. Whiling away the tedium of the long voyage, he "mechanically endeavor[s] to school himself into a stoical frame of mind" by means of his "strong moral staying power." He systematically frames "rules of conduct for reducing to mild proportions the feverish regrets which would occasionally arise and agitate him," "allowing himself now and then a few minutes' thought of Emmeline, with the strict yet reluctant niggardliness of an ailing epicure proportioning the rank drinks that cause his malady" (198).

After his arrival in America, Hill grows even more absurdly self-indulgent. Shaken in his religious beliefs, he turns his hand to teaching; but not for a moment does he drop his private role-playing. Instead, he fairly wallows in it, fashioning himself with great relish into a romantic, ever-suffering, yet ever-courageous martyr to his love, while the real victim becomes in his imagination a vague, static figure, about which lingers no trace of the original's fear and pain. All his spare moments are spent in composing "Lines to an Unfortunate Lady," and in contemplating

mournfully the "shades of his own life." Although he never expects to see Emmeline again, he passes nine years in this fashion. He wastes away his youth and his looks for a mere pretense which he has "enshrined," making of it "the kernel of his life, his secret, . . . kept as snugly shut up as though he had been dumb" (199). This is, indeed, a "sickly romanticism." Having rejected the real woman, he now all but rejects life itself, preferring to live in his cliché-ridden daydream, playing at love-sickness and producing "machine-made synecdoche, antithesis, and climax" (200).

Then, suddenly, a new possibility enters his life, by way of a typically mundane Hardyian coincidence: Hill discovers, in an English newspaper tossed aside months before, the obituary of the Duke of Hamptonshire. The language describing his response is ecstatically romantic. His mind luxuriates over the "thrilling information--rung with more passion-stirring rhythm than the collected cantos of all the poets"--and he dreams of Emmeline, "now as ever the one dear thing in all the world" to him (200). Immediately, he resolves to return to her. But when it comes to taking action rather than merely acting a part, Alwyn is the old Alwyn yet. His true emotions are less pressing than his imagined ones, and he begins to rationalize. First, he reasons that he cannot "abandon his professional work on the instant," but must postpone his joy four months more to "get really quite free." Then he persuades himself--with amazing obtuseness as to what would be the lady's probable feelings toward him had she survived his desertion--that

If she has continued to love me nine years she will love me ten; she will think the more tenderly of me when her present hours of solitude shall have done their proper work; old times will revive with the cessation of her recent experience, and every day will favour my return. (200)

Given all the delays and the duration of the voyage itself, his actual return comes a full year after the Duke's death. There is little suspense in the story. Most

readers surely will have guessed immediately the identity of the woman buried at sea ten years before. Consequently, the last few pages are the story's weakest, for the reader cannot share Hill's shock and dismay now at finding a stranger reigning in place of his own Duchess; and the painstakingly detailed account of his piecing together the puzzle of the latter's fate is merely tedious rather than intensely ironic. The few bright spots in those pages are the touches which maintain Hill's own self-romanticizing character. His shock is real when he learns that Emmeline lives no more. But it is his dream, not his heart, that is affected, and he needs only a moment to make the suitably romantic adjustment: "He was a man who had suffered, and he could suffer again" (202). He recalls reading the burial service over the dead girl "as the sun went down with a blaze in his face" (205), but here the vivid light symbolizes no sudden self-discovery, no compassionate recognition of her suffering, but merely another romantic picture of himself with which to fuel his imagination. The narrator is mistaken when he concludes his tale by claiming that "the ten years' chapter of Alwyn Hill's romance wound itself up under his eyes," terminated by the force of his discoveries (206). As he prepares to depart for America once more, Hill is not presented as a changed and chastened man; he is, on the contrary, shown as merely beginning the next "chapter" of his romance, in which he will play the part of the anguished, lonely lover whose love now transcends not only time and distance, but death itself. The irony of the story (and its principal merit) lies in the utter failure of its romantic "hero" and in his own absolute unawareness of his failure.

Time and again, Hardy gives his plots the kind of unexpected twist one sees in "The Duchess of Hamptonshire." He shifts the focus surprisingly or shines an ironic light from an unconventional angle to make of the stories as wholes more than is promised by their beginnings in a stereotypical framework. In treating an

admittedly minor story at such length, I hope also to have shown both the richness to be found even in Hardy's minor works and the impossibility of discussing his plots, as too many scholars are prone to do, in isolation from other vital concerns, such as characterization, imagery, perspective, and theme. He continually reuses devices and methods within all those aspects of his stories, but through their complex, inextricable relationships with one another, he derives art from repetition.

The most pervasive repetition in Hardy's stories, of course, is their continual emphasis upon marriage as the focal point of plot. More precisely, it is some manner of unhappiness in connection with marriage--as evidenced by plot "A" and "The Duchess of Hamptonsire"--that is the central plot pattern in all but a handful of Hardy's stories. (Of those few that center instead on tales of adventure or the supernatural, I shall have more to say in other chapters.) The focus upon a marriage plot was, of course, by no means unusual in Victorian fiction; it had long been a standard mode for English novelists. Thus, it is not surprising that when, in 1868, Hardy embarked upon his fiction-writing career with his never-published and later dismantled first novel, The Poor Man and the Lady, he should have affirmed to Alexander Macmillan the following as one of his considerations as he wrote that book: "as a rule no fiction will considerably interest readers poor or rich unless the passion of love forms a prominent feature in the thread of the story" (CL 1: 7).

The prevalence of the love/marriage plot in his short stories does more, however, than merely provide interest. Hardy uses it to direct the action so as to reveal those unexpected glimpses into character and theme noted above. Often, Hardy's manipulation of the traditional romantic love plot in his short stories disposes its "basic ingredients . . . in such a way as to undermine conventional views about 'right choices' and the equation of 'moral' behaviour with happiness" (Shaw

219).³ He succeeds in these subversive tactics most fully when he shows the misery his characters help fashion for themselves precisely because they are prompted by belief in the very values and conventions he is challenging. As Kristin Brady puts it, in reference to Life's Little Ironies, the tragedy emerges

not because people are repressed from outside by conventions, but because they themselves have been conditioned by their environments and social expectations to such an extent that they have internalized artificial social laws. . . . Their tragic hubris lies in the degree to which conventional beliefs, customs, and desires govern the ways they regard each other, construct their visions of happiness, make their sexual choices, and live their respective lives--trapped in the very cages of respectability they have built for themselves. (153)

What is true of Life's Little Ironies can be discerned in essentially all of Hardy's stories with love/marriage plots. But the matter is even more complex than Brady describes, for this overall pattern actually splits into several distinguishable sub-patterns. At times, the characters who have "internalized" social conventions most dangerously are not the principal figures in the marriage plot at all, but secondary personages who wield absolute power over at least one of those principals. These manipulators may be ambitious, match-making parents who disregard their child's happiness in order to procure for her position and fortune--as in "The Duchess of Hamptonsire" and that story of a luckier Dame, "The First Countess of Wessex." Elsewhere, the ambitions of other relations urge them either to promote a socially advantageous marriage, as do the Halborough brothers for their sister in "A Tragedy of Two Ambitions" (LLI), or to prohibit a lowly one, as does the insufferable Randolph Twycott when he ruins the remaining years of his

³ For similar views, see Brooks 145 and Brady 152. Brady's emphasis here is on this effect in the single volume of Life's Little Ironies, in which she sees Hardy deliberately blurring the "differences between good and evil, so strongly delineated in the conventional plots," so as to jar his readers from their moral complacency. His villains are outwardly respectable men of whom Victorian readers would generally approve, and his heroines display an unconventionally strong sexual instinct which in other contexts would inspire condemnation.

lonely, timid mother in "The Son's Veto" (LLI). In such decisive effects as these of social conditioning on human happiness, one sees clearly that "[s]ocial prejudice for Hardy could come to play a role similar to that of an indifferent 'fate' guiding his characters' lives" (Bohi 4).

When the "fateful" prejudice or ambition is that of a principal in the marriage plot, one is apt to see even more desperate maneuverings as the characters seek to protect and advance their own social standing. Prominent among these are the grotesque exertions "The Marchioness of Stonehenge" (GND) makes in ridding herself of all links to her ill-considered and soon-regretted secret marriage to a young man her social inferior. When he dies suddenly in her room, she drags his body through her parents' house, out the window, and across the park to his father's cottage, shrewdly remembering to lift him over the tell-tale gravel and to find the key and place it in his hand at his father's door. Anxious to preserve her social reputation and upward marriageability at all costs, she calculatingly bribes a local village girl to assume her roles both as widow and, unexpectedly, as mother. Similar concern with social appearances and advancement prompts "The Lady Icenway" (GND) to assume a false widowhood and to dismiss haughtily the rich husband who has involved her in a bigamous marriage. Her "moral" outrage at his deception does not, however, prevent her practicing the same deception on the "excellent man of ancient family and possessions" who soon after offers her "a title, in which she much rejoiced" (142). And later, in what was surely a shocking moment for Hardy's Victorian readers, she desperately thinks to strengthen her position with the aging and disgruntled Icenway by conceiving an "heir" for him with the assistance of her first, still-adoring husband. Only the latter's sudden death forestalls her planned deception of both men. These instances of such "internalized" concern for social

appearances illustrate just how unrespectable the pursuit of external respectability can leave a person, or in the words of the sentimental Field Club member at the end of Lady Stonehenge's story, "how an honest human affection will become shamefaced and mean under the frost of class-division and social prejudices" (111).

Sometimes, though, Hardy shows that it is not so much ambition and class-prejudice as self-preservation and societal expectations that lock people into unrewarding marriages. While the pretty maid, Anna, in "On the Western Circuit" (LLI), is attracted to Charles Raye at first because he is "so genteel that [he] must have plenty of money" and later because his worldly ways have seduced her "body and soul" (114, 119), her most urgent motive for securing him in marriage is the "shameful" pregnancy for which she is compelled to leave the proper household in which she serves. The appalling prospect of permanent ostracism is what persuades both the desperate girl and her mistress to begin the deceptive correspondence that ultimately restores Anna's reputation in the eyes of the world by making her Mrs. Charles Raye. But, significantly, even as it brings security, the coveted stamp of social approval destroys happiness; for, though her husband is "a god" to her (137), Anna is to him a peasant galley slave to whom he is chained forever and whom he despises for not being the sensitive, literate woman he has imagined.

That woman is his correspondent, Edith Harnham, who is also trapped in a loveless marriage. Older and less attractive than her maidservant, Edith has succumbed to a different kind of social pressure in consenting to marry an "elderly wine-merchant." Guided by parental prejudice against "free womanhood" (125), she now finds herself doomed to a life with neither emotional nor sexual fulfillment. But, ironically, the loneliness and thwarted desire which urge her to continue the exchange of love-letters with Raye merely descend upon her with a hundred times

their original devastating weight when the deception is inevitably exposed and the passion she has now tasted lies as far as ever from her reach. She cannot escape her initial mistake of accepting, like Ella Marchmill, her counterpart in "An Imaginative Woman," the social "necessity of getting life-leased at all cost" (LLI 4).

Like Edith, Ella has married a man who is vaguely polite at times, but generally self-involved with his own creature comforts, and entirely unsuited to her emotionally and intellectually. And though Ella has the emotional outlet of motherhood not open to Edith, she too escapes into a romance of her own creation. Her case is even more extreme, however, for Ella never meets or even sees (save in a photograph) the young poet upon whom she lavishes all her frustrated passion and for whom, finally, she rejects life itself. Moved to hysterical grief by the news of his suicide, she is physically as well as mentally consumed by her fantasy; and, finding nothing in her real, oppressively conventional life (not even the birth of her fourth child) as emotionally satisfying, she follows him into death.

Just as social considerations can lead Hardy's people to ignore passion until it is too late, however, so can passion lead them to flout social laws too unguardedly. Neither extreme, as his stories demonstrate, is conducive to happiness. Hardy felt strongly that in fiction "the passions ought to be proportioned as in the world itself" and the "catastrophes" to which they can lead be "based upon sexual relations as it is" (Personal Writings 127, 128), but the sexual instinct was to his mind also not just a natural and very real part of life, but in its power akin to the power of Fate, impeding the ability of men and women to see clearly and act wisely when making their choices in love and marriage. Often, his characters find that too precipitous a surrender to the impulse of sexual passion leaves them as dissatisfied with their choices as adherence to social dicta leaves his more conventional figures, usually, in

fact, bringing them quickly and disillusioningly face-to-face with the social repercussions of their rebellion. This is the dilemma central to most of Hardy's tales structured around the plot patterns of secret marriages, elopements, and seductions.

Usually, the dilemma arises because a character has, like Ella Marchmill and Edith Harnham, conceived a desire for greater romance and passion than is available in her world. Of these characters, the dairymaid Margery Tucker alone escapes relatively unscathed. Dazzled by the wealthy and mysterious Baron von Xanten and by the treasures she observes at the Yeomanry Ball to which he escorts her, Margery is almost spoiled for contentment in life as wife to plain Jim Hayward, master lime-burner. But at the end of her "Romantic Adventures of a Milkmaid" (CM), the Baron resists the temptation to spirit Margery away on his yacht and returns her instead to her dull, but worthy husband. Although she feels no passion for Jim and still daydreams occasionally about the man with whom she would have eloped had he pressed her, Margery is happy enough with her baby and with the fine furniture provided by the Baron to help Jim win her. Other characters are less fortunate. When Car'line Aspent indulges her passion for the "Fiddler of the Reels" (LLI), Mop Ollamoor ruthlessly seizes control of her will. Long after he has lured her from the simple man who loves her, seduced her and left her pregnant, and finally deserted her entirely, Mop's hypnotic music and demonic personality retain their effect upon her. But as the object of her passion assists her in no way, she finds that for stability, compassion, and restored honor, she and her child must turn to the very man whose unromantic, but socially endorsed proposal of marriage she had spurned four years before. By then, Ned's love for Car'line has faded considerably through Mop's interference, and though their marriage gives Car'line the security she needs, the destructive power of her past indiscretion seems inescapable: the

fiddler intrudes one last time to rob them of Carrie, disappearing forever with the little girl who has alone brought the warmth of family affection to their union.

The seekers of romance in Hardy's world often find that they are finally left with nothing. When Phyllis Grove is callously neglected by Humphrey Gould, her faithless--though socially superior--fiancé, and left to languish in the lonely home of her irritable, reclusive father, it is little wonder that she loses her heart to "The Melancholy Hussar" (WT) who appears with such radiance upon the scene. In her isolation, Matthäus Tina seems little less than a fairy-tale hero, and he finds in her loneliness the complement to his own wretched homesickness. Yet when they grasp at happiness by planning a dramatic elopement, they are disastrously forestalled by the coincidental return of Humphrey Gould. Dutifully abandoning her chance at love, the heartbroken Phyllis discovers too late Gould's duplicity in secretly wedding another; and owing, ironically, to the moments of delay occasioned by her honorable gesture toward Gould, Tina and his companion are captured and executed for desertion. Thus, betrayed by one man and the unwitting means of another's betrayal, Phyllis lives out her days a lonely woman, the object of unkind gossip in a community which has begrudged her both the socially prohibited liaison with the soldier who might have brought her happiness and the initial legitimate engagement to a man regarded as too good for one of her social sphere.

Equally disastrous are the social and emotional repercussions of romantic impulsiveness in "Barbara of the House of Grebe" (GND). At first passionately absorbed in her elopement with the handsome Edmond Willowes, the heroine soon comes to share something of her parents' dissatisfaction with her young husband's social and educational inferiority. And, when he returns from the travels intended to perfect him, horribly disfigured by the blaze from which he bravely rescued many

others, the shallow girl cannot bear to live with him again or even look at him without his former external perfections. Her fastidious passion revives when she belatedly receives the Adonis-like statue which reproduces those perfections; but, by this time, the worthy young man is dead and Barbara has succumbed to aristocratic ambitions and married the sadistic Lord Uplandtowers, who makes it his one goal to destroy her early attraction forever and attach his wife's heart and mind to none but himself. The hideous cruelty of his procedure very nearly destroys her mind as well. By forcing the terrified woman to gaze night after night upon the statue he has mutilated to reproduce Willowes's ghastly injuries, Uplandtowers succeeds in driving the romantic fantasies from her forever. But he also finds himself unexpectedly burdened with a too clinging wife whose broken-spirited, yet undeniable attachment to him yields in the years before her death but one living child--a girl--out of eleven exhausting pregnancies.

The fatal combination of romantic dreams and social ambitions appears most painfully perhaps in what is Hardy's most convoluted tale of disappointment in love. In "The Waiting Supper" (CM), the socially unequal protagonists come agonizingly close to marriage several times, but are never actually united. After a botched attempt to be wed in secret, Nicholas Long and Christine Everard are pushed apart by the lady's growing romantic desire for a more worldly suitor. Like Barbara Willowes, Christine believes that an educational tour of Europe would give Nic the necessary polish; but, hesitant to leave his beloved, the young farmer unwittingly opens the door for the socially superior and very worldly Mr. Bellston. Aided by a series of misunderstandings and coincidental mishaps, the vacillating lovers seal their own fate: Nic departs angrily on his tour; Christine marries Bellston, who squanders her fortune and deserts her; after fifteen years Nic returns a wealthy

cosmopolite to court his sweetheart anew; and their marriage is again prevented, this time by the last-minute return of the husband they had assumed dead. Although Bellston is drowned that very night, their ignorance of the fact keeps them apart until they are too old, when the truth is discovered, to care for upsetting the sad, but comfortable routine of friendship which has gradually replaced their passion.

Though "The Waiting Supper" ends sadly with the implication of wasted lives, Nicholas and Christine have at least the consolation of a sincere, abiding friendship such as is rarely a part of the marriages in Hardy's stories. (The relationships between the cheerful lawyer Downe and his two successive wives, in the Wessex Tale "Fellow-Townsmen," are apparent exceptions, but they are secondary to the miserable union of Barnet and his arrogant, upper-class wife.) Occasionally, however, in his exploration of human character, Hardy introduces a more ominous note than mere incompatibility into the marital relationships he presents. The jealousy which prompts such sadistic responses as those of Lord Uplandtowers and the Duke of Hamptonshire, to what they know to be infidelities in thought only, provokes even more extreme reactions from husbands who suspect infidelity in deed as well. In "What the Shepherd Saw" (CM), the hot-tempered Duke who witnesses but cannot overhear the innocent meeting on Marlbury Downs between his wife and her imprudent cousin, Captain Fred Ogbourne, automatically assumes the worst. A haughty, impatient man, the Duke is convinced instantly by appearances and, bent on avenging his honor, attacks Ogbourne without warning the next night and murders him brutally. Like those other arrogant noblemen, the Duke ruthlessly exercises his own version of justice. But when, to his surprise, he finds the Duchess awaiting him at home, ready with welcoming words and a full confession of the previous night's rendezvous, the realization of his groundless suspicions destroys him

rather than his wife. Under the weight of his crime, the Duke gradually withers from a robust autocrat to the pathetic skeleton of a man by the time his debilitating secret is revealed twenty-two years later.

Not murder, but forgery is the crime to which impetuosity and belief in his wife's infidelity lead Timothy Petrick in the bizarre psychological tale "Squire Petrick's Lady" (GND). Convinced by her deathbed confession that the child to which his wife has just given birth is not his own, Petrick immediately encourages his grandfather to alter his will "so as to dish the intruder" (155). However, upon discovering after the old man's death that his wife once loved a handsome aristocrat, Timothy begins to regret his precipitancy in dispossessing little Rupert, whom he is now certain has flowing in his veins the blue blood of the Marquis of Christminster. Filled now with absurd admiration for his wife's "grand instincts" (158) in thus ennobling the common Petrick line (comprised largely of grasping lawyers and usurers), Timothy forges the date on his grandfather's first will to bring the family fortune back to his beloved Rupert. The great irony of the story, however, and of Timothy's character, comes in the final coincidental twist of the plot when he learns that his wife was hereditarily prone to delusions, that the glorious Marquis had been abroad when Rupert was conceived, and that the boy is, in fact, his own flesh and blood. Perversely, it is not the earlier assumed cuckoldry, but the discovery that his son is his own legitimate heir and not a nobleman's bastard that leaves Timothy feeling a "bit unmanned" (161). And in his worst crime of all, he rejects his natural affection for the boy, regarding him coldly as an "imposter" (163) as he recognizes his own broad family features establishing themselves in the youth's face. As with the murderous Duke, it is Squire Petrick's own unreasonable assumptions about and responses to appearances and events that leave him a broken man.

The point is an essential one. For, however strange, convoluted, or incredible the events and coincidences in Hardy's plots, the real importance for Hardy lay not in them, but in the reactions to them of his characters, of human nature itself when confronted with an extreme situation. And yet the continual development of extreme situations is as insistent a plot pattern in the short stories as the emphasis on love/marriage relationships, and it requires equally serious consideration for its implications about theme and character. One must remember that the challenge Hardy felt as a writer of fiction was that of striking a balance between what he called the genre's "real, if unavowed, purpose . . . [of giving] pleasure by gratifying the love of the uncommon in human experience" and its responsibility to present characters the reader could believe in as ordinary human beings, "true and real like himself." Thus, he maintained that in "working out this problem, human nature must never be made abnormal. . . . The uncommonness must be in the events, not in the characters" (EL 193-94). Perhaps the most remarkable of Hardy's achievements is the consistency with which he manages to strike this balance, commanding belief in and sympathy for his characters despite the profuseness with which he pours out "his coincidences, his marvelous juxtapositions, his catastrophes" (Personal Writings 111). To him, the latter extremes of plot helped make a story "worth the telling"; they could embroil his personages in character-revealing predicaments such as Squire Petrick's or Phyllis Grove's in a way that the things of life which a reader "can get at first hand anywhere around him" could never do (LY 158).

Of course, not all of Hardy's readers have been comfortable with his use of the "uncommon." Several critics feel that his "sensational incidents . . . point in too obvious a manner to his views" (Cassis 296), or that he sometimes "spoils the truth of his stories by piling up malevolent turns of chance" (Beachcroft 113). Even the

largely admiring Lord David Cecil asserts that Hardy's "love of sensational plots makes him succeed better in a novel than in a short story," since there is so little time in a short story for him "to create the atmosphere that might persuade us into believing it" (76n.). But for Hardy, the sensational, the coincidental, the grotesque even, were ways of getting at universal truths in his fiction; and in order to appreciate his artistic vision, readers must be prepared, as Cecil himself ultimately admits, "to swallow" those improbable elements in his plots (60). Hardy vehemently disliked the methods of the realists whose school of fiction was displacing the more romantic tradition from which his own work sprang.⁴ Their copious, photographic detailing of ordinary things seemed to him unselective and thus thematically and artistically unemphatic. In a note recorded in Early Life, he wrote:

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 be overlooked. Hence, 'realism' is not Art. (299)

The remainder of this chapter will examine the role of coincidence in Hardy's stories, the major patterns of chance and of the often associated grotesquerie that take shape in his plots through this kind of deliberate disproportioning. Far more than mere sensationalism, these disproportionings serve precisely the purpose Hardy describes here: they spotlight dramatically the essential realities of experience.

For some chance events in the stories, one need not look, perhaps, even to artistic disproportioning for explanation. As Walter Allen writes, in connection with Hardy's novels, "It is silly to blame Hardy for the emphasis he places on coincidence;

⁴ Albert J. Guerard devotes much of his book on Hardy to a discussion of Hardy's peculiar but "deliberate anti-realism" (3) and argues that his "symbolic use of mischance and coincidence carry us no small distance toward the symbolic use of the absurd in our own time" (ix). Such anti-realism defines for Guerard the cosmic absurdity that is Hardy's vision of life, the "weakness of human longing and planning in the face of senseless process" (88).

simply, he believed in coincidence" (English Novel 239). He knew that strange accidents and unexpected convergences of events could and did happen in everyday life. And in this vein one may accept without much protest that all three of Tony Kytes's jealous sweethearts should ask him for rides on the same afternoon and end up hiding from one another in his wagon; that witnesses to Baptista Trewthen's secret marriage and to Lady Caroline's disposal of her husband's body should surface later to complicate those ladies' lives; that Margery Tucker should happen to break fence to hurry home across the Baron's estate just in time to prevent his suicide; and perhaps even that it should be Lady Baxby's own Parliamentary brother who is sent to lay siege to her Royalist husband's castle.

Most Hardyian coincidences, however, place a greater strain on credulity when considered in strict terms of probability. Is it not too incredible that the note Margery receives from the Baron should request her promised visit on the very morning that marriage to Jim Hayward is to secure her from the Baron's reach; that Ella Marchmill's family should happen to rent the very rooms at Solentsea generally occupied by the poet she so reveres; that Mr. Barnet should receive the letter announcing his wife's death just as his beloved Lucy has gone to church to marry Charles Downe; or that the paper containing Luke Holway's last wish to be buried at the crossroads beside his father should be blown to the floor out of sight until he has already been interred in the churchyard? These events obviously move beyond the surprising, but fairly frequent oddities of day-to-day coincidence. They are Hardy's deliberate disproportionings of reality and must be viewed in light of the essential truths they are designed to illustrate--truths of human character and destiny.

For instance, in "The Romantic Adventures of a Milkmaid" (CM), it is Margery's response, not the coincidental timing of the Baron's note itself, that is

important. Granted, she has given the Baron her word to come to him should he send for her; and he does, in his characteristically gloomy ennui, give the note a vague sense of urgency by alluding to his past suicidal tendencies. But he also asks clearly that she call just "for five minutes as soon as possible" (354). There is no reason for Margery to abandon her wedding plans to keep so brief and indefinite an appointment. All the preparations have been made, at some expense, and the date chosen specifically so as "not to hinder much time" for guests or groom "at this busy season of the year" (355). Margery would be more than justified in sending a note of her own to inform the Baron of the situation and arrange another time for their meeting. Such action would be reasonable, but Margery wants romance and glamor, not reasonableness. Quite simply, she does not want to marry ordinary Jim whom she has known all her life; and the Baron's coincidental summons gives her the excuse she needs, however flimsy, to make her escape at the last moment. There is far more of personality than of fateful chance at work here.

Revelation of character is likewise the purpose behind the opening coincidence of "An Imaginative Woman" (LLI). The narrator explains at the outset that Ella Marchmill, wife of a matter-of-fact tradesman, keeps "her heart alive" by "letting off her delicate and ethereal emotions in imaginative occupations, day-dreams, and night-sighs" (4). But her reaction to finding herself temporarily in the lodgings of the poet she respects--but until now has regarded mainly as a rival--demonstrates the escapism and extreme imaginativeness that dominate her character. She longs to be in love with a sensitive, intellectual man, and the sheer accident of being "surrounded noon and night" by Robert Trewe's books and clothes and poetic scribbles on the wallpaper is the very thing to set her imagination to work fashioning this stranger into the ideal lover of her dreams. The coincidence

makes possible the story's vivid illustration of Ella's nature, of the human "instinct to specialize a waiting emotion on the first fit thing that [comes] to hand" (11). In addition, the series of tantalizing near misses that prevent her ever actually meeting Trewe serves to emphasize how completely unrealistic and ultimately unfulfilling her fantasies are. Thus, by the time one reads the final ironic coincidence, that the poet has committed suicide precisely because he has found no "female friend . . . tenderly devoted to [him]," one is not really disposed to believe that Ella Marchmill could have saved him had they only met. Both characters are dreaming of some perfect, "unattainable creature" (25) who will magically fill their emptiness and sweep away all their dissatisfaction with life. It seems unlikely that real human beings, however sensitive, could have provided such imagined happiness.

Similar doubt complicates the irony of coincidence in "Fellow-Townsmen" (WT). It is certainly outrageously ironic that Barnet should receive together the letters which inform him of his wife's death and invite him to Lucy and Downe's wedding--which, in effect, free him one moment to marry Lucy and, the next instant, cruelly snatch her again from his reach. Sympathy for Barnet as a victim of "Fate" is limited, however, because he has two other opportunities in the story to make Lucy his wife, at which points little besides his own impulsiveness and uncertainty stands in his way. He first allows a trivial lover's quarrel and vague social ambitions to separate him from Lucy and then, at the end of the tale, accepts too quickly her startled refusal of his renewed proposal. These failures to overcome manageable obstacles in order to attain his prize make one wonder if what he really values most is not the woman herself but her unattainability. Like Alwyn Hill in "The Duchess of Hamptonshire," Barnet seems almost to enjoy the melancholy role of suffering lover into which chance, circumstance, and character have cast him.

Sometimes, of course, chance and coincidence do take matters out of the characters' hands and reveal how much of life Hardy felt to be beyond human control or comprehension.⁵ The accident which circumvents Luke Holway's burial instructions in "The Grave by the Handpost" (CM) is the last of many bitterly ironic coincidences that make Samuel Hynes claim that "the defeat of worthy human motives by mere chance is the whole point" of the story (xxiv). Such a claim is too extreme, however, in that it disregards the part played in that defeat by the characters' own choices and actions. Luke and his father have misjudged each other in the past, both acting rashly when faced with Luke's misery in pursuing the military life his father had found so agreeable: the son's angry letter, regretted too late, has led the older man to suicide. Furthermore, the Chalk-Newton villagers have inadvertently provoked Luke's suicide by first promising to remove Samuel Holway's corpse to consecrated ground and then--through numerous delays and natural aversion to the gruesome task of disimpaling the body--leaving it until it is too late. But at the end, Fate does step in to deal the final blow. Attempting in death symbolically to atone for the pain he caused his father, Luke wishes humbly to lie beside him in the ignominious grave at the crossroads. That a trifling coincidence like a gust of wind should be sufficient to frustrate utterly the finest human feelings and here extend into death the misunderstandings between a genuinely loving father and son, is for Hardy that aspect of the "laws & nature of the Universe" which made him regard it as so "ghastly a business"--"the non-necessity of it" (CL 3: 5).

Nevertheless, he found in that ghastliness a boundless source of artistic inspiration. The observation of cosmic irony "aroused Hardy's powers as a dramatist

⁵ Mary Caroline Richards sees these elements as a kind of "wanton 'providence,'" not "simply chance, but evidence of the workings of an agency not discernible by mankind." "Thomas Hardy's Ironic Vision: Part Two," Nineteenth-Century Fiction 4 (1949): 26.

and stylist as nothing else could" (Guerard 87). Nowhere is this effect more evident than in the category of coincidences that merge into the grotesque. The bizarre incongruities of the grotesque, with its emphasis upon the fantastic, abnormal, and unexpected, could not but appeal to a man who based his art on the disproportioning of reality. Many scenes in Hardy's stories have the same touch of the macabre or perverse which Richard Carpenter recognizes in the grotesquerie of the novels, in the "violent connections between the real and unreal, the mundane and the surrealistic" ("Gurgoyles" 226). In one respect, the often horrific effect of such grotesque connections "deforms the texture of human experience and distorts the natural character of human responses" (Scott 375). In working these distortions, however, the pressure of the unexpected also, paradoxically, clarifies the essential nature of the characters' motives and personalities. George Wing comments similarly on this favorite device of Hardy's, insisting that the very grotesqueness of the stories "intensifies, for the modern reader, their ultimate reality." The abnormal situations are a "means of stripping down pretensions," and under their stress, "the human character is shown more starkly, and perhaps with shrewder perception and with deeper meaning" (Hardy 22).

Such is the effect of grotesque coincidence on characterization and theme in "The Withered Arm" (WT), a story in which Hardy weaves together inextricably threads of realism and supernaturalism, the ordinary and the perverse, rational causality and irrational accident. Aside from the bizarre central incident of seeming telepathy by which Rhoda Brook causes Gertrude Lodge's arm to wither, the most grotesque element in the story is the desperate point to which Gertrude is finally driven in search of a cure. Once practical and generous, she becomes increasingly superstitious, finally believing that her one hope lies in touching her withered limb

to the neck of a man who has been hanged. So thoroughly convinced is she that this will "turn the blood" and restore her beauty that she "well-nigh longed for the death of a fellow-creature" (96). Hardy adds to this bit of grotesquerie the extra twist of ironic coincidence that reveals the hanged man to be the illegitimate son of Gertrude's husband and Rhoda Brook. To some scholars, this coincidence seems contrived, over-ingenuous, and "incompatible with the homely local color" which they see as the story's "one superior feature" (Harris 48). Against such a view, one might argue that Hardy has provided a degree of realistic preparation for the boy's execution, through the earlier reference to his practice of poaching to help support his mother and himself. But the crucial point behind the climactic coincidence is symbolic, not realistic in the sense of probability.

Truly important for the first time to the meaning of the story, the boy becomes at the end a symbol of the barriers, social and personal, that have led to all the suffering. Most obviously, he is the product of Farmer Lodge's casual seduction and desertion of Rhoda Brook, an affair from which Lodge emerges unscathed, but which apparently initiates Rhoda's poverty-stricken estrangement from the community. To Gertrude, disfigured by her rival's vengeful jealousy, Rhoda's son becomes a painful reminder of her own estrangement from Lodge. Though illegitimate, the boy is the son, and potential heir, which she cannot provide her husband--the one thing, that is, short of regaining her beauty, that might rekindle in Lodge the "love" and approval by which she defines herself. And to Lodge himself, the hanged boy is an ironic chastisement for his taking no responsibility for his son until time and events render the gesture meaningless. In the final grotesque confrontation of the principal characters beside the dead boy's body, Hardy presents human nature reduced to its most elemental, self-absorbed emotions: Rhoda's

jealous rage; Lodge's guilt-induced anger; and Gertrude's helpless terror and despair. An innocent victim like the boy, Gertrude lacks the emotional strength to do battle with those who have wronged her, and she, too, soon lies dead.

Exploring the extent of a character's emotional resilience and stamina is often the purpose behind Hardy's use of the grotesque: "he loves to drag his personages into bizarre situations, where they grow desperate or light-headed, where circumstances stand to them in strong contrast, mark their isolation, prove their weakness or their strength" (Macdonnell 70). And certainly, not all of them succumb weakly like Gertrude Lodge. Some characters respond with surprising ingenuity and presence of mind to their stressful circumstances. Such is the case with the spunky heroine in "Netty Sargent's Copyhold" (ECC). Frustrated by her uncle's procrastination in renewing the lifehold deed to the house built by her great-great-grandfather, Netty almost loses her home to the greedy Squire of the manor. The real crisis comes when, after finally setting the business in motion, old Sargent dies just hours before the Squire's agent is to bring the deed for his signature. Clever and courageous, however, Netty is more than equal to this cruel turn of events. By the time the agent arrives, she has set the scene and prepared the script for a little drama which deceives him completely. Convinced by her respectful demeanor and strategic description of her frail uncle's terror of "law business" (256), the agent agrees to "witness" the necessary signature through the parlor window. From that distant vantage point, he watches unsuspectingly as Netty guides the dead man's hand and pen at the little table where she has placed his body (back to the window) in thoughtful repose over his Bible.⁶

⁶ Ruth Firor suggests in reference to Netty's trick that the "folk-belief that the signature of a person not yet cold in death, is valid in law may be a relic of sympathetic magic." Folkways in Thomas Hardy (1931; New York: Perpetua-Barnes, 1962) 251. Though such a notion may have been in Hardy's

This kind of performance is yet another favorite device of Hardy's, one which Alexander Fischler describes, in his essay on Hardy's "Theatrical Techniques," as a "tour de force of stage setting, blocking, and character placement" (437). Fischler's emphasis, however, is on the author's "stage" arrangements and on his frequent use of an unseen observer. But in "Copyhold," the grotesque scene is arranged not merely by the author for his characters, but by one of the characters herself in order to manipulate people and events to her own benefit. Such creative cooperation intensifies both the truths revealed about Netty's personality and the irony of what follows her success. By asserting her intelligence and independence, Netty has secured not only her home, but also the man she has desired as a husband--and for whom, more than for herself, she has circumvented the letter of the law. Jasper Cliff, however, is a mercenary lout who takes to beating his wife once he has secured through her the house and land he covets. Here again is Hardy's recognition of the unreliability of sexual attraction: through it, Netty forfeits some of her independence. As the point is only briefly mentioned, though, the emphasis in this short sketch remains predominantly on the comic--an element which is always present in the grotesque but seldom foremost in Hardy's stories.

More often, under Hardy's direction and in the scenes staged deliberately by his characters, the device turns grisly. One such instance has already been mentioned in connection with "The Marchioness of Stonehenge" (GND)--Lady Caroline's nocturnal disposal of her husband's corpse. Motivated by the suddenness of the youth's demise in her unsuspecting parents' house, however, that grotesque scene arrangement on the lady's part is necessarily rather impromptu. More grimly

mind, there is little indication that Netty is thinking of magic or even of so dubious a moral/legal justification of her act. To her, it is merely a practical way out of her difficulties.

deliberate, if less immediately repulsive, is the scene in which she persuades the village girl to assume her role as widow. Well aware of Milly's unrequited love for the young man, Lady Caroline shrewdly arranges to meet the girl at his grave just after sunset. She calculatingly chooses the one place where Milly's sense of loss will be most acute and the time of dusk, which will both conceal their meeting from casual observation and work upon Milly's perceptions less rationally than full daylight. This ingenious stage-setting works upon Milly even more powerfully than Lady Caroline has anticipated. Standing upon her lover's grave, Milly is drawn willingly into a grotesque wedding ceremony: the real widow slips her wedding ring onto the trembling girl's finger, bestows upon her all the trinkets ever given her by the young man, and, in short, makes of Milly "a corpse's bride." The scene demonstrates in under two pages not only Lady Caroline's composure and ingenuity under pressure, but also the ease with which such a love as hers can be shed in contrast to the depth of feeling which binds Milly blissfully to a man she had "vainly idolized" in life (103).

The notorious character-staged scene designed in "Barbara of the House of Grebe" to dissolve a similar imaginative attachment has already been touched upon briefly, and I will have more to say of it later in a discussion of Lord Uplandtown's character. Although most critics regard this scene--with its mutilated shrine and brutal system of psychological torture--as the most horrifying instance of the grotesque in Hardy's short fiction, there is another, briefer and less well-known, but just as ghastly. The scene appears in "The Doctor's Legend" (QMC), one of the tales Hardy chose not to collect but which one critic at least considers superior to "Barbara" (Weber, Revenge Is Sweet 14-15).⁷ James Scott, on the other hand,

⁷ Weber is more generous in his assessment of all the uncollected tales than most critics. He contends that they were omitted from the final collected volume, A

equates the two tales, commenting briefly that in both, the "horror . . . results from a well-planned revelation scene" (376). His emphasis, however, like Fischler's noted above, falls on Hardy's planning, on his manipulation of the Gothic grotesqueries and eerie lighting, rather than on the character's own part in staging the scene.

The story focuses on a fiendishly ambitious Squire whose jealous love of his own property and contempt for his social inferiors are so strong that he forbids the latter access to "his private grounds except on pressing errands" and eventually, when he has added an Abbey to his estates, has the village "carted . . . bodily away" to free himself of the unwelcome "proximity of its inhabitants" (41, 46). In his violent dislike of intruders, he one day terrifies into an epileptic fit a little girl, only child of a poor village woman, who has unthinkingly trespassed onto his lawn. The encounter destroys the child's sanity and health; her teeth and hair fall out, and owing to her now "cadaverous hue," she acquires the nickname "Death's Head" (43).

Inflamed with hatred for her daughter's persecutor, the mother awaits her opportunity for revenge, but ironically, when the moment comes, she capitalizes eerily on the very disfigurement she so bitterly resents and blindly duplicates the Squire's victimization of an innocent mother and child. Crossing the churchyard with her daughter one night, under a "full harvest moon" (43), she chances to see the Squire's kind new wife returning from her parish-visits by way of the path beside the churchyard wall. So filled with rage is the vengeful mother now that she perceives

Changed Man, not necessarily because Hardy meant to suppress them, but more likely because he had kept insufficient records of when and where he had first published them and was thus unable to locate them all, especially those published in America (8). Regarding "The Doctor's Legend," he argues, on the basis of its narrative frame and its reference to the Earl of Dorchester's family history, that the story was probably intended for A Group of Noble Dames, but was omitted because Hardy was "unwilling to risk offending another" noble Dorset family as he had done with "The First Countess of Wessex" (13-14). See Purdy, Bibliog. Study 299, for a similar explanation.

neither the charitableness of the Squire's lady nor her innocence in the little girl's misfortune, but instead, acts immediately on her inspiration. She crosses the graves to the wall where Lady Cicely is passing, pulls off the child's hood, and dramatically adds her own grotesque touch to the moonlit scene:

Whispering to the child, 'Grin at her, my deary!' she held up the little girl as high as she could, which was just sufficient to disclose her face over the coping of the wall. . . .

The moonlight fell upon the sepulchral face and head, intensifying the child's daytime aspect till it was only too much like that which had suggested the nickname. (44)

Terrified, Lady Cicely falls almost senseless to the ground, but her child is born safely in the spring, a healthy son and heir, and the Squire continues to prosper. Only years after the girl and her mother are dead and can gain no satisfaction from it does the grotesque scene work its vengeance. Disconcerted by his father's irreverent exhumation of hundreds of skeletons from the grounds of his Abbey, the Squire's superstitious son is driven to suicide one night by the unexpected sight of one of the skulls, set up as a model by his sculptress wife. Though he had not yet been born when his mother received a similar shock, the young man screams madly, "I've seen it before!" and, overcome by horrible recognition, he shoots himself. In a few years, the old lord is dead as well, his title extinct, his ambitions brought to nothing, and the revenge complete. The real shock value of the grotesque scene lies not, however, in this rather unconvincing finale, but in the effect of hatred and despair on the wretched mother herself. She idolizes her daughter; yet, through the violence of her fury on the child's behalf, the mother's love is for one disturbingly malignant moment perverted into cruel exploitation of her child's affliction. It is this appalling insight into the potentially grotesque depths of human grief and hatred that one remembers from the story, almost to the exclusion of all other details.

Hardy's most intriguing insights into human nature always arise from such dramatic moments of crisis and choice. For him, "the truth of experience does not exist in circumstance, or even in the juxtaposition of circumstances and events, but in the crisis that ensues" (Hornback 8). The revealing element is the individual's response to the pressures of that crisis. In this connection, two final plot patterns deserve mention: the "unpropitious return" in many stories of the one person most capable of ruining the protagonists' happiness (whether intentionally or not), and the frequent occurrence of sudden, violent deaths. Usually appearing together, and relying heavily on coincidence, these two patterns contribute to some of the most complex and ironic plot lines in Hardy's short fiction. In fact, they pull together in their moments of crisis most of the other plot patterns already discussed, especially those dealing with mismarriage, thwarted love, and the grotesque.

Such complexity draws the familiar objection from some critics that the extraordinary coincidences "are little more than improbable plot devices," especially those surrounding the many unexpected deaths in the stories (Brooks 144). At the opposite extreme is Fischler's claim that, among these, the violent deaths are "the ground for [Hardy's] best short stories and a saving element in many of the others" ("Major Trends" 43). At times, these deaths are so particularly convenient or inconvenient or blatantly ironic in their effects on the other characters that they are difficult to countenance. But like the device of the unpropitious return which they so regularly accompany, and indeed, like all Hardy's plot devices, they are important not for their probability, but for the options they open or close for the characters at critical moments.⁸ One sees in these last plot patterns the vital interconnection

⁸ Brady makes a similar point, noting briefly that the sudden deaths "operate as catalysts of new moral dilemmas, usually by changing a character's sexual and marital alternatives" (172).

between all the elements of destiny in Hardy's world--the combined power of chance, unavoidable circumstance, and past and present human choices.

This interconnection has already been hinted at in two stories which contain both an unpropitious return and a dramatic, violent death. In "The Melancholy Hussar" (WT), Phyllis Grove's past decision to engage herself to Humphrey Gould combines with the coincidental timing of his return to destroy her dream of happiness, condemn her lover to death before a firing squad, and leave her more desolate than ever in the cheerless home she has no power of escaping. Similarly, in "The Waiting Supper" (CM), the happiness forfeited years before by Nicholas and Christine eludes them again on the very eve of their wedding. Christine's cruel husband, Bellston, ironically times "his return from her past to coincide with her formal rejection of that past" (Hornback 77). That he drowns that same night in the stream behind her house only intensifies the irony, for the weeds that entangle his body beneath the waterfall hold their victim fast for seventeen years, dividing Nicholas and Christine as surely as his own living presence would have done. Here, too, is the familiar note of the grotesque, for throughout those long years that the sad lovers lament their fate, they meet almost daily beside the very spot where "aquatic operators" are reducing their persecutor to a skeleton (82). Mere chance keeps the truth submerged.

"The Waiting Supper" illustrates powerfully a major characteristic of Hardy's plots in general: the uncomfortable reality that "actions literally years apart impose upon each other as though time has ceased to exist" (Hornback 9). This reality provides the very basis for the "unpropitious return." In every human history, the past has fashioned the present as the present is fashioning the future; but the pure linear quality of time is continually disturbed, as Hardy recognized, by looping

intrusions of the past. Through memory, through repetition, through delayed effects of long-forgotten causes, the past will not lie quiet. And how better to personify that active, often painfully intrusive past than through the disconcerting reappearance of some individual believed--or hoped--to be forever out of the picture?

Hardy emphasizes the idea of intrusion even in the title of one early story which uses the device, "Interlopers at the Knap" (WT). Philip Hall, having left home years before, returns from Australia, ill and poverty-stricken, on the eve of his sister's marriage to the thriving farmer Darton. After a silence of three years, Phil's sudden reappearance is disturbing enough; but the real interloper, the person who poses the real danger to Sally's wedding plans, is Phil's wife, Helena, who has come with him and their two children to England. Secretly married to Hall against her rich uncle's wishes, Helena has since been disinherited and forced to live with her wandering husband on a social scale far below that of her ladylike upbringing. But chance and strong memories of the past now coincide to open for her the very opportunity they are closing for her sister-in-law. Sally's betrothed is none other than the man who courted Helena years before, unaware that she had already married Hall. And while Sally and her mother listen to Phil's story, a series of accidents and misdirections brings Darton unexpectedly face-to-face with his old love--a woman whom he has never forgotten and whom he now sees miraculously attired in the dress he had expected to find adorning his bride-to-be.

This seemingly prophetic image is too strong for Darton's merely practical feelings for Sally, and when her brother dies that same night, the girl knows immediately that Helena will be Darton's bride. Although her prediction comes true and Sally refuses Darton repeatedly in later years, one is inclined to admire rather than pity her for choosing "spinsterhood." Drawn to Sally only when he "can do no

better" (179) or when he needs a mother for Helena's children, Charles Darton is no great prize. He is hardly worthy of the spirited woman he pursues, as she now knows; and, accepting the past with dignity, Sally gets on with her life, competently managing her own affairs and apparently content with her independence.

In his last-published story, "Enter a Dragoon" (CM), Hardy seems to be repeating much of the "Knap" plot line, even to the heroine's independence. Six days before Selena Paddock's marriage to a respectable young man, an old suitor unexpectedly returns to rearrange the wedding plans. The ironic coincidences involved in this lover's return, however, and in the accompanying echoes from the past, are even more convoluted than those in "Knap." Once before, Selina has been forestalled in matrimony by mere chance: only two days before that ceremony, the Crimean War called her lover away. More than saddened, however, Selina then faced the "shame" of unwed pregnancy. Bearing a child whose legitimacy had been so nearly secured, but whose father is now presumed to have been killed in the war, Selina has struggled to maintain social respectability, even keeping her mummified wedding cake as proof of her moral intentions. But just as she is about to achieve unquestionable respectability for herself and her son, through marriage to the quiet master-wheelwright who loves them both, Sergeant-Major Clark returns. Selina has always felt as if she were Clark's widow, and the idea of marrying him at last holds for her heart and mind a far more satisfactory path to the respectability she craves.

Just hours after presenting itself, however, this option is cruelly snatched from her again by Clark's sudden death. Hardy offers a rather tedious, "realistic," medical explanation of this strained coincidence, but again, the important point is the protagonist's reaction to the crisis. Like Sally Hall, Selina refuses the renewed proposals of her former suitor, the wheelwright; and like Milly in "The Marchioness

of Stonehenge," she enters fully into the assumed role of widowhood. Donning widow's weeds and calling herself Mrs. John Clark, she feels a certain dignity in the knowledge that her lover did once again intend to act rightly by her, whatever the delay and strangely duplicated interruption of the plan. This renewed confidence enables her to achieve through her own efforts a comfortable, independent home, and even the long-sought respectability, for herself and her son. But Selina is not left in contentment like her two counterparts. The power of the past descends upon her again in the devastating final scene of the story, in which she encounters Clark's legitimate widow and son. Though bitterly estranged from her husband soon after their marriage, this "respectable woman" still has the comforting position and dignity of a legal union (166). In contrast, Selina suddenly finds herself left only with the searing knowledge that she has wasted years of loyalty on a man who first deserted her and then, to escape his own troubles, would have wed her bigamously and carried her far from home and family to New Zealand. Stripped in one moment of the protective identity she has forged for herself, Selina is defenseless against her "rival's" insults. So firmly do the woman's snide remarks put Selina in her social place that one can only wonder if her options have not changed again or if she will have the strength to maintain her respectable independence.

Somewhat less doubtful is the fate awaiting the Halborough brothers in "A Tragedy of Two Ambitions" (LLI). One hears from the characters' own mouths that they may some day be driven to suicide by the corrosive emotional effects of that story's unpropitious return and its accompanying violent death. Actually, the brothers must endure more than one ironic return of the person who plagues their lives--their own crude father. The malicious old man "intrudes at a critical point" in "each of the five episodes. . . . But he is not a mechanical Nemesis. Each

appearance is incremental" (Gerber, "Tragedy" Item 55), adding both to the misery of the brothers and to the reader's understanding of their response to the climactic encounter. The first fleeting view of the elder Halborough reeling down the street and collapsing at home in alcoholic slumber sets the story's tone and bitterly reminds the brothers that he has, in the year or two since their mother's death, exhausted the money she had saved with great effort for their education. Robbed of the hope of a university degree, they become schoolmasters and scrimp to put themselves through theological college and send their sister to a fashionable school abroad. As they slowly push their way upward, however, their boorish parent threatens continually to drag them down. Humiliated by his repeated intrusions at their colleges to beg money and by his appalling "marriage" to a garish gipsy woman, the brothers bribe the couple to emigrate to Canada; and, for a time, the three siblings advance unchecked. But their respite from disgrace is short-lived as usual: just as all their hopes seem brightest, their father writes to announce his probable return.

With the local squire on the brink of making Rosa mistress of the manor, this new intrusion presents the crisis which the brothers cannot withstand, especially when, upon his return, the relentless old Halborough immediately shames them with a week's imprisonment for disorderly conduct. Drunk, resentful, and determinedly malicious when he meets his sons after his release, the old man pushes them to such intense despair that when they hear him fall into the river a moment later, they deliberately hesitate in going to his aid until rescue is pointless. Their delay makes possible Rosa's marriage and their own continued professional advancement, but the guilt they feel even as they listen to their father's dying cries deepens into a chronic dread which destroys any satisfaction they might take in their success. Although the man himself can return no more, the brothers daily feel his presence

and the ravaging force of their decision not to save him. Death alone promises release from the painful grip of past events and the gnawing torment of their own choices.

Such is the agonizing dilemma faced by many Hardy characters, but two final examples will suffice: "The History of the Hardcomes" (ECC) and "To Please His Wife" (LLI). "Accidental" drownings and unwise choices figure prominently in these stories, too, though the device of the unpropitious return gives way to the equally distressing failure of certain characters to return. Both stories contain other familiar elements as well--in particular, mismating and the sudden rearrangement of principals in a projected marriage ceremony. In "The History of the Hardcomes," that rearrangement is effected not by a returning lover, but by the odd, unanimous choice of two engaged couples to exchange partners--"an action that arouses in the reader misgivings almost as soon as it occurs" (Carpenter, "Characters" 160). James and Steve Hardcome are well-suited in personality and taste to the young women they escort to Tony Kytes's wedding-randy. It is only a fleeting, albeit powerful, sexual attraction created by the heat of a dance that leads all four to agree impulsively to "marry crosswise" (207), and they all soon realize their error. Momentary physical attraction to the "wrong" partner is no match for the compatibility of character that drew them to the "right" one in the first place.

Although the four young people are loyal to their respective spouses and rather graciously resigned to the paths they have chosen for themselves, such an injudicious wrenching of their original pairings leads inevitably to disaster. On holiday together after a year or two of marriage, the couples find their old feelings reasserting themselves. This is especially true for the more restless characters, Olive and Steve. Prompted by their still identical tastes and whims, they decide to row

around the bay while their spouses watch from the shore. But at some point, the simple pleasure-excursion becomes a lover's retreat from unsatisfying circumstances: face-to-face in the boat, they find their love reviving; and, oblivious to all else, they row too far out, capsize somehow, and drown. Their bodies are found "tightly locked in each other's arms, his lips upon hers" (214).

The narrators repeatedly stress the pair's innocence, insisting it was "their destiny to die thus"--"two halves, intended by Nature to make the perfect whole," united at last in death (215). Indeed, their innocence in starting is clear. But details suggest that the "accident" may really have been a suicide pact, a deliberate choice, once they were under way, of the destiny the characters preferred. The water is very calm, and in what seems a moment of decision and farewell, Olive turns briefly from her steering to wave at the couple on shore; then the boat continues straight out to sea and out of sight. Intentional or not, the drownings revise destiny for both couples, restoring the pairings originally planned--of Steve and Olive through death, and of James and Emily through belated marriage. Yet, what one remembers most vividly from the story is neither the fatal romantic reverie of the drowned pair nor the eventual calm happiness of the survivors, but simply the enormous, persistent, and potentially devastating power of even the most impulsive decisions.

The same power works with relentless irony in "To Please His Wife." Like the Hardcomes, Joanna Jolliffe allows a fleeting emotional response to bind her to an unsuitable spouse; and like the Halborough brothers, she is tormented by the knowledge that her own ambitious choices have led to the deaths of her nearest relations. When Shadrach Jolliffe returns to Havenpool, Joanna wins him away from her timid friend Emily simply because she can, and then is just as casually prepared to give him back until she finds that he wishes to be released. She would

really rather wait and try "to marry higher" (146), but discovering by chance that the captain far prefers Emily to herself, Joanna perversely thwarts her own desires in order to thwart his. In a moment of envy, jealousy, and wounded pride, she makes a choice that destroys at one stroke the happiness of three people and sets in motion the events which lead to her own utter desolation. For while Shadrach and Emily are both generous enough to make the best of their situations, Joanna can never be satisfied with the gentle, unambitious sailor she has trapped into marriage.

Indeed, she is ultimately more a prisoner than he, as she chafes continually against her lowered social status and the ironic ascendance of her old rival who eventually marries a wealthy merchant. Her two adored sons are Joanna's only consolation for her early mistake; and yet, more envious than ever of Emily's success, she sacrifices them, too, to her obsessive ambition. She loves them "to idolatry" (149); but, desperate to finance her "large dreams" for their futures, she risks their lives by sending them to sea with Shadrach on a speculative venture. From this voyage, neither husband nor sons return. And though she is continually "hearing or seeing evidences of their arrival" (159), after six years, the guilt-stricken Joanna is still alone. Worse yet, with no income, she is forced to accept the charity of the woman she has unjustly come to hate. In her self-absorbed behavior, Joanna is one of Hardy's most reprehensible characters; yet through the startling accuracy with which he records her motives and very human failings, he generates considerable sympathy for her--especially in the final haunting scene. Gaunt, prematurely aged, and half-mad with grief, she appears in the street one foggy December night--like the mere "skeleton of something human"--to ask in poignant expectation at the door of her old home, "Has anybody come?" (161).

This sympathetic treatment of imperfect human nature, which Hardy affords to all but his most unreservedly malicious characters, makes most of his short stories succeed "through their very integrity" (Wing, Hardy 22). The crowded plots, the excessive use of chance and coincidence, the repetition of the same marriage motifs and other dramatic devices in story after story to bring the action to a crisis--all these superficially objectionable practices assume far less objectionable proportions when considered beside the truth and compassion of Hardy's insights:

The impression that survives such buffetings of the reader's patience corresponds, no doubt intentionally, to the indestructible essence of human worth and dignity with which [Hardy's] characters manage to survive . . . their havoc of ruin and defeat. (Zabel 87)

Strong characters like Phyllis Grove, Sally Hall, and Shadrach Jolliffe spring immediately to mind as possessing that worth and dignity. But, of course, not all of Hardy's characters do genuinely survive their defeat: one remembers the suicides of Luke Holway and the mismatched Hardcome pair; the exhausted deaths of Ella Marchmill, Gertrude Lodge, and Lady Uplandtowers; and, especially, the conscience-stricken death-in-life of the Halborough brothers and Joanna Jolliffe. Nevertheless, Hardy presents these characters, too, with understanding and pity for the fate that befalls them--even when they do not meet it with particular dignity, or when, like Joanna, they rashly collaborate with chance and fate in bringing ruin upon themselves and all they value most.

The major achievement of Hardy's short fiction lies precisely in this sensitive, astute probing into the realities of human character and experience; all the melodramatic plot patterns are simply Hardy's idiosyncratic means of taking their measure through an imaginative medium. If he exasperates some readers by continually trapping his characters in unhappy marriages or disastrous secret alliances, his stories are no less truthful for their repetition. Those painful romantic

situations illustrate at once three substantial realities: the universal, self-protective tendency of human beings to shun isolation at all costs and to seek continuity, security, and meaning through connection with other human beings; the irresistible influence of sexuality in directing that desire for reassuring human connection; and the unfortunate tendency of arbitrary or prejudicial social conventions to make truly successful unions almost impossible. Similarly, if Hardy strains credulity with his constant recourse to the ironic, often grotesque, and usually devastating force of accident and coincident, he does so almost invariably in order to highlight the more important aspects of his tales--the truths of personality, motivation, and human vulnerability which emerge strikingly under the pressure of chaotic events. Such thematic complexity cannot be adequately gauged if Hardy's plots are casually reduced to silly paraphrase or his technical devices dismissed as artificial contrivance. One must recognize the frequent subtlety with which he orchestrates his basic plot situations and coincidences. For Hardy's stories are not stale clones of one another. He directs all his standard plot patterns so as to produce a slightly different effect every time they appear--adjusting them to reflect the individual circumstances and choices of particular characters even as they point by repetition to the common plight of all humanity. In this way, the combined effect of all the patterns enables Hardy to explore an astonishing range of experience and possibility and to demonstrate emphatically the complex web of events, random and chosen, that determines the quality of human existence in a world where accident and passion often make wise choices difficult.

CHAPTER 3

POINT OF VIEW: INTERPRETIVE NARRATORS AND THE PERSISTENT NARRATIVE FRAME

Just as Hardy tends to gravitate in his short stories toward the same basic subjects and plots, so does he have his favorite narrative perspectives from which to view those subjects and unfold those plots. In general, he tells his stories either in his own omniscient authorial voice or through the voice of an invented narrator, one who vouches for a particular tale's authenticity and often both frames and colors the story with his more limited perceptions. These two major patterns, however, are considerably more complex than they at first appear and have elicited a good deal of critical comment, especially from those scholars intent upon defining Hardy's relationship to the modern short story and its most characteristic techniques. In fact, more than any other single feature of his stories, Hardy's handling of perspective has convinced the majority of his critics that he belongs not to the modern school at all, but exclusively to the old-fashioned oral tradition of storytelling.

Hardy's frequent use of a narrative persona--usually some "local" character called upon to entertain an audience of friends, neighbors, or fellow-travellers--is primarily responsible for this view. Most modern writers, after all, tend to adopt a far less obtrusive narrative stance, so that "the narrator as such seems to have disappeared from the story entirely" (Allen, Short Story 15). Their emphasis is on what Julian Moynahan describes as "a dramatized or objectified point of view," one which avoids "overt moralizing, circumstantiality, or ampleness in narrating" and which shows rather than tells. Such dramatic intensity is by no means entirely absent from Hardy's short stories; still, Moynahan finds Hardy generally "content to tell

[his] stories in an ample, leisurely manner" (3, 4). Irving Howe makes much the same point in classifying Hardy's short works as traditional "tales" (with the typical tendencies to meander, to amaze their listeners with strange lore, and to moralize explicitly) rather than as modern "stories," self-sufficient, fundamentally realistic, and authorially unglossed. Even when Hardy uses an omniscient narrator, Howe argues that the omniscient voice, too, "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" (Hardy 78-79).

As I wish to demonstrate, however, the effects of Hardy's choices of viewpoint are more various and even problematical than such a broad categorization suggests. Although both his styles of narration (from the omniscient perspective and that of a "frame" persona) do allow for casual digressions and for direct narrative comment on events and characters, Hardy actually exercises a good deal of restraint in keeping such intrusions generally few and brief. Even Samuel Hynes, who sides with Howe in labelling Hardy "simply the storyteller, or the parish-historian" in his "tales," defends Hardy against the charge of unnecessary discursiveness. For he sees Hardy as prudently accepting a lesser narrative role in the short stories than the one he occupies in the novels, where "he is present as a philosopher, observing the tragic significances of events, introducing the President of the Immortals, and dealing in abstractions like Chance and Destiny" (xxiv-xxv). There is little room, of course, in the space of twenty or thirty pages for long philosophical passages; but, for many of Hardy's admirers, it is not merely the scarcity of didactic interruptions that sets the stories apart in their narrative style. Like Lance Butler, they find Hardy's writing in the shorter genre to be, in general, notably "brisker, shallower, more direct, less

allusive, less metaphorical, more concrete": "Hardy finds the right 'gear' in which to tell his tales; he presses on to the point with few digressions" (159, 160).

To an extent, both critical positions are valid: Hardy does reveal unmistakable ties to the older style of storytelling Howe describes, especially in his use of perspective; and he also writes with considerable "modern" economy once he has found the right narrative "gear." Few participants in the debate, however, have focused on what seems to me the crucial point in understanding this dichotomy in Hardy's short stories: the frustrating reality that, in a surprisingly large number of stories, Hardy has some difficulty finding the right gear and establishing from the outset a point of view with which he is comfortable. This is the phenomenon I wish to explore in this chapter, by examining closely Hardy's varying achievements with the two major patterns in his narrative style. When he begins immediately in an omniscient mode, he seldom fails to present his material with economy and power. Almost invariably, it is in the "frame" stories, where he imposes an additional narrative voice between himself and the reader, that he hesitates and makes false starts. More than half of Hardy's tales are frame stories, and, certainly, not all are flawed in terms of perspective; but in a great many, the narrative frame does seem an unnecessary complication. Often, the extra narrator seems merely a convenient tool for getting a story underway and adds nothing to its real substance. And, in several instances, there is no true frame at all, for the invented speaker disappears from the story entirely after the first paragraph or two.

Several critics have commented in passing on the frequent awkwardness of these opening passages, but few have offered any explanation or detailed discussion of the problem. Maire A. Quinn comes closest, perhaps, in her brief essay on "Thomas Hardy and the Short Story." Though unduly dismissive of his overall

achievement in the genre, Quinn is justified in complaining that Hardy's use of a narrative persona too often gives his stories "a certain formal triteness" and results in openings that "bear a dreary similarity to one another" (78). Time after time, in order to get to the story proper, one must push past tedious passages which either attribute the tale to "the testimony of some other person" or identify it as a local tradition, but seldom supply any vital information (77). That Hardy uses this device so persistently, despite its minimal effectiveness, Quinn explains by emphasizing, like most critics, the influence of the oral tradition. All those otherwise useless narrators, she says, are for Hardy "merely a means of preserving the oral character of the tale" (76). Significantly, however, she does not pigeon-hole Hardy as simply an old-fashioned storyteller. Rather, she sees him as being torn--to the detriment of his stories--between the oral tradition and the more formal demands of literary art. To her, in the frame stories at least, the artist in Hardy is hampered by his unwillingness to abandon the dated conventions of the more casual form.

It would be a mistake to dismiss these stories categorically on the basis of awkward beginnings and ineffective frames; they contain too much that is effective. But Quinn's insight does help explain the presence of those flaws. Hardy does indeed appear to be drawn toward "two distinct traditions": "the tradition of the conscious, artistic literary short story, that of the écrivain, and the tradition of the raconteur, the narrator who simulates a spoken story in print" (Cassis 287). Yet even this perception leaves unaddressed the most intriguing pattern in Hardy's struggles with point of view: the fact that--whatever his fondness for the oral tradition and for the colorful tale-tellers familiar to him since childhood--as a short story writer, he seems naturally to prefer a more distant and objective narrative stance. His fully omniscient stories, though paradoxically the minority, are almost always his

strongest. But even more to the point is Hardy's tendency--in all but a handful of frame stories where he successfully incorporates the device--to drop the frame narrator very early and, without warning or explanation, to assume an omniscient voice for the remainder of the tale, only rarely returning to the persona at the end.

In the sketches of A Few Crusted Characters and in "A Tradition of Eighteen Hundred and Four," "The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion," and "The Fiddler of the Reels," the fictional narrators earn their keep, genuinely framing and informing the stories they tell. But the speakers in the other "frame" stories are so slightly drawn and so artificially tacked on to otherwise omniscient works that Hardy seems to have created them merely from a vague sense of obligation to a vanishing style, rather than from any deliberate artistic desire to test the possibilities of an intermediate viewpoint. They obviously held little interest for him as characters; and because he does not maintain most of them long enough to establish an atmosphere of storyteller and audience or to give one a sense of their personalities, they often create the disturbing impression of being mere literary crutches--easy, reliable formulae for introducing his tales. The effect is all the more unfortunate since his other stories prove he needed no such crutches.

Whatever his reasons for including these weak frame narrators, his almost immediate movement away from them through the assumption of an omniscient perspective is significant. Most notably, it enables him to salvage most of the stories thus unimpressively begun. But it also indicates why the omniscient mode is the narrative "gear" that works best for Hardy: sensitive as he is to the short story's incompatibility with extensive philosophizing, Hardy nevertheless seems to prefer a narrative stance which allows him some freedom to comment directly on the experiences and motivations of his characters--always his primary artistic interests.

Without impeding the steady progression of his narratives, such a stance apparently gives him a surer sense of control than does the frame device over the clear communication of his views. For this reason, Hardy's frame stories succeed as well as his omniscient ones only on those rare occasions when he creates a narrative personality he finds substantial enough to be maintained throughout the story and powerful enough to speak for him. Then, either by the authority of their compassion and mature insight or by the obvious insensitivity or ignorance of their perceptions, these commenting narrators do point clearly toward Hardy's theme. Why a writer linked so persistently to the oral tradition manages only occasionally to create genuinely credible raconteurs like these is a mystery; but story after story, by beginning in or drifting into omniscience, clearly attests to Hardy's ultimate preference for his own voice as the most useful narrative perspective.

Most of Hardy's fully omniscient stories appear in Wessex Tales and Life's Little Ironies, easily his two best short story volumes. While, as narrator in these stories, Hardy does sometimes adopt the familiar Victorian technique of addressing the reader and telling instead of dramatizing certain vital points, his intrusions rarely break the pace and, in general, tend toward legitimate, incisive characterization rather than ponderous declarations of theme. In fact, most of Hardy's narrative comments either preface or strategically reinforce the thematic truths which his characters dramatize in other passages. They are, in the main, simply evaluative comments which help universalize the reader's sense of individual characters' experiences. Indeed, one may apply to all of Hardy's omniscient, interpretive narrators what Kristin Brady says of his rhetorical stance in Life's Little Ironies: "Assuming a posture of worldly wisdom and philosophical distance, the narrator of these stories--with an objectivity at once rational and compassionate--frequently

invokes the wider patterns of behaviour to which the story's events correspond," pointing out how certain characters represent particular types of human beings or how their environments have shaped them in significant ways (154). Thus, succinct and astute, Hardy's omniscient interjections usually blend smoothly with the main narrative and enhance rather than diminish its artistic impact.

In only one of his omniscient stories is the opposite true. In "For Conscience' Sake" (LLI), Hardy experiences the same kind of difficulties in beginning that mar so many of his frame stories. There is "much preliminary huffing and puffing as Hardy searches for a point of entry into his story," shifting uneasily from the opening allusion to J. S. Mill, to the local crossing-sweeper's perceptions of Mr. Millborne's daily routine, to Millborne's own first-person account of his history to his physician (Quinn 79). As Quinn notes, the story proper begins only with the third shift, when we actually meet the protagonist and learn something of his situation. But even this first-person narrative lasts only a few pages before Hardy shifts gears yet again, to settle finally into strict omniscience for the last two-thirds of the story. Hardy's difficulties here are instructive, for they demonstrate by contrast the very reasons for his successes in the other stories. Although his first attempt at beginning "For Conscience' Sake" is omniscient, it fails because that opening paragraph presents "an extreme example of the narrator only too obviously at work" (Allen, Short Story 15):

Whether the utilitarian or the intuitive theory of the moral sense be upheld it is beyond question that there are a few subtle-souled persons with whom the absolute gratuitousness of an act of reparation is an inducement to perform it; while exhortation as to its necessity would breed excuses for leaving it undone. The case of Mr. Millborne and Mrs. Frankland particularly illustrated this, and perhaps something more. (55)

There is nothing to engage a reader in such an opening as this. As narrator, Hardy is at once too intrusive and too removed from his material: he gives the rule

of behavior--in tedious, abstract terms--before providing any particulars of the illustrative case. Worse yet, he goes on to fill two equally lifeless paragraphs with an omniscient record of the limited observations of the crossing-sweeper and Millborne's casual acquaintances--a graceless and unnecessarily involved method of establishing Millborne's basic character and station in life. At the end of these paragraphs, the reader knows that the protagonist is about fifty, comfortably well-off, exceedingly regular in his habits, and nondescript in his personality. But he still has not met the man himself and certainly has no clue that he owes anyone a gesture of reparation, much less that he once seduced a young woman and left her to face society's judgment and rear their child alone. Having begun the story from such an abstract standpoint, Hardy finds he must take a huge leap to an entirely different perspective in order to establish these vital details of Millborne's past and let the character relate the guilty secret himself.

Despite the awkward shift, this brief first-person passage is not without artistic power. Besides establishing the antecedent action and Millborne's belated inclination to honor his promise of marriage, it provides a telling characterization of the protagonist which, at last, links him directly to the moral issue raised in the first paragraph. Through the first-person viewpoint's tendency toward ironic self-revelation, Millborne unwittingly sabotages every attempt to present himself as a repentant "man of honour" (59). By his own words, he reveals that his slight embarrassment at confessing his secret to Doctor Binden arises not from his callous betrayal of the girl, but from his having allowed its memory to "[come] back to me with a magnitude out of all proportion (I dare say) to its real gravity" (56). Lest he be thought thin-skinned by his male peer, Millborne describes his dissatisfaction with himself in terms that preclude emotionalism: he likens his breach of promise to

a hypothetical failure to repay a debt of fifty pounds. Though he admits that Leonora suffered undeservedly for his selfishness, the analogy is essentially inaccurate and shows how grossly he underestimates rather than exaggerates the gravity of her situation. He did not merely borrow what is in comparison a trifling material possession and fail to give it back. He took from her the one intangible, but indispensable possession with which an unmarried woman might expect to keep herself in the social climate of their day--her reputation.

By the end of the passage, it is clear that Millborne's conscience concerns Leonora and their daughter hardly at all, but merely urges him in the introspective years of middle age to rectify the one error of his life which disturbs his sense of self-respect. He gives no thought to the probable reception of his offer by those he has so long neglected--a fact all the more astounding in that he regards Leonora deprecatingly as "simply commonplace" and "uninteresting" (58, 59), and has taken so little interest in his daughter that he does not even know if she still lives.

The potential explosiveness of this bizarre family reunion is perhaps what prompts Hardy to abandon the first-person narrative at this point and finish the story omnisciently. The obtuseness of Millborne's perspective, though effective in exposing his own faults, is incapable of evaluating directly the other characters and their responses to his sudden disruption of their lives. From the omniscient viewpoint, however, Hardy can continue to emphasize Millborne's folly (by delving most consistently into his consciousness) and still step aside to comment directly on the nature and perceptions of the other characters. Thus, as Millborne ill-advisedly puts his plan into action, one learns that Mrs. Frankland has, by dint of her own efforts and natural dignity, established herself and her daughter as respected members of their community; and that only by presenting their belated union as

advantageous to their daughter's marital ambitions and future security does Millborne eventually persuade Leonora to surrender her prized independence. Just as the omniscient voice here allows Hardy to generate sympathy for the "widow," so does it enable him a few pages later to reduce sympathy, unexpectedly, for the illegitimate child and her suitor. Sparing narrative comment deftly underscores what the action reveals--that Frances is an "imperious sort" of girl (67), drawn to the Reverend Percival Cope and reconciled to her mother's marriage by social ambition rather than love; and that Cope himself is a hypocrite, whose fastidious affections grow cold when he begins to suspect the Franklands' scandalous past, but warm again instantly when he discovers the "excellent style" in which Millborne's departure and generous settlement will enable them to live (73).

In settling most of his fortune on his wife and daughter and leaving them once again to themselves, Millborne arrives at last at wisdom and self-recognition. In essence, he sets right the most recent wrong he has done them by judiciously making the only restitution for the first that he should ever have attempted. Unfortunately, although the story's events are themselves sufficient to convey its ironic theme, Hardy weakens the ironic impact a little by overstating his case at the end, in a brief return to the kind of philosophical abstraction that spoils the first paragraph. Most explicit is Millborne's weary summation in his letter to Leonora of the defeat of his "honourable" scheme:

'I have learnt that there are some derelictions of duty which cannot be blotted out by tardy accomplishment. Our evil actions do not remain isolated in the past, waiting only to be reversed: like locomotive plants they spread and re-root, till to destroy the original stem has no material effect in killing them.' (73-74)

Newly enlightened though Millborne is, the tone and expression of the analogy correspond more to Hardy's own accents than to those one expects from his

character. And, indeed, Hardy cannot resist one last conspicuous intrusion in his omniscient voice to drive his theme unmistakably home: in the final paragraph, he identifies Millborne's new burden as "the heavy thought which oppressed Antigone, that by honourable observance of a rite he had obtained for himself the reward of dishonourable laxity" (74). These didactic passages, however, do at least have the advantage of following the concrete details of character and action that substantiate their general principles.

Hardy's other omniscient stories show him in much better command of his narrative stance and, thus, far subtler in his management of theme, characterization, and antecedent action. In "Fellow-Townsmen" (WT), for example, the omniscient narrator is firmly in control; yet, so few are his blatant intrusions that one scarcely feels his presence. Instead of opening with thematic abstractions, Hardy quickly introduces two of the story's main characters, George Barnet and Charles Downe; and rather than devote paragraphs to a bland enumeration of personality traits, he immediately puts the two men into action, adding only brief descriptive phrases and dialogue tags to begin sketching in those traits. In less than a page, one begins to get a palpable sense of both men's characters and relative social positions. For, as Barnet, with his "pale and refined appearance," takes up into his phaeton the "professional" looking Downe, with his "plump, cheery, rather self-indulgent face," one is guided almost imperceptibly to regard them as the opposites all succeeding encounters prove them to be (111). Hardy inserts one short expository passage to confirm their respective circumstances--that the pedestrian Downe is a "struggling young lawyer" and his carriage-equipped friend the well-educated, gentlemanly heir of a successful flax merchant (112)--but returns immediately to dialogue and action to do the real work of characterization. With nothing more than brief dialogue tags

noting Barnet's "constrained" replies to Downe's unintentionally embarrassing inquiries about Mrs. Barnet and the new house she has dubbed "Château Ringdale," Hardy draws the reader instantly into the emotional tensions of the story and creates a truer impression of human individuality than he ever achieves with Mr. Millborne.

Rather than shift viewpoints to let Barnet chronicle his own dissatisfaction with life, Hardy dramatizes, in the present moment, the cause of that dissatisfaction--by starkly juxtaposing the two scenes which contrast Downe's happy household with the frigidity of Barnet's own, in which the most he can hope for is tenuously to "preserve peace" (114). The loving response of Downe's wife and children, who rush to his aid when he slips on the wet curb, touches Barnet deeply and exacerbates the bitterness of his own reception minutes later, when his wife declines even to come downstairs to dine with him. Stung by the contrast in their lives, Barnet does confess something of his trouble to his friend--the humiliating truth that construction of the new house is entirely due to his wife's disdain for his own family home, and that its pretentious name honors another man she once admired. It is only one carefully selected detail that Hardy permits his character to reveal directly, not his whole history, but it speaks volumes about his marital misery. That Mrs. Barnet would embarrass her husband publicly in this way prepares the reader in one understated stroke for her coldness toward him that evening and for her ultimate departure. One dislikes her intensely before she ever appears and sympathizes strongly with Barnet at the end of this first chapter as the narrator follows his thoughts back to a happier time and the memory of a gentler woman.

That sympathy diminishes considerably in the next chapter when Barnet seeks out that figure from his past and one discovers the events that led to his present misery. But, again, Hardy defines the characters and their relationship

without unwarranted narrative intrusions. The important antecedent action is supplied through oblique references in Barnet's conversation with Lucy Savile, rather than through detailed narration. The characters, of course, have no need to recall their mutual experiences explicitly. Yet, such is Hardy's method here that one easily gleans the essentials of a love affair ruined by miscommunication and pride. In particular, one finds that Barnet let a mere quarrel become an insuperable barrier by unfairly expecting of Lucy a written appeal, which her inferior social position and apparent blamelessness in their quarrel made it impossible for her to write. Faced with her reticence, Barnet succumbed to his mild social ambition and married a lady of higher station. Though prompted by neither soliloquy nor narrative analysis, one begins to see in Barnet a tendency to act against his own best interests, a trait which governs him consistently throughout the story. Thus, these first two chapters subtly lay the groundwork for all that follows in Barnet's painful life. Moreover, they show Hardy deftly handling the very techniques of a modern dramatized viewpoint and generally effaced narrator which most critics claim he does not use.

That Hardy chooses not to use these techniques exclusively hardly justifies ignoring his possession of the skill. In most of his omniscient stories, it is only after these subtle narrative procedures have established character and situation that Hardy makes any bold narrative intrusions to highlight the developing theme. Not until halfway through "Fellow-Townsmen," a story three times the length of "For Conscience' Sake," does there appear an interpretive passage at all reminiscent of the latter's heavy-handed opening. As Barnet pauses in agonized reflection before attempting to resuscitate his drowned wife, the narrator fills the moment with a universalizing consideration of the hero's dilemma:

There are honest men who will not admit to their thoughts, even as idle hypotheses, views of the future that assume as done a deed which

they would recoil from doing; and there are other honest men for whom morality ends at the surfaces of their own heads, who will deliberate what the first will not so much as suppose. Barnet had a wife whose presence distracted his home; she now lay as in death; by merely doing nothing . . . he would effect such a deliverance for himself as he had never hoped for, and open up an opportunity of which till now he had never dreamed. . . .

From Barnet's actions we may infer that he supposed such and such as a result, for a moment, but did not deliberate. (138-39)

Though slightly tedious, this passage does not offend, because it points to the same traits of character the reader has already observed in Barnet. It describes precisely the attitude one expects of a gentleman and of a man who has once before undermined his own happiness. There is no question of Barnet's honor here; but beneath his selflessness lies more than a hint of what the narrator later describes as "a rich capacity for misery" under the weight of "that curious refinement of cruelty . . . which often proceeds from the bosom of the whimsical god at other times known as blind Circumstance" (157).

It is the same half-proud, half-masochistic quality that makes him attend Lucy's wedding on the morning he is himself set free, and the same again that makes him accept instantly her rejection of his suit twenty-one years later--the "indocile wish to walk unmoved in spite of grim environments" (158). Strategically placed and pungently accurate in their evaluation of Barnet's character, these narrative glosses in the last half of the story are essential rather than intrusive. They steadily deepen and refine the reader's perception of Barnet as one who is as much to blame as Circumstance for his pain. Consequently, when the focus shifts to Lucy at the end and the narrator records her perception of Barnet's urbane acquiescence as "heroic and grand," the irony is clear (172). Hardly the noble gesture she thinks it, his instant relinquishment of the one goal in his life is all of a piece with his habitual, self-indulgent melancholy. And this time, Hardy does not spoil the irony by tacking on any philosophical summaries of theme. He simply lowers the curtain poignantly

on the utter waste of life and love which Barnet's outlook has now inflicted upon Lucy as well, as she waits "years and years" for his return (173).

A similar waste marks the lives of the characters in "On the Western Circuit" (LLI), a story distinguished by one of Hardy's most effective uses of the omniscient perspective, and one which also demonstrates the variety of effects he achieves with it. Although "Circuit" is much shorter than "Fellow-Townsmen," Hardy includes in it many more narrative passages devoted to characterization, especially in the early pages. Yet, for all his direct commentary, the narrator remains generally inconspicuous--mainly because Hardy always moves him swiftly from his own objective analysis into the perceptions of the characters. In the bulk of the characterizing passages, the narrator simply assumes the tone of the person whose thoughts, motives, or personality he wants to render. He never lingers long over any externalized observation. This is true even of the first sentence, by means of which Hardy nonetheless achieves a great deal:

The man who played the disturbing part in the two quiet feminine lives hereunder depicted--no great man, in any sense, by the way--first had knowledge of them on an October evening, in the city of Melchester. (109)

The second part of the sentence merely establishes setting and provides a quick way into the action. But the first part sets the tone and--with superb economy--anticipates the structure of the whole story. The reader is prepared instantly for the upheaval caused by Charles Raye's intrusion into the narrow, passionless sphere traversed by Edith Harnham and her maid. And the possibility of interpreting the phrase that Raye "played the disturbing part" in their lives as also suggesting that he acted a role, or at least assumed an exaggerated pose, in his dealings with them points toward the many deceptions and ironic misconceptions that govern all the characters' responses to one another. That the characters must inevitably face

disillusionment is foreshadowed as well, by the narrator's deliberate undercutting of Raye's stature: he is "no great man, in any sense, by the way." Through this ostensibly casual aside, the reader is afforded an objectivity of insight which neither woman's situation or character permits her to exercise.

Such subtleties of narration create a splendid undercurrent of dramatic irony by continually interweaving the appraisals of characters who "regard each other as stereotypes"--each seeing in another what is lacking is his or her own life--with the more "comprehensive view which the reader has of each of them" (Brady 121). Through the omniscient narrator's brief evaluative comments, however, the reader ascertains not only the true nature of the characters, but also the bleak end toward which their romantic self-deceptions are propelling them. Raye, the young seducer, has "nothing square or practical about his look, [but] much that [is] curvilinear and sensuous"; and he is filled somewhat pretentiously with "vague latter-day glooms and popular melancholies" (111). In short, he is an "end-of-the-age young man," a breed to which the "lonely, impressionable" Mrs. Harnham and her "unfledged maid-servant" are equally unaccustomed (118). To the inexperienced girl, this dashing figure is almost "a god" (137), and her "too unreserved" nature makes her an easy target for his casual attentions. It obviously takes little more coaxing to seduce her bodily than it does to loosen her tongue at their first meeting, during which she chatters willingly about her own and her mistress's personal situations. Though written in third person, all but the first two sentences of this convenient recitation of antecedent action are rendered in Anna's own unguarded, unsophisticated tone--especially the final, wonderfully revealing effusion that "She, the speaker, liked Melchester better than the lonely country, and she was going to have a new hat for next Sunday that was to cost fifteen and ninepence" (112-13).

To such a girl, Raye represents a busier, more exciting world than she has ever known. But to her mistress, whom the narrator describes as "a woman whose deeper nature had never been stirred" (125), one "little less impulsive than Anna herself" (116-17), he embodies all the sexual passion and intellectual refinement her own husband lacks. Unexpectedly stirred by Raye's misdirected caress of her hand, Edith finds herself wishing "she had married a London man who knew the subtleties of love-making" (118). Neither woman can see clearly enough beyond her own desires to divine what the narrator knows, that this particular London man is simply an ordinary, unretained barrister with embarrassingly little professional work to occupy his time. In his boredom, Raye responds initially to Anna's unspoiled country freshness, seeing her as a "fascinating child of nature" (120), and later to what he believes her deep, poetic sensibilities. He, too, sees what he wants to see, and even though--as the narrator explains--he possesses a "substratum of honesty and fairness" that convinces him to marry the pregnant Anna, the layers of deception and misapprehension between them doom the marriage before it begins.

On the night of the fair, the narrator carefully foreshadows the disaster that awaits the pair, announcing ominously that

they gazed at each other with smiles, and with that unmistakable expression which means so little at the moment, yet so often leads up to passion, heart-ache, union, disunion, devotion, overpopulation, drudgery, content, resignation, despair. (113-14)

His intrusive warning gains thematic force by immediately preceding the dreary scene in Edith's bedroom when her husband joins her at the window for a moment, merely "for politeness' sake," before withdrawing again to follow his own pursuits (115). As with the Harnhams, evidence of the younger couple's incompatibility manifests itself only when it is too late. Horribly out of place in London on her wedding day, Anna seems to Raye suddenly less attractive and hardly even a

measurable presence in her own new home. She is "as a domestic animal who humbly heard but understood not" (133). With the exposure of her illiteracy and of the real identity of Raye's correspondent, nothing remains for the characters but to bear out the narrator's prediction and take up their bitter lives of "heart-ache." The story ends with appropriate grimness in two superbly understated scenes of ironic misalliance: first, Edith and Harnham unwittingly pass each other by at the train station--he out of "perfunctoriness" and she out of "preoccupation," forgetting in her grief that she has a husband; and, on the train carrying him and his bride away for their honeymoon, Charles Raye sighs in "dreary resignation" over love letters written to him by another woman (136-37). Through his masterly combination of such omniscient dramatization, objective narrative analysis, and subjective character revelation, Hardy achieves the clarity of meaning he always aims for, without resorting to the awkward didacticism of "For Conscience' Sake."

Beyond providing clarity, however, Hardy's use of the omniscient perspective makes each of his omniscient stories satisfyingly distinctive, for he always finds some fresh means of exploiting the device to present his characters and themes. Two final examples demonstrate this adaptability within the pattern especially well. In the unconventional opening paragraph of "The Son's Veto" (LLI), the omniscient stance allows Hardy to align the reader instantly with timid Sophy Twycott against the tyranny of her priggish son, Randolph. By situating the reader behind Sophy, to view the "wonder and mystery" of her elaborately coiled "nut-brown hair," and then deflating his expectations with the comment that "she had done it all herself, poor thing," the narrator draws the reader swiftly into Sophy's lonely experience. That dressing her hair should be "almost the only accomplishment she could boast of," indeed almost her only occupation in life, speaks eloquently of how heavily time

weighs on her hands in a world so far removed from her simple country origins (35). And, as the narrator emphasizes in the next scene, the son who might provide her solace instead rejects Sophy's loving overtures in his shame at her lack of education: correcting his mother's grammar "with an impatient fastidiousness that was almost harsh," Randolph betrays at his first appearance the snobbery that rules his character to the end. Moreover, in one of Hardy's nicest bits of characterization, the narrator's obvious disapproval here of Randolph's disrespectful tone casts a faintly repellent aspect, in the following paragraph, over the boy's "surreptitious attempts to eat a piece of cake without taking it out of the pocket wherein it lay concealed" (37)--an action that might well seem comic or endearing in another context.

On rare occasions, Hardy does pursue a comic rather than a tragic effect and, accordingly, uses the omniscient narrator's intrusive voice to heighten the humor and openly satirize his characters. Such is the case especially with "The Distracted Preacher" (WT), in which the narrator merrily traces young Stockdale's prolonged battle between a rather capricious conscience and a decidedly healthy sexual attraction to his pretty, brandy-smuggling landlady. Flirtatious and fun-loving, Lizzy Newberry is quite a temptation to a Methodist minister who is "as yet only of the halfpenny-candle sort" of "shining light" in his profession (226), and mostly still just an ordinary young man with a "great craving for somebody on whom to throw away superfluous interest" (222). Continually the target of the narrator's satirical glosses, Stockdale emerges as a kind of trifling caricature of Hawthorne's soul-tormented Arthur Dimmesdale. Like Dimmesdale, Hardy's guilt-ridden clergyman seeks to appease his conscience through "self-chastisement" (227); but his atonements, like his sins, are absurdly trivial. Disturbed by his part in tapping the brandy tub with Lizzy on the night of his arrival, Stockdale deliberately denies himself the luxury of

a fire to ward off his cold. When he cannot resist the delightful anticipation of perhaps repeating the adventure with her, he hypocritically resolves to render the proceeding "more moral by steadfastly insisting that no water be introduced" to fill up the broached tub (228). And upon finding himself, after a mere three days, utterly distracted by the lady from his clerical duties, he sets "a watch upon his tongue and eyes for the space of one hour and a half" before deeming the struggle useless and surrendering to romance for the duration of his temporary incumbency (229). Although his moral discipline wins out in the end and Stockdale ultimately converts Lizzy to his own conventional values, the omniscient narrator's tongue-in-cheek record of the man's vacillation helps maintain the rollicking humor of the tale and lends considerable credence to the alternate ending Hardy provides in his 1912 footnote--a far more appropriate conclusion in which Lizzy rejects the stuffy minister to emigrate instead with her smuggling cousin Jim, in accordance with "the true incidents of which the tale is a vague and flickering shadow" (287).

In his preface to Wessex Tales, Hardy mentions several of his sources for these "true incidents," including the court records of an 1830 smuggling trial and the reminiscences of an old employee of his father's who had carried "spirit-tubs" in his youth (viii-x). But Hardy also likely drew upon stories preserved in his own family from the days when his grandfather let smugglers hide tubs on his property, "his house being a lonely one." The latter anecdote appears, significantly, in the first of Hardy's personal memoranda notebooks edited by Richard H. Taylor (8-9). Hardy was, as Taylor asserts, "a compulsive note-taker" (xiii) who covered an extraordinary range of subjects in both these and his commonplace notebooks.¹ And, while much

¹ See The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy, ed. Lennart A. Björk (New York: New York UP, 1985). These six notebooks contain passages Hardy copied from books and articles rather than personal anecdotes.

of this material later made its way into Hardy's autobiography, some of it also directly inspired his short stories. Michael Millgate cites one notebook in particular, titled "Facts, from Newspapers, Histories, Biographies, & other Chronicles-- (mainly Local)," as containing items from Hardy's reading that appealed strongly to his imagination by "their oddity, their incorporation of some ironic narrative twist, or their illumination of the social life of the period" (*Biography* 248). A Group of Noble Dames, of course, represents Hardy's most substantial use of a printed source in his short fiction, as he imaginatively transforms into "palpitating drama" the faintest genealogical clues in John Hutchins's The History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset (GND vii). But many of his other stories can be traced to stray observations from his miscellaneous reading and, especially, to tales he heard from friends, relatives, and other Dorset residents.

Hardy's fascination with researching and recording these local materials naturally surfaces most frequently in those stories with the strongest flavor of the oral tradition--those in which a frame narrator at least momentarily lures him away from the omniscient mode. In falling back upon what Millgate calls his "oldest, deepest, and surest creative resources" (*Biography* 247), Hardy obviously could not help wishing to reflect the traditional quality of his subjects in an equally traditional narrative pose. And yet, it often seems to have been enough for him merely to suggest the oral tradition, through a brief recourse to those extra narrators who strike most modern readers as disturbingly artificial, before resuming his omniscient stance. These experiments with the frame tale comprise the second major pattern in Hardy's manipulation of perspective, and it is to them that I turn in the remainder of this chapter to examine both the problems and the varying degrees of success Hardy encountered with the frame device.

Many of the frame narrators mirror Hardy's own interest in preserving folk legends and obscure historical oddities. In one instance, Hardy draws the legend straight from his own family history: in "The Duke's Reappearance" (CM), he repeats "A Family Tradition"--as it was told to him by an unnamed "kinsman"--concerning the supposed encounter of their mutual ancestor Christopher Swetman with the Duke of Monmouth.² As the immediate narrator, this kinsman is careful to describe the stranger's two visits in such a way that he manages both to capture the romantic essence that kept the legend alive for two centuries (Swetman's superstitious conviction that his second visitor was either the Duke's ghost or the man himself, an imposter having been executed in his place) and, simultaneously, to maintain a detached tone that suggests the more reasonable explanation (that the second man was a friend come to fetch the Duke's belongings in obedience to a last request).³ Yet, aside from this admirable balance between his own and Swetman's perspectives, the story is hardly more than a sketch, for there is very little significant characterization and no discernable theme to provide literary substance.

Several of the frame stories in A Changed Man are guilty of the same superficiality. Hardy himself recognized the volume's relative inferiority when pirating of the stories in America forced him to collect them in 1913. In August of that year, he complained to Sir George Douglas that "I heartily wish I could snuff out several of them, but my hand is forced, & I shall have the pleasure of listening to

² Hardy records this tradition again in The Early Life (7-8) in a discussion of his mother's family. Herself the daughter of a Swetman, Hardy's mother may, in fact, be the unnamed kinsman of the story. Certainly, she was a major source of Hardy's interest in and knowledge of local legend, a woman whom he described upon her death as having possessed "an extraordinary store of local memories, reaching back to the days when the ancient ballads were everywhere heard at country feasts, in weaving shops, and at spinning wheels" (LY) 106).

³ Brady 188.

reviewers lamenting the feebleness to which I have declined" (CL 4: 300). Perhaps the story he would most have wished to "snuff out" (certainly one his reviewers have lamented)⁴ is "Master John Horseleigh, Knight," with its flat, unengaging characters and clumsily devised plot. It is, as Hardy wrote, "of the slightest" (CL 2: 19); but, for present purposes, its narrator makes it interesting. This "thin-faced gentleman" is one of the few frame personae maintained throughout a story (233); and, although the effect is greatly diminished by the story's weaknesses, he does color the narrative faintly with his own personality. By way of his occasional pedantic asides, the narrator emerges consistently as a somewhat stuffy, but energetic scholar. Like his creator, he is an amateur explorer of local, aristocratic genealogies, delving into old records much as Hardy did before writing A Group of Noble Dames.⁵ In piecing together the puzzle of Horseleigh's "contemporaneous wives" (233), the narrator has painstakingly consulted sixteenth-century marriage registers, the Horseleigh family pedigree, a manuscript describing the "manorial residence" (239), and above all, the local tradition that preserves eyewitness accounts of the unfortunate man's deathbed confession. This fusion of the narrator's scholarly distance and the local legend's sensational immediacy has the potential to accentuate dynamically the ironies that plague Horseleigh's life. From his innocent involvement in an unlawful marriage to his brutal murder before he can assure his legitimate heir's succession, Sir John's story is rife with the bitter coincidences and desperate impulses that characterize human experience in Hardy's view. But the plot is so loosely and undramatically

⁴ Harris 48; Brady 184.

⁵ The story may originally have been intended for Dames. As in that volume, the narrator addresses a serious audience on the subject of an ancient family's marital predicaments; and through him, as F. B. Pinion notes, Hardy re-creates "a traditional story to explain an apparent discrepancy" in Hutchins's account of Sir John Horsey of Clifton Maybank (Companion 372).

arranged--its central mystery being explained cumbrously at the end by "a mass of unprepared-for detail" (Harris 48)--that point of view alone can neither intensify the action nor generate sympathy for the characters' misfortunes.

In its point of view, "Horseleigh" also illustrates an almost imperceptible subpattern that marks many of the frame tales: the direct narrator is not actually the person identified as speaker, but is rather an unnamed member of the audience who now relates the story exactly as he heard it told. In essence, there is a frame around the frame, the external narrator being entirely devoid of characterizing touches. The same technique appears in "A Committee-Man of 'The Terror,'" "The Fiddler of the Reels," and "A Tradition of Eighteen Hundred and Four," though only in the last two with any real effectiveness. In a variation of the technique, the outer frame narrator appears in other stories not as an unidentified character speaking in the first person, but as an effaced third-person voice surrounding the narration of a specific persona. (Even the carefully devised groups of characters who frame and tell the stories in A Group of Noble Dames and A Few Crusted Characters are encompassed within the additional frame of such a narrator.) As close as these stories are in their extremities to the omniscient mode, it is not surprising that many of them succumb entirely within a few paragraphs, abandoning their narrative personae in favor of Hardy's preferred objective viewpoint.

Usually, the multiplicity of narrative voices is only briefly distracting, but occasionally, the layers are so numerous that they become a source of genuine irritation. Such is the case with "A Committee-Man of 'The Terror'" (CM), in which the unnamed, external narrator merely records a tale he heard told in his youth by the eighty-year-old "Mrs. H___," who in turn heard it from her mother and "wrote it down in the shape of a story," but who nevertheless recited it to her audience from

memory (215). Maire Quinn attributes this convoluted beginning to Hardy's concern for verisimilitude in "accounting for the overly literary style of the [spoken] narrative which follows" and to his "desire to achieve a compromise between [the] two rival modes" of "oral and literary narration" (76). But, in this instance, he may also have wished to approximate his own discovery of the facts behind his story--events from which he was no less removed than is the outermost narrator of his tale. The immediate inspiration for the harrowing experiences of Hardy's *Mademoiselle V___* lay in this historical anecdote he happened upon in his reading:

One of the Directory was seen a few days ago in the Strand, and recognized by a French lady whose father, mother, and brother he had murdered. She fainted away in the street, and before she recovered enough to speak he had escaped in the crowd.

Apparently the subject of town gossip initially, this story was then recorded in a letter, written on 3 March 1797 by Lady Elizabeth Talbot to her sister, Lady Harriot Fox-Strangways. The letter, in turn, was preserved and ultimately published in The Journal of Mary Frampton, where it came at last to Hardy's attention (Purdy, "A Source" 555).

Here, too, is the blend of oral and literary narration. But while his narrators merely preserve a "received" story through several generations, Hardy himself appropriates a tiny kernel of facts similarly preserved and constructs around them an elaborate fiction. However interesting he may at first consider the complex sequence of traditional narrators, once embarked upon his own imaginative version of the heroine's unnerving encounter, he obviously finds the story itself far more involving and the intermediate storytellers too restrictive for his purposes. Intrigued by the strange attraction between his characters--bitter enemies drawn to each other by their common plight as unwelcome refugees--Hardy simply requires more freedom to examine their inmost convictions and fears than the frame narrators can

provide. Thus, save for a few ineffectual intrusions by Mrs. H___, he abandons them, rendering all but the first and last pages of the story in omniscient tones.

This casual abandonment of deliberately introduced narrative personae is strangely common in stories where Hardy actually emphasizes the oral rather than the written perpetuation of local legends. Yet his inclusion of these narrators at all is even more perplexing, for they are neither substantial local personalities in their own right, nor entirely neutral observers standing aloof from the action. They are precisely the sort of ambiguous narrators Percy Lubbock seems to have in mind when he declares that "unless the presence of a seer and a recorder is made a value in itself, contributing definitely to the effect of the subject, he is better dispensed with and put out of the way" (185). Most of Hardy's frame narrators contribute only minimally to the overall effect of their stories, and usually, what they do contribute could be better achieved through more consistent means.

Such is the case with "What the Shepherd Saw" (CM), a tale that begins with narrative convolutions similar to those in "A Committee-Man." An anonymous narrator repeats a story told in earlier times by a "genial Justice of the Peace . . . who made himself responsible for [its] facts." Throwing in an occasional "he would say," this external speaker apparently reproduces even the "good old-fashioned" flourishes used by his predecessor (187), at least until the third paragraph when, as Quinn notes, the narrator no longer obtrudes, and the reader's interest becomes focused on a non-narrating observer--the shepherd himself (81-82). The rest of the story may well sustain the Justice's flourishes, but without the vocal reminders, they become indistinguishable from a straightforward omniscient account. It is true that Hardy does try to keep most details within the realm of what Bill Mills can legitimately be supposed to see, hear, and think--even to the strained point of

making the Duchess repeat, outside the manor house, the exact words of Ogbourne's note rather than have her go indoors, out of earshot, to show it to her husband. But Mills is never a direct narrator of his own story, and one wonders if the work might not have gained dramatic and thematic force had he been so. Such a first-person delivery would surely have made more of the debilitating sense of guilt that shatters his will and leaves him dead "somewhat under forty-nine years of age" (210).

That Hardy chooses to gloss over these effects of his protagonist's secret, and to skip entirely the years between the murder and its discovery, demonstrates clearly that Hardy's main interest lies in the eerie first sections of the story, and that, for once, subtleties of atmosphere outweigh the subtleties of character which usually monopolize his attention. The concluding paragraph--with its renewed reference to the Justice of the Peace and its record of the apparitions rumored to reenact the crime on Marlbury Down during Christmas week--reminds the reader that such atmospheric touches accord precisely with the narrative style the frame storyteller seems to relish at the outset. The Justice is said always to have begun, purposely, "with a bright moonlight night and a mysterious figure." On a cold upland such as he describes, weirdly lit by reflective "frost-sparkles," the ensuing events would, of course, be all the more horrific to a shepherd lad significantly characterized as "young for his occupation" (187). But if the narrator is careful here to suggest the impressionability of a simple peasant boy left alone at night beside an ancient Druid stone, he is equally careful to maneuver his eerie effects so as to exploit whatever degree of impressionability may reside in his listeners as well. The story fails simply because Hardy maintains neither his narrator's nor his own voice and artistic concerns throughout; consequently, the story splits into two fundamentally opposed halves and emerges unsatisfactorily as neither wholly a traditional horror story,

meant merely to entertain, nor wholly a study of character, designed to illustrate the corrosive effects of guilt.

Less disruptive of his story's unity of purpose is the frame narrator of "Enter a Dragoon" (CM). Though he, too, disappears quite early on, he is sustained at least long enough to establish a definite tone and thematic direction. Even before introducing the central theme of betrayal, the narrator displays an acute personal awareness of the passing of time, and of the old ways of life, that casts a solemn shade over all that follows. By vividly recalling his recent nostalgic ramble through a small house once witness to "an exceptional number of abrupt family incidents" (145), but now decayed and scheduled for demolition, he provides a telling backdrop for the images of decay and destruction that fill his heroine's life-story. Like the house she once occupied, Selina Paddock's experience culminates in an ironic contrast between past romantic associations and present disillusioning realities, and the narrator's melancholy mood aptly prefaces her crisis. In short, he possesses a subtle veneer of personality, which, paired with his contemplative interest in village history, makes him a credible embodiment of the traditional country storyteller.

As yet another of those frame personae, however, whom Hardy frames, in turn, with an inconspicuous third-person narrator, the gentleman "answerable for the truth of this story" appears only in the short, unnumbered section set apart from the rest as a sort of prologue. He simply describes the "doomed house," introduces the heroine, and retires (145). In an unusual stratagem for one of Hardy's short fictions, he gives way to a number of chorus-type characters who gather outside the house to gossip about Selina and, thus, conveniently fill in pertinent details about her past and the unexpected return of her lover. These figures then give way to Mrs. Stone, an intimate of the family who enters the house and actually talks with Selina, further

illuminating her sad history and anxious present. Though clearly encased in an omniscient presentation as part of what the effaced narrator observes, these speakers are functional both as characters (albeit incidental ones) and as tools for establishing antecedent action; and one does not resent their gradual disappearance from the story as Hardy turns more and more frequently to direct analysis of Selina's inner turmoil. It is the abrupt disappearance of the first-person frame narrator that is annoying, despite his mood-setting value. Hardy might just as well have begun with the gossiping neighbors as they observe the agitation in the Paddock household, or else have replaced the persona's opening description of the house with a purely omniscient one, which, with little revision, would have created the same effect.

Although the frame device itself fails in most of the stories in A Changed Man, the early shift to omniscience usually redeems the story proper. The one serious exception is the volume's title story, in which the inconsistencies of perspective continue to the end, undermining unity, interfering with development, and thus spoiling the entire work. It begins much like the other frame tales, with an unidentified third-person narrator relating events apparently described to him by the man in the oriel window, a rather shadowy figure who observed them personally. But, unlike those other stories, this one does not slip quickly into an omniscient style once the source of its facts has been identified. Instead, Hardy tries to retain his observer's limited perspective throughout--with disastrous results:

Having established this observer early on . . . , Hardy is at a loss to find something for him to see. His role changes from surveyor of the High Street to general confidant and focal point of unity in the story. Every so often the state of his knowledge of affairs is ascertained, but his presence becomes more and more cumbersome, and long before the story ends he has stopped earning his keep. (Quinn 80-81)

Part of the problem is the obvious contrivance Hardy must resort to in order to supply the invalid with his knowledge of the characters' lives. What he cannot see

from his window he gathers from the opportune shouts of schoolboys, the gossip of unidentified callers, and occasional encounters with the Maumbrys themselves. Only once is such an encounter dramatized so as to give substance and credibility to the persona's role as witness. The rest of the time, the reader is distanced from both the observer and the action by Hardy's attempts to maintain simultaneously the "witness's" immediate perspective and the separate voice of the outer narrator, who repeatedly emphasizes the former's limited means of knowledge. This narrator is apparently intended to possess no information beyond that conveyed to him by the observer; and yet, to further complicate matters, Hardy drifts continually into brief omniscient passages where he reproduces the private conversations of Laura Maumbry with her husband and with her lover, and even quotes the letter she writes on the night of her planned elopement. Nothing in the story suggests that she ever shared these intimate exchanges with the man in the oriel window.

But besides creating an unconvincing frame persona, Hardy's failure to maintain a single narrative viewpoint renders the story's central event unconvincing as well. There is, extraordinarily, "no attempt to explore the process of change" in Jack Maumbry's character from that of a somewhat frivolous captain of the Hussars to that of an earnest, heroic clergyman (Sumner 19). Nor is there any thematic comment on the appropriateness of his professional shift or on the moral difficulties it poses for his vivacious wife--a serious artistic weakness which John Bayley attributes specifically to the "withholding of the direct viewpoint" (226).⁶ One cannot imagine Hardy neglecting such important issues had he approached the story entirely from an omniscient stance, or even shifted to such a stance as usual after the first page or two.

⁶ Brady addresses both this moral issue and the plausibility of Maumbry's metamorphosis in some detail (191-93).

In view of its weaknesses, it seems especially significant that Hardy regarded "A Changed Man" as the best story in his last collection (CL 4: 297). His valuation of it above "The Waiting Supper" and "A Mere Interlude" is surprising, since both stories outshine it in every way, from plot development and narrative consistency to the convincing exploration of engaging characters. When paired with his frequent, casual use of ineffectual frame narrators, Hardy's preference here reinforces one's impression of a remarkable insensitivity at times to the niceties of perspective in his short fiction and to the disruptive effects created by such inconsistent applications of the technique. Drawn toward the figure of the traditional local storyteller, Hardy nevertheless seems unwilling to enter fully into the minds of his narrative personae. Though extraordinarily sensitive to the complexities of human nature, and adept at portraying them through his characters, he can never completely subdue his own personality as observer and storyteller to a fictional personality of his own creation.⁷ Thus, only rarely does he achieve even a convincing, workable union with his frame narrators--not a fusion, but a partnership which allows him to exploit the ironic limitations or simple wisdom of their insights and the more objective, penetrating powers of his own understanding, without having to sacrifice one for the other.

Hardy's few successful frame stories have naturally attracted more critical attention than his failures, and foremost in both general popularity and scholarly approval is "A Tradition of Eighteen Hundred and Four" (WT). Though the plot is hardly more than an anecdote, most critics praise highly the invention of Solomon

⁷ For the same reason, Hardy has little use for the popular device of the protagonist-narrator who tells his own story in the first person. His only two attempts at the subtleties of this device--"A Tryst at an Ancient Earthwork" and "Alicia's Diary"--are too uneven to be successful and too unlike each other to constitute an additional narrative pattern in Hardy's repertoire. See chapters 4 and 6 respectively for discussions of these stories in relation to the major patterns of setting and character to which they do appertain.

Selby and the subtle camouflaging of his unreliability with his skill as a storyteller. That Solomon's first-person account of having witnessed a nocturnal landing by Bonaparte is unreliable is suggested from the first by the presence of the frame narrator, an unnamed member of Solomon's audience who comments at beginning and end on the old man's irresistible influence over his listeners. To Hardy's surprise, that influence--preserved in the narrator's retelling of Solomon's story more than ten years later--exerted itself profoundly over his own audience as well, some readers taking the tale so seriously that it became circulated and credited as an actual tradition he was assumed to have used as a source (LY 195).

Despite these early readers' credulity and Hardy's admitted efforts to render "the extreme improbability" of his tale less obvious (LY 195), there is ample evidence, distributed carefully throughout the story, that Solomon Selby is not to be taken entirely at his word. In her interest in Wessex Tales as a series of "pastoral histories" (1), Kristin Brady has provided by far the most thorough evaluation of "A Tradition's" point of view, focusing particularly on the clues to Selby's unreliability (13-16). She draws attention especially to his impressionability at the time of the original events--to his utter belief in the tall tales of his uncle, a waggish soldier who continually nips at the family supply of smuggler's brandy and who clearly enjoys manipulating his nephew's imagination. The boy falls asleep, feeling himself almost a soldier, too, under the influence of his uncle's braggadocio; and when he wakes from romantic dreams (if he wakes at all) to the sight and sound of uniformed foreigners examining the coastline, he is primed to interpret what he sees as the much-discussed French prelude to invasion. Uncle Job's quick confirmation of Solomon's suspicions and his exaggerated regret at having no gun with which to kill Bonaparte may be merely "a performance for the child's sake" (Brady 15). Such an

act would certainly be in keeping with Job's character and would also support Brady's speculation that the "foreign" landing party actually consisted of officers from the King's German Legion patrolling the isolated downs for smugglers. Though she pursues the idea no further, it stands to reason that Uncle Job, an intimate of the smuggling trade, would recognize such officials at once and relish the unexpected opportunity to fabricate a dangerous adventure for his naive nephew.

Convincing as her analysis is thus far, however, Brady's emphasis on Selby's unreliability leads her to a less persuasive conclusion: her claim that he displays an "utter lack of irony regarding his past self" (15) and is thus unaware of the conflicting evidence he supplies. Actually, several details suggest that he is well aware of the clues he drops and of the effect his methods have on his audience. Brady herself notes that the tale's central subject is "not the episode itself, but the process of storymaking and storytelling" (13); and Solomon Selby is a master storyteller, one with whom Hardy is, for once, delighted to share the narrative responsibilities. As the frame narrator reveals at the outset, Selby has only to smile "his narrative smile" as he muses silently in the local inn's chimney-corner to spark eager anticipation in his companions. He begins at once to elicit their trust by peppering his opening summary with such phrases as "as you mid know" and "as I need hardly tell ye" (33, 34), subtly reminding his listeners of the common history and long, valued acquaintance they share with him and each other. And when he drops these phrases for parenthetical appeals to Uncle Job's questionable authority--as a "sergeant of foot (who used to know all about these matters)" (35)--Solomon cleverly maintains the sense of community and encourages acceptance of that authority by staunchly aligning Job, himself, and his audience all at one stroke against the closed-minded gentry "who only believe what they see in printed lines" (36).

Thus, by the time he reaches the improbable central event of his tale, he has his audience well enough under control to avert their disbelief. For example, when he admits that he recognized Bonaparte only after Uncle Job identified him, Solomon anticipates his listeners, expostulates, "Not know Boney? I should think I did know Boney" (39), and buries their doubt under an avalanche of detail. So intense and thorough is his description of the famous Corsican's features that one hardly registers the possibility that it was the picture he had seen "a hundred times" rather than the lantern-lit figure he glimpsed only for a moment that really supplied the details. More than a mere teller of tall tales like his uncle, Solomon is a master of technique who has the power to make the absurd believable. As the frame narrator explains at the end, Solomon defeats the "incredulity of the age" (40):

if anything short of the direct testimony of his own eyes could persuade an auditor that Bonaparte had examined these shores for himself with a view to a practicable landing-place, it would have been Solomon Selby's manner of narrating the adventure which befell him on the down. (41)

This tribute to his friend's talent is the most direct proof of conscious deliberation in Solomon's narrative style, and in supplying that proof, the frame narrator neatly highlights the story's greatest strength and justifies his own secondary narrative role.

In "The Fiddler of the Reels" (LLI), the frame narrator's role becomes much more centrally important. The story opens with the familiar device of an unnamed speaker quoting the words an "old gentleman" once addressed to a local gathering. This rather opinionated gentleman quickly establishes the story's basic tension--between time-honored beliefs of the rural past and the sweeping changes brought by modern progress--by describing the impact of the Great Exhibition of 1851: ⁸

⁸ The Great Exhibition setting was Hardy's means of making his story suitable for its original publication in Scribner's Magazine, in a special May 1893 "Exhibition Number" for the Chicago World's Fair (Purdy, Bibliog. Study 82).

'For South Wessex, the year formed in many ways an extraordinary chronological frontier or 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 year since the Conquest was ever witnessed in this part of the country.' (165)

One expects this emphatic, analytical voice to continue when the focus turns to the "queer little history" of Mop Ollamoor and his victims (165). But this time, the tale has no single source persona; and when the old gentleman's voice does disappear, it gives way not to an omniscient one, as in most of the frame stories, but to the initial, unnamed speaker. For an anonymous frame narrator, this young man possesses far more substance and individuality than most of his counterparts: he potently infuses the story with his own modern attitudes even as he preserves the superstitions and old-fashioned judgments of the "seniors in [his] party" (166), those who knew the characters well and whose memories he pieces together for the present narrative.

This complex compilation of village gossip and tradition by a narrator too young to have witnessed the original events accounts for the story's blend of "folkloric and modern elements," its balance between "nostalgic recollection" and more objective, "contemporary ways of explaining experience" (Brady 133). While the elder members of the group condemn Mop's "fantastical" playing as the devil's music and half-believe him a demon himself, the young narrator voices a more modern opinion of the fiddler's mesmerizing influence--as something "it would require a neurologist to fully explain" (169). The intricacy with which the narrator intertwines his companions' views with his own is one of the story's most admirable effects, but the very subtlety of the combination has led some scholars to attribute all the views to a single speaker. Frank Giordano, for instance, assumes that the old gentleman narrates the whole story, even though quotation marks clearly indicate where his comments begin and end. Accordingly, Giordano sees the "narrator" as a

rather irritating character marked by a conglomeration of "repressive Victorian and Christian values," blatant materialism, and the amateur's "scientific enthusiasm, expressed in the up-to-date jargon of popular geology and physiognomy" (617, 622). While this view produces quite a credible Victorian figure, it misses entirely the multiplicity of voices through which Hardy captures the commingling of ancient and modern attitudes that has characterized this Wessex community since the watershed year of the Exhibition. Thomas Mallory makes a similar mistake, seeing the narrator as a "slightly stodgy" figure embodying his whole community's range of beliefs--from scientific skepticism to a strong vein of mysticism he cannot entirely repress. Nevertheless, Mallory at least recognizes the bifurcated outlook that governs the story's point of view, and he astutely praises Hardy's choice of a limited rather than an omniscient narrator. By thus avoiding the "temptation to explain too much," Hardy achieves the reserve essential to his story's success: "the reader is nowhere forced to accept a rationalization of the supernatural and can believe or doubt the rumors which alone tell of Ollamoor after his disappearance from the inn" (15); neither is the supernatural view ever forced upon the reader, for there is always a "way left open for the rationalist's retreat" (17).

In the last half of the story, Hardy does slip occasionally into the omniscient mode, especially in the London scenes, to present action and dialogue to which none of the Wessex folk were privy. It is an omniscient voice also that provides the most specific insights into character: describing soft-hearted Ned's helpless acceptance of a ready-made family--even though his is a "nature not greatly dependent upon the ministrations of the other sex for its comfort" (170)--and shallow Car'line's petty sense of triumph in returning to her home district a proud "London wife" (178). These brief lapses, however, are far less noticeable and objectionable than Hardy's

omniscient shifts in other frame stories, mainly because the early pages have prepared the reader to accept the tale as the combined evidence of many eyewitness accounts and decades of gossip, speculation, and hindsight analysis by an entire community. Furthermore, when the omniscient passages increase toward the end, with Car'line's last hysterical submission to Mop's music, Hardy is careful to identify periodically the source of his narrator's information so as to keep both the frame persona and the community view firmly in the reader's mind. Such interruptions also help obscure the fact that there was no one left in the room to witness the final moments of Car'line's dance, much less to divine her inward response to the fiddler's "gimlet-like gaze" (182). Indeed, Hardy seems keenly aware here of the effects he achieves through point of view and of the extent to which he can efficaciously intrude upon his narrative frame. For while he manages to slip in direct analyses of Ned and Car'line without jeopardizing his story's narrative unity, Hardy wisely refrains from entering Mop's consciousness. The narrator makes one or two guarded suppositions as to Mop's thoughts and motives, but provides no firm evidence either way about his "demonic" nature. Appropriately, the story ends with nothing more conclusive than the "general opinion" of the community whose responses the narrator has recorded throughout (185).

Equally concerned with community views, but more exact in his information, is the frame narrator in "The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion" (WT), who retells the story of Phyllis Grove in order to correct the fragmented version long circulated by uncharitable gossips. Repeating for the first time the story he heard from Phyllis herself when he was but fifteen and she "an old lady of seventy-five" (46), this first-person narrator becomes the perfect instrument for Hardy's narrative purposes. Because he draws all his details from the woman who experienced the

events and their accompanying emotions, no sudden shifts to a more encompassing perspective are necessary. And because he waits, at her request, until twenty years after Phyllis's death to tell the tale, the reader has not only the benefit of Phyllis's mature reflection on her past, but also that of the narrator's own years of sympathetic, but perceptive analysis. Together, this retrospective advantage and the narrator's direct access to the full truth of events ninety years distant bring his perspective very close to omniscience. The result is a frame persona who is both credible in his own right and persuasive as an objective interpreter of character.

Occasional references to what Phyllis "always said" help sustain the narrator's plausibility as a flesh-and-blood character (57), as do the various tones he adopts to describe the people of the tale. But while the adjustments he makes from character to character clearly reveal his personal sympathy for Phyllis and her doomed lover, they also shed considerable light on the respective temperaments of all concerned. One does not doubt his judgments, for they are always substantiated by events and lent an air of objectivity by his willingness to examine Phyllis's character as closely as the others. If Dr. Grove is condemned as a misanthropic jailer, who perversely ruins his daughter's happiness out of an oppressive sense "that he [has] wasted his life in the pursuit of illusions" (47), one is told just as distinctly that Phyllis's tragedy owes much to her own illusions about life and love. What her father's bitter seclusion and tyranny initiate, Phyllis's romantic disposition completes. Born of loneliness, her passion for Matthäus Tina can end only in misery, for he is to her an "ideal being," "the subject of a fascinating dream--no more" (54).

Through the central contrast he draws between this glorious foreign soldier and the utterly mediocre Humphrey Gould, the narrator reveals the full irony of Phyllis's position and character. In particular, the two passages which summarize

each suitor's courtship of Phyllis brilliantly define both the men themselves and the heroine's emotional response to them. In the case of Humphrey Gould,

This bachelor of thirty found his way to the village on the down:
beheld Phyllis; made her father's acquaintance in order to make hers;
and by some means or other she sufficiently inflamed his heart to lead
him in that direction almost daily; till he became engaged to marry
her. (48)

Contrast this to Tina's suit:

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. (51)

The style the narrator adopts in each passage reflects both his own prejudices and the essence of each man's character. With its choppy, unemphatic sentence structure, the first paragraph is appallingly colorless and devoid of specifics--a perfect representation of Gould's shallow, methodical personality. The one word of any emotional force, "inflamed," has its potential ironically extinguished by the superb preceding adverb, "sufficiently." The phrase exactly captures (and inherently condemns) Gould's casual approach to life and the vagueness of his loyalties. In contrast, the second passage consists of fluid, complex sentences and a host of sensory images that present Tina, much more favorably, as an impulsive, but deeply emotional young man to whom mere words are unnecessary in matters of the heart.

Both passages, however, suggest as much about Phyllis as about her admirers. Before the arrival of the Hussars, knowing only her father's loveless home, Phyllis is content--even proud--to have attracted the attentions of "an approximately fashionable man of a mild type" (47-48). But, as the courtship description indicates, her feelings are no more inflamed than Gould's. Her presence is hardly discernible

in the passage at all, and one can well imagine her passivity during so unromantic a wooing. When the "golden radiance" of Tina's regiment flashes on her solitary scene (47), however, Phyllis's heart and imagination are dramatically awakened. And in the second passage, the narrator focuses more on her than on her lover. Isolated from the villagers and neglected by both father and fiancé, she readily responds to the soldier's tender means of communication, hearing perhaps all she wants to hear in his broken English and yearning, like Desdemona, to experience vicariously the stranger's daring exploits and warm family ties. Under his influence, her latent romanticism surfaces, bringing with it the impetuosity that leads to disaster. The inspired depth and economy of these passages attest powerfully to Hardy's skill when he does establish a true partnership with his narrator.

Perhaps the frame device succeeds as well as it does here because the narrator who enables Hardy to include the sort of direct analysis he prefers actually is Hardy in many respects. Much of the plot is based on stories Hardy himself heard from various local personages; and, like his narrator, he feels a special affinity for this particular tragic history. Hardy rarely records his personal estimations of his short stories, but he comments revealingly on this affinity for "The Melancholy Hussar" in an early preface to Life's Little Ironies, the volume in which he first placed the story:

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. . . . "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 burials

is literal, to be read any day in the original by the curious who recognize the village. (Personal Writings 30)⁹

Hardy's sensitivity to such fragile human links with the past is also mirrored in his narrator. The descriptive segments that begin and end the story emphasize the importance of time, change, and memory; and the narrator repeatedly remarks upon the differences in social values and attitudes that separate the current generation from the "picturesque time" of Phyllis's story (46), making the things of that era "look strange and barbarous now" (45). The lonely downs remain unchanged but for the now overgrown surfaces of the deserters' graves, but only the "older villagers, . . . who know of the episode from their parents, still recollect the place where the soldiers lie" (66). Through these nostalgic touches, the story becomes not merely a chivalrous revision of inaccurate gossip, but a lament for the deterioration of local traditions in general and of the shared history that once kept them alive.¹⁰

This lapse in the continuity of human experience and memory is, of course, one of the gaps Hardy's fiction seeks to fill. But while most of his stories contain elements of the oral tradition, nowhere is Hardy's interest in preserving the material and spirit of that tradition pursued more deliberately than in his two most ambitious

⁹ For the basic details of the soldiers' desertion and subsequent capture, Hardy follows closely a news item he copied from the Morning Chronicle (4 July 1801) into his Trumpet-Major Notebook (Personal Notebooks 124-25).

¹⁰ In this respect, the story anticipates a similar lament Hardy made more than a decade later in a March 1902 letter to Rider Haggard concerning the improvement of agricultural conditions and the consequences of the new mobility of rural laborers:

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. . . . 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 known. (LY 94)

applications of the narrative frame: A Group of Noble Dames and A Few Crusted Characters. In both, a series of stories is unified by a single, encompassing narrative situation, which, in the manner of Boccaccio and Chaucer, gathers a miscellaneous group of characters who share a common objective and inspires each person to tell a relevant tale. With its communal "atmosphere and psychology," the occasion itself becomes in each instance "the expression of something further" (Abercrombie 83), of a general mind-set and system of values, which at once characterize the storytellers and determine how fully one should accept their judgments.

In A Group of Noble Dames, the storm which prevents the members of the South Wessex Field and Antiquarian Club from undertaking their planned excursion leads them to substitute "for the regulation papers on deformed butterflies, fossil ox-horns, prehistoric dung-mixens, and such like" (48-49), the more entertaining histories of Wessex noblewomen, "whose actions and passions were now, but for men's memories, buried under the brief inscription on a tomb or an entry of dates in a dry pedigree" (50). Suggested to Hardy by the bare framework of facts in Hutchins's History of Dorset, these stories become in the hands of the Club narrators a gossipy "pageant of disastrous marriages, confessed and unconfessed adulteries, complicated illegitimacies, sudden deaths, suspected crimes, bizarre cruelties and the like" (Stewart 150). In short, they contain precisely the stuff of which local legends are made, and the narrators recall them with relish.¹¹ Oddly

¹¹ These subjects caused a great deal of trouble when Hardy submitted the original six stories to the Graphic. William Locker protested that, although the stories were "very suitable and entirely harmless to the robust minds of a Club smoking-room," they were "not at all suitable for the more delicate imaginations of young girls" in the magazine's family audience. For the complete text of Locker's letter and a detailed account of the bowdlerizations Hardy was forced to make to satisfy the Graphic editors, see Simon Gatrell, Hardy the Creator: A Textual Biography (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988) 80-96. For contemporary reviews which objected to the restored and expanded Dames volume on similar grounds of

enough, Hardy waits until the end of the first story to introduce the Club frame, merely indicating parenthetically at the outset the presence of the first speaker. Subsequently, however, transitional passages at the end of each tale sustain the Club setting and provide a revealing forum for the narrators' placidly conventional, stereotypically male views of the women they discuss.

Much has been made of the frame narrators' ironic lack of sympathy for the noble dames, women whose misfortunes, after all, derive mainly from the conflict between their unconventionally passionate natures and the very social prejudices represented by the collective attitude of the Field Club.¹² It is an attitude which invariably condemns the woman's rashness, while taking almost no account of "the wrongs performed by father, lover, or husband" (Brady 91). When Barbara Grebe, Lady Penelope, and virtuous Emmeline Oldbourne are hastened toward death by brutal husbands, the Club discussions categorically attribute their fate to a divine chastisement for "unseemly wantonness" (188). In "Lady Mottisfont," Dorothy's two "mothers" are justifiably criticized for being "not genuinely staunch in their tenderness" toward her (133), though no similar judgment is passed on Sir Ashley for relinquishing his parental responsibilities. Even the child-bride Betty Dornell, a helpless pawn of ambitious parents, seems to come under reproach--apparently for being adaptable enough actually to fall in love with the rich husband chosen for her.

coarseness, see "Contemporary Literature," The National Review 17 (1891): 838-48; and "The Merry Wives of Wessex," Pall Mall Gazette (8 July 1891): 3.

¹² On this point, see Brooks 148; Orel, Vict. Short Story 110; and Brady 89-94. For considerations of the volume as a single, unified work, see Chapter 2 in Brady and George Wing's "A Group of Noble Dames: 'Statuesque dynasties of delightful Wessex,'" Thomas Hardy Annual 5 (1987): 75-101, to date the only extensive studies of the Dames collection. Brady's chapter is particularly interesting for its examination of the subtle interrelationships between the stories, of how, with "few exceptions, each story can be seen as a repatterning or ironic refutation of the ostensible moral of the one preceding it" (53).

This consistently narrow-minded outlook produces the pervasive dramatic irony that is the volume's hallmark. After every story, the renewed intrusion of the frame narrators cautions the reader against too hasty an evaluation of the tale's characters and, as Brady explains, encourages a more objective and compassionate consideration of those characters' behavior than the reader might otherwise expend:

the constant presence . . . of the Wessex Field and Antiquarian Club forces the reader to separate himself from both storyteller and audience and to see events from a different perspective altogether--to transcend the complacency of the Club members, whose judgments simply do not accord with the presented facts. . . . In the eyes of the narrators [these stories] possess a convention-bound moral, while to the enlightened reader they embody a human problem which must be judged according to separate standards. . . . (54)

Brady is not entirely accurate, however, in saying that this "double perspective" makes the volume "essentially different in tone and narrative technique from all of Hardy's other fiction" (54). The tone is unique perhaps in its ironic undercutting of the narrators' judgments, but the narrative technique is really no different from that used in most of Hardy's frame stories. Indeed, the volume owes its success to the very narrative quirk that makes so many of those other stories seem flawed: the shift to an omniscient voice. It is this "more enlightened narrative voice" that Brady recognizes in the opening and closing descriptions of the Field Club meeting (93)--for there is an analytical, third-person frame around the obvious frame of Club storytellers¹³--but the omniscient voice often takes over within the stories as well. Thus it is that the "presented facts" of the tales appear so jarringly at odds with the frame narrators' callous judgments. The reader is deliberately guided toward an enlightened, humane view of the noble dames by a narrator who stands outside all the action and sees both the dames and the Club members for what they are.

¹³ Unlike the outermost narrators in many of Hardy's individual frame stories, the third-person speaker here is not a member of the frame audience.

With this additional controlling perspective, Hardy's frame setting simply cannot produce the same bold effect as that in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. It successfully casts a communal atmosphere over the volume as a whole, but the potentially engaging personalities of the individual Club narrators are only faintly suggested in the conversational passages between stories and hardly ever reflected by distinctive narrative styles in the stories themselves.¹⁴ In fact, as narrators, the Club members are virtually indistinguishable and are seldom linked in any significant way to the specific tales they tell (Abercrombie 86; Brady 92). The local historian half-tells, half-reads the first and longest story from a manuscript he has prepared "with a view to publication" (49). The old surgeon relates a "professional" tale about a young woman's nervous susceptibility to systematic psychological torment. The Colonel recalls a legend of the Civil War; and the foppish Spark concludes with a melodramatic offering about elopement, attempted murder, and the happy reunion of long-estranged lovers. But these tenuous links shed little light on the narrators as characters. George Wing singles out the crimson maltster as the one Club narrator whose choice of subject actually betrays a substantial aspect of his personality. As the only speaker to tell a tale without an aristocratic heroine, the bourgeois maltster displays the same "grudging envy" which Timothy Petrick himself feels toward "the handsomer and the mightier" ("Dames" 97, 94).¹⁵

¹⁴ As an early reviewer observed, "though the tales are put into the mouths of ten different gentlemen, the manner of telling is always precisely the same: the manner, in fact, of Mr. Thomas Hardy" ("Contemporary Literature" 845).

¹⁵ Both Wing and Brady see this simultaneous fascination with and envy of the aristocracy as an ironic attribute possessed by all the Club narrators (Wing, "Dames" 94; Brady 92). A tantalizing reference in one of Hardy's letters to Edward Clodd, however, makes it especially tempting to examine the maltster closely: his is the only story in the volume that Hardy recommended specifically to a friend, and he identified it to Clodd by its narrator rather than by its title. But whether this singular emphasis indicates a mild sympathy on Hardy's part with his ambivalent-

Still, there is little in the narrative style of the tale to suggest that Hardy had a strong interest in the maltster as a persona. The colorful diction said to be "an approximation" of the crimson man's delivery lasts only a few pages before the story lapses unabashedly into an omniscient analysis of Petrick's strange convictions (149). Indeed, the only narrator with a distinctive narrative style is the old surgeon. His wry cynicism strongly colors the first half of "Barbara of the House of Grebe," where he slyly underscores the foibles of each character. He first mocks his heroine, by introducing her as a girl who "hated other pretty women the very least possible" (57). And, in a wonderfully metaphorical passage, he ridicules her parents' vacuous snobbery by describing their only consolation for the waste of their daughter's blue blood ("compounded of the best juices of ancient baronial distillation") on the plebeian Edmond Willowes, as the rumor that one of his ancestors "was once honoured with intermarriage with a scion of the aristocracy who had gone to the dogs" (61, 62). But even this rollicking, satirical voice fades, perhaps due to the grim shift in plot after Edmond's accident and Barbara's disastrous remarriage. Despite scattered reminders that he is repeating this local legend for his peers, the Club narrator recedes before the less flippant tones of the omniscient one. The surgeon returns convincingly only at the end when his companions join him in condemning Barbara's weakness and discussing the quasi-scientific interests of the case. There, as at the end of Petrick's story, the Club's eager approval of "subtle and instructive psychological studies" combines ironically with their male prejudices to obscure for them all mental aberrations except the woman's romantic delusions (163).

Within the story proper, however, Barbara is treated with greater understanding. Though not excused, her inability to love Edmond without his minded, middle-class narrator, or simply his preference for the collection's most original and incisive character study, the letter unfortunately does not reveal.

former beauty is rightly attributed to the inexperience of a bride hardly "grown out of the capricious fancies of girlhood" (77). And later, when she has been reduced to "obsequious amateness towards a perverse and cruel man," she is described as one "whose existence might have been developed to so much higher purpose but for the ignoble ambition of her parents and the conventions of the time" (90). Through such compassionate commentary, Barbara emerges still as a rather shallow woman, but as one more sinned against than sinning. Each of the stories contains similar narrative judgments, which, in their balanced tone and reasonable sympathy for the noble dames, hardly represent the attitudes of the ostensible narrators. Only the Man of Family presents a sympathetic view of his heroine without the aid of this overriding, omniscient voice. Lady Penelope appears consistently as an honorable woman, whose innocent jest with her three suitors is so exaggerated by irresponsible gossipers that it destroys her. But while the Man of Family acknowledges the role of social pressures in effecting Penelope's ruin, he fails to defend her at the end against the other Club members' charge of sinful self-indulgence; and one is reminded yet again of the limited narrators' unreliability.

Often, it is not so much sympathy as a clarity of perception about the characters, or a foray into their private thoughts, that betrays the presence of the omniscient narrator. He is the one who knows that Lady Mottisfont errs so far in the "direction of over-submissiveness" that she feels herself an unworthy "intruder" between her own husband, his child, and his former mistress (124, 123). And it is he who recognizes the peculiar "perverseness" that makes Lady Stonehenge crave only that which is denied her (111). But the most significant insights of the omniscient narrator come at the end, in his observation of the Club members themselves as they take leave of one another--knowing "that the easy intercourse which now exist[s]

between them all" will vanish on the morrow when the barriers of education and class are again in place (235). Some members, in fact, are never genuinely free of the reserve those barriers inspire. After the dinner break, which divides the volume in half, the rather impatient Club President and prim clerics do not return; the "faithful ones" consist mainly of the chummy lower-class members and those with particularly romantic or jocose interests in storytelling (133). Hopelessly entrenched themselves in conventional social hierarchies, the Club narrators never see the noble dames as anything more than objects of antiquarian interest. Paradoxically, it is through the omniscient narrator that Hardy resurrects those ladies from the dry dust of genealogical records and imbues their stories with the human warmth of the oral tradition. In this respect, Hardy's relationship with his frame narrators in A Group of Noble Dames is less that of a partner than that of a puppeteer, working the strings of characters who are completely unaware of how unattractive they appear.

How different the relationship is in Hardy's other long frame-fiction--the collection of "Colloquial Sketches," entitled A Few Crusted Characters, which concludes the volume of Life's Little Ironies. Again, one finds the additional frame of an omniscient narrator outside that of the travellers who actually tell the stories. But here, neither Hardy nor his outer narrator makes foolish puppets of the interior speakers. Instead, the latter are presented as likable characters whom Hardy trusts to narrate the stories themselves, the omniscient voice intruding only to introduce the frame situation at the beginning and to disperse its participants at the end. The fact that Hardy does describe the narrative occasion at the very outset makes the collection notably stronger than A Group of Noble Dames, in which the reader learns of the Club frame, unexpectedly, only after the first long tale has been told. And, most important, rather than perfunctorily listing the various speakers as he

does in Dames, and merely paraphrasing their agreement as to the subject matter of their tales, Hardy takes the time to evoke a thoroughly credible human scene. With the first sentence, the reader is transported effortlessly to "the High Street of a well-known market-town" (189) to witness the gradual, placid assembly of passengers in the Longpuddle carrier's van and to share their pleasant flutter of interest in John Lackland, the returned native who enlivens their familiar journey homeward.

Much of the engaging immediacy of this introduction derives from what Alexander Fischler calls the "stage-direction" quality of its descriptions ("Major Trends" 55). For the first four paragraphs, at least, the theatrical analogy is exceedingly apt: speaking entirely in no-nonsense present tense, the omniscient narrator conjures up a narrow stage--revealing only the fore-court of the White Hart Inn on a "blue and yellow autumn" afternoon (189)--upon which the actors enter singly and in pairs to take their seats in Burthen's van, until almost the entire cast is assembled. Mingled with the narrator's objective stage directions, however, is an affectionate commentary on the characters, which brings them instantly to life and sets the tone for the whole work. One smiles in recognition at the aged groceress who appears twenty minutes early in order to secure her corner of the van, even though there is "as yet no sign of a horse being put in, nor of a carrier" (189). And the smile broadens to a grin at the description of Mr. Day, "the world-ignored local landscape-painter" whose productions nonetheless adorn "every dwelling in the parish" (190). Then, suddenly, the theatrical techniques disappear: the horses are put in; the narrator shifts to the more conventional past tense; and the van begins to move along the road out of town, utterly dispelling the illusion of an artificial stage.

Despite its suddenness, this change in narrative approach seems perfectly smooth and natural--mainly because the omniscient narrator immediately

subordinates his voice and presence to those of the "actors" he has gathered together. No sooner does the van jog into motion than its rustic occupants command the reader's full attention, by beginning the amiable conversation which hints at their own delightful talents as narrators. The omniscient speaker need do little more to fill out his introduction than simply record the villagers' talk as they stop to make room for the last two passengers, the tardy curate and Lackland himself. Their courteous, but persistent interrogation of the "stranger" elicits all the information necessary about his past connection with Longpuddle and his present reason for returning--without interrupting the vital sense of community which their colorful local idiom has begun to reveal. In turn, Lackland's inquiries about the people he knew in childhood "lead very naturally," as Lascelles Abercrombie notes, "to [the] series of anecdotes" his companions relate, and the "whole business fits in perfectly with the occasion" (87). From the first, therefore, the frame of A Few Crusted Characters is a lively, integral part of the work, utterly credible in the sheer commonplaceness of its central event, and subtly instructive in its portrayal of the Longpuddle narrators' enviable rootedness in place, custom, and local history.

Their rootedness makes them, of course, the perfect dramatic foils for the deracinated John Lackland. But it also accounts for the genuine success of a work many scholars view as "a little masterpiece" (Abercrombie 86).¹⁶ For one thing, it makes the villagers inherently qualified to tell the stories they tell. In terms of occupation or character, they are only slightly better suited to narrate a given tale

¹⁶ Rutland 219-20; Howe, Hardy 77-78. Attracted by the regionalism and humor of the sketches, however, many of these admirers miss the darker elements of death and loss which culminate in Lackland's irreparable estrangement from his old home. For a more balanced and detailed analysis of the collection, especially of the structural counterpointing of comic and tragic motifs, see Richard C. Carpenter, "How to Read A Few Crusted Characters," Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Thomas Hardy, ed. Dale Kramer (New York: Barnes, 1979) 155-71.

than the Club members in Dames: Burthen, the carrier, begins naturally enough with the comic mishap of Tony Kytes and his wagon-load of sweethearts; and the seedsman's superstitious father tells a tale rife with visions, omens, and ghosts. But the vital link between teller and tale in most of the stories is less one of personality than of knowledge. Unlike the narrators in Dames, who tell stories of a time and a class of women with which they have no direct experience, the Longpuddle narrators take as their subjects the doings of fellow villagers never more than a generation or two distant. Moreover, each speaker is encouraged to relate those events about which he or she is most peculiarly well-informed. Thus, the parish clerk who witnessed the Hardcome cousins' exchange of fiancées at Tony Kytes's wedding-randy shares his narrative role with the curate, who learned the details of the subsequent drowning accident directly from the victims' surviving spouses. The schoolmaster tells the story of "Old Andrey's Experience as a Musician" because, as a "quire-boy" (230), he was present when the old man attempted his charade at the squire's Christmas party. And, in response to Lackland's inquiry, the elderly groceress recalls the tale of vengeance between "The Winters and the Palmleys," villagers of whom the other, younger passengers have no memory.

But while such first-hand knowledge of their subjects matches the individual frame narrators most directly to their respective stories, the link of personality is not neglected. Indeed, once one of them has embarked upon a tale, one never doubts it is that villager's voice one hears straight through to the end. There is no omniscient shift mid-stream to make him or her sound like all the rest. Although the speakers are not all equally flamboyant, their narrative styles are all entertaining and subtly appropriate for the stories they tell. The most memorable personalities, perhaps, are Burthen and Christopher Twink, since they narrate the most emphatically

humorous sketches. But even they differ in their means of achieving a comic tone: Burthen through an understated figurativeness of language--as when he describes Tony Kytes in a "dim sort of sweat" over the disastrous consequences of loving women "in shoals" (197, 194)--and the master-thatcher through an unreservedly satirical manner which makes all his stories "bear pruning" (220). Twink's sly zest for embarrassing slips of impropriety brilliantly suffuses the two stories he tells, capturing, respectively, the mortifying hilarity of Parson Billy Toogood's instant obliviousness, at the cry of the hounds, to the prospective bride and groom locked in his church tower; and that of the church choir's furious rendition of "The Devil among the Tailors" in place of the customary "Evening Hymn" (234).

In the more serious stories, the narrative personalities manifest themselves less obtrusively, but nonetheless significantly in their overall effect. Though the superstitious man's contribution hardly seems a story at all, his utter conviction of the authenticity and import of the supernatural signs surrounding William Privett's death compensates for the general lack of plot. His intense belief, illustrative of a vivid aspect of rural life, is ultimately more important than the miscellaneous testimonies he has carefully, and rather transparently, strung together to create as eerily impressive a chronology of fate and foreboding as he can muster. In "The Winters and the Palmleys," the somber reflection of extreme old age on the ways of the world lends a mournful element to the groceress' style. Describing a violent whirlwind of love, hate, pride, grief, jealousy, and malice in the calm, steady tone of sage reminiscence, she brings a balance of humane understanding and reasonable judgment to otherwise grossly melodramatic events.

The consistency of these narrative personalities, in fact, makes one trust their social and moral judgments in general--as one does not trust those of the narrators

in Dames. Whereas the Club members' callous opinions are undermined by the more charitable intrusions of an omniscient voice, these village storytellers speak for Hardy directly, conveying "fundamental human values stressed with warmth and sanity" (Brooks 148). There are, of course, no great class divisions between them to create resentment or condescension, but their easy fellowship is shown repeatedly to be based on far more than social equality. In thought and action, they are guided by respect for each other as human beings and by tolerance of the imperfections that go with being human. At first, their generosity is demonstrated humorously--in their indiscriminating confidence in Mr. Day's "pretensions to art" (190) and in their unwillingness to reproach the curate for being late, "seeing how he was reproaching himself" (191). But their compassion is deep and clear-sighted, leading them to express sympathy for the Hardcomes' efforts to be loyal to their lawful mates despite renewed passion for their original lovers, and to feel admiration for Netty Sargent's courage in flouting the letter of the law to retain her home.

This tolerance for their fellow villagers' weaknesses, however, is not mere insular pride designed to excuse members of their own class when they blunder or act selfishly. On the contrary, it takes into account the circumstances that motivate those actions and weighs the two carefully against one another. When the narrators do criticize a character, it is always because that individual has deliberately sought to harm another for some unjustifiable personal gain. Thus, Georgy Crookhill is let off comparatively lightly because he takes only his companion's horse and clothes and enough of his money to pay their bill, while the disguised soldier would gladly let Georgy be shot in his place as a deserter. And Netty's guile is excused as a necessary weapon in her struggle for survival against the greedy machinations of her uncle, her fiancé, and the local squire. Most of the narrators' negative judgments--more

often implied than direct--fall upon their snobbish social superiors, whose capricious intolerance of others forms such a telling contrast to the speakers' own deliberate assessments. One trusts these criticisms, because, as events prove, the villagers are singularly qualified to level them against those persons in a position to do them undeserved injury. They have good reason to resent the rich squires who covet their small properties and who have the power to oust a cottager from his home or extinguish the valued tradition of church musicians in a moment's anger.

But again, it is no simple class prejudice that elicits the Longpuddlers' judgments. When they criticize their superiors, they do so fairly, recognizing exceptions and extenuating circumstances where they apply. Though given some provocation by old Andrey's sham appearance as a musician and by the muddled church choir's unfortunate explosion into its "evil tune" (235), the vindictive squires are accorded no sympathy; the punishments they exact are too grossly out of proportion to such minor offenses. Yet, resentment of tyranny from one quarter does not prevent the villagers from acknowledging the kindness of the first squire's wife, who unobtrusively grants Andrey the Christmas dinner he schemed for and diplomatically defuses the plan to turn him out of his cottage. The same mixture of condemnation and fairness pervades the groceress' tale: while lamenting the snobbery that makes Mrs. Winter and Harriet Palmley cruelly oblivious to their victims' pain, and the hatred that moves Mrs. Palmley to demand a life for a life, the groceress can yet pity both mothers' agonizing grief over their dead sons. Even the satirical Christopher Twink metes out a jovial brand of sympathy toward his story's characters. Grinning all the while, he subtly commiserates with them all--with the reluctant bridegroom, whom intoxication alone can embolden for the fateful step; with the pregnant bride, terrified of losing her man should sobriety precede the

sacrament; and even with the hypocritical parson and clerk, who carelessly leave the imprisoned couple to starve for a day in their enthusiasm for the hunt.

This fair-mindedness distinguishes the frame narrators' bearing toward John Lackland as well. Even though they regard him as essentially an outsider (he is variously termed "stranger," "newcomer," "emigrant," and "the man from abroad"), the villagers welcome him with a friendly openness about their local history born of respect for his former ties with Longpuddle. The continual contrast, however, between their uninterrupted store of knowledge and Lackland's obsolete fragments of memory merely emphasizes the fitting symbolism of his surname and leads inexorably to his lonely discovery of just how complete a stranger his thirty-five-years' absence has made him in his old home. His disillusionment begins the moment the companionable van ride ends and--in a natural reversal of the journey's beginning--the passenger-narrators who have welcomed him drop off one by one at their own doors. Left alone, Lackland wanders through a moonlit village prosaically unlike the one preserved in his romantic childhood memories: "Far from finding his heart ready-supplied with roots and tendrils here, he perceive[s] that Time had not condescended to wait his pleasure, nor local life his greeting" (259). His nearest connections to the place lie in the churchyard; and, in a few days, the wanderer disappears as quietly as he came, quite abandoning his nostalgic notion of resuming residence among the true natives of Longpuddle.

This somber conclusion to what is basically a lighthearted collection casts an "elegaic" shade back across the whole work (Brown 115-16)--an effect achieved primarily by Hardy's brief return to omniscient narration and intensified by a curious ambiguity in his manipulation of the omniscient voice. The shift itself is a natural one, as the outermost narrator steps back in, after the others have departed,

to bring the frame occasion to an orderly close. Entering directly into a character's thoughts for the first time, this speaker simply confirms what has been implied throughout concerning Lackland's unalterable status as an outsider; and, with his quiet, compassionate tone, he brings all the human stories of A Few Crusted Characters perfectly to rest. Yet, without disturbing this air of calm resolution, Hardy makes an inspired narrative adjustment in the final sentence: shifting at the last moment back to present tense, he thrusts into prominence a heretofore effaced narrator and, with the pronouncement that a dozen years or more have passed since Lackland's visit, makes that narrator take an unforeseen step yet further away from the time of the villagers' anecdotes. This is not the stage director's present tense of the opening pages, though, nor the objective narrator's external observation. Rather, the speaking voice seems suddenly to have become that of another villager, one aware of all that has transpired both inside the carrier's van and in the Longpuddle of more recent years. The adjustment is made so simply and the story concluded so quickly that one is scarcely conscious of any narrative anomaly even on a second or third reading. But the subtle, functional effect it produces is instantly apprehended. By sounding once more the familiar note of local oral tradition, and thus underscoring the thematic contrast between the village narrators and their rootless visitor, the closing remark impeccably unifies an already economical work.

Despite Hardy's occasional problems with perspective elsewhere in his short fiction, it is difficult to imagine this fine effect as merely a happy accident. In fact, A Few Crusted Characters reveals Hardy's control over point of view at its most conscious and skillful, blending his most successful sustained use of a narrative frame with one of his subtlest incorporations of omniscient commentary. The sketches do not, however, represent the culmination of narrative skills gradually and

progressively acquired. First published in 1891, they do fall relatively late in the period Hardy devoted to fiction, but that period is marked from beginning to end by surprising oscillations between powerful and mediocre examples of both his narrative patterns. Strong omniscient tales appear as early as 1879 ("The Distracted Preacher") and 1880 ("Fellow-Townsmen"), and one of his best frame stories--"A Tradition of Eighteen Hundred and Four"--as early as 1882. But sandwiched in between, in 1881, is "What the Shepherd Saw," with its casually abandoned frame narrator. Even the interval from 1888 to 1894, arguably Hardy's finest period with the short story, betrays this inconsistency, mingling such impressively told tales as "A Tragedy of Two Ambitions," "The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion," and "On the Western Circuit" with the less fully realized narrative effects of A Group of Noble Dames and its uncollected offshoot, "The Doctor's Legend." The much-praised "Fiddler of the Reels" appears in the same year (1893) as the much-criticized "Master John Horseleigh, Knight." And the intriguing omniscient analysis of "An Imaginative Woman" (1894) is followed anticlimactically by a final series of tales related second- or third-hand by ephemeral frame personae.¹⁷ It seems especially ironic, in terms of perspective, that in his last year of writing fiction (1900), Hardy should have produced so seriously flawed a work as "A Changed Man."

In the end, however, the very presence of these inconsistencies over twenty-five years of writing says as much about Hardy's considerable talents in managing perspective as it does about his limitations. The significant issue lies, finally, not in the fluctuations themselves, but in the connection they indicate between Hardy's thematic interests and his technical choices. The two narrative patterns explored in

¹⁷ "The Committee-Man of 'The Terror'" and "The Duke's Reappearance" (1896); "The Grave by the Handpost" (1897); "A Changed Man" and "Enter a Dragoon" (1900).

this chapter reveal an artist deeply rooted in the comfortable oral tradition which so informed his beloved Wessex, yet one who was also continually breaking free of that tradition and moving toward more modern forms to tell his tales of individuals trapped by circumstance or oppressive social conventions. In general, Hardy chose seriously to simulate the oral tradition--by means of a permanent narrative persona--only in those stories where the literary preservation of some by-gone era, legend, or local custom takes precedence over the development of complex human characters. Thus, such basically lighthearted frame stories as "A Tradition of Eighteen Hundred and Four" and the brief sketches of A Few Crusted Characters succeed, even without heavy themes or detailed characterization, precisely because they capture the aura of a whole passing way of life--mainly through their sustained "community" style of narration. The more Hardy became interested in the individual psychologies of his characters, though, the more he tended to rely upon the omniscient voice to convey his insights directly and emphatically, even if that reliance created artistic inconsistencies in stories begun by limited frame narrators. "The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion" is the sole exception in which an intensely psychological tale is rendered entirely from the perspective of a frame persona. Beyond that, all of Hardy's most powerful psychological studies are omniscient from start to finish.¹⁸

Perhaps even more than any personal artistic strengths or weaknesses, however, Hardy's vacillation between omniscient and frame narration demonstrates the tentative nature, in England, of the early short story itself. Still a relatively new and undefined form when Hardy abandoned fiction in 1900, the English short story

¹⁸ Foremost are "Fellow-Townsmen," "A Tragedy of Two Ambitions," "To Please His Wife," "On the Western Circuit," "The Son's Veto," and "An Imaginative Woman."

had certainly established no precise standards governing its composition or criticism when he began publishing his tales in 1874. In part, his own varying achievements with point of view reflect the groping experimentation of the genre itself, emerging as it was from its age-old sources in orally preserved folklore and local history to drift gradually toward the modern effects of effaced narration and psychological analysis. Viewed in this context, Hardy's frequent combination of his two narrative patterns seems quite understandable. He was, after all, finding his own way in uncharted territory; and, in most cases, he quickly perceived when he was on the wrong track with the older narrative method. His casual abandonment of some frame personae is momentarily frustrating, since he could so easily have omitted them completely without damaging the stories; but, however abrupt, Hardy's instinctive turn to omniscience almost always saves these token frame tales--simply by raising them to a more objectively analytical level capable of elaborating his vision of human experience. How much more significant, then, are the unequivocal successes that stand on either side of these hybrid stories, successes both with the frame device and with fully omniscient narrators, through whom Hardy often approaches the succinct narrative and dramatic indirection adopted by countless later writers? These successes should earn Hardy a far more widely recognized place in the history of the short story than he currently occupies, for they are born largely of his active experimentation with perspective and, thus, represent a valid contribution to the technical development of an increasingly important literary genre.

CHAPTER 4

SETTING: PLACE, SCENE, AND THE INFLUENCE OF ATMOSPHERE

Of all Hardy's contributions to narrative technique, perhaps the one least disputed by scholars is his use of setting. No one denies Hardy's genius in creating some of the most hauntingly memorable landscapes in fiction--though the praise falls, as usual, mainly on his novels. As a writer whose "creative power shows itself most continuously and most characteristically in its capacity to embody its inspiration in visible form" (Cecil 81), Hardy often makes of setting far more than mere realistic or picturesque locale. He is careful to make his

narrations of the natural surroundings of his characters either reflect, contrast, or in some way relate to those characters; at their best they are deeply symbolic and prophetic as concerns the future of one or more of the characters, and at their least, they serve to set a mood. (Cramer 8)

Despite the restrictions of space for purely descriptive material, both these higher purposes of setting are strikingly achieved in many of Hardy's short stories. Time and again, the basic facts of place and scene are rendered with an extraordinary poetic intensity that prepares the reader imaginatively for subsequent themes and characterizations--sometimes through the panoramic presentation of a "grandiose stage" (Fischler, "Techniques" 436), but just as often through the reduction of setting to a few potently emblematic details. Through these two methods, Hardy continually emphasizes one of his most insistent themes: that of the enormous, often ironic, influence exercised by environment over human lives and destinies.

Occasionally, Hardy's settings portray this influence at work on an almost cosmic scale before a single character ever appears on the scene. But even in his

most commonplace settings, there is always a hint of mankind's shared vulnerability that lends an air of timelessness to the stories. This attention to the universal elements in his characters' experiences makes the specific chronological settings of Hardy's tales relatively inconsequential, despite his having set more than half of them substantially before the date of his own birth. These time settings do allow Hardy to introduce into his stories such historical realities as the Napoleonic wars, the energetic smuggling trade of that era, the presence in England of the German Hussars, the French Revolution, and the Great Exhibition of 1851. But, with the exceptions of "A Tradition of Eighteen Hundred and Four," "The Distracted Preacher," "The Melancholy Hussar," and "A Committee-Man of 'The Terror,'" Hardy's stories are developed without significant thematic emphasis on their historical periods and events. "Anna, Lady Baxby" (GND), for instance, is not essentially about the English Civil War and its politics, but rather about the private loves, loyalties, resentments, betrayals, and emotional caprices of individual human beings. Even when Hardy sets entire volumes in the past, as he does with Wessex Tales and A Group of Noble Dames, the time settings rarely make more than a "refractive contribution to the general illusion of story-telling" (Wing, "Dames" 80).

In the same way, most of the specific (and often identifiable) villages, farmsteads, manor houses, towns, and lonely uplands in which Hardy sets the action of his stories have comparatively little significance in and of themselves. What is important is the impressions they convey of rural or urban values, of the consequent pace and tenor of life, and of the vital relationship of the inhabitants to each other and to their physical surroundings. In Hardy's short fiction, it is the atmosphere of place that makes his settings powerfully evocative conduits of theme. And in his creation of a telling atmosphere, Hardy again relies upon a few favorite plays which

emerge as recognizable patterns. Most impressive among the patterns to be explored in this chapter are the many dramatic night scenes through which setting becomes a dominant force in several stories and landscape a palpable, living entity--by turns sinister, comforting, and implacable. Often depicted with grand gothic flourishes, these sweeping scenes provide a natural expression of Hardy's view of humanity's precarious position in the universe. In other stories, the passages devoted to setting are briefer and generally less sensational in tone and detail, though still animated by Hardy's fine instinct for mood. While they, too, are often suggestive of Hardy's largest themes, these passages are more particularly aimed at illuminating truths of character. Usually a focal point only at the beginning of a tale and, occasionally, at its moments of crisis, they anticipate, in just a few strokes, the nature of coming events and of the personalities touched by them. Through a sparing, but splendidly symbolic selection of images describing their surroundings, Hardy foreshadows, in almost every case, the acute physical and emotional isolation of the characters in these stories, often suggesting at the same time their habitual attitudes toward their lonely circumstances. Finally, in both these and the more extended scenes, one finds the same idiosyncratic technique that governs setting in Hardy's novels: his continual interweaving of "human and natural moods" whereby the "landscape corresponds to human feelings, weather and seasons sympathize with plot-turns, and even the smallest creatures suffer as man suffers" (Hynes viii).

All three of these patterns--the extended night scene; the suggestive individual images; and the emphasis on the pathetic fallacy--converge impressively in "The Honourable Laura," the final story of A Group of Noble Dames. The best thing in the story, in fact, is the way Hardy's presentation of its various settings through these patterns parallels the strange amalgam of comedy, melodrama, and

grim realism that characterizes its plot. Much of the action takes place out of doors. And, from the moment Laura Northbrook arrives at the Prospect Hotel with the absurd Signor Smittozzi, inadequately sheltered by their open basket-carriage against a Christmas snowstorm "totally opposed to all that tempts mankind from home" (209), the story is a cold, wet, gloomy one for all concerned. The successive scenes of the attempted murder above the moonlit waterfall, Laura's flight from her lover through the snowy copse, and James Northbrook's secretive return to his wife's home one rainy evening twelve winters later steadily increase the sense of gloom attached to the principal characters. Their physical discomfort under the influence of such consistently dreary settings reflects perfectly the quality of lives governed by childish impetuosity, false bravado, and unyielding pride.

For all the violence and misery to come, however, the story begins placidly enough. As with most of the buildings in his short stories, Hardy's opening description of the Prospect Hotel is conspicuously vague in regard to structural details and overall appearance. Rather than paint a precise word picture of the inn, he provides just enough details to convey the essence of a popular resort's "sealed and chrysalis state" in its off season (210). The sand-bag at the front door; the visitors' book "now closed and pushed back against the wall" (210); the picturesque view reduced by snow and mist to the "stern angular outlines" of the surrounding cliffs and the "grimy dirtiness" of the facing townlet (209)--all emphasize with dreary realism the winter idleness of the place. Despite the gloom, however, there is wry humor in Hardy's presentation of the sheer numbing ordinariness into which the hotel and its inhabitants sink during their virtual hibernation. Free from the demands of their usual occupations, the landlord wanders aimlessly from room to room, and the once genteel coffee-room waiter appears outside, "metamorphosed

into the unrecognizable shape of a rough country lad in corduroys and hobnailed boots . . . talking the local dialect in all its purity, quite oblivious of the new polite accent he had learned in the hot weather from the well-behaved visitors" (210).

The very dullness of this opening setting subtly prepares the reader for the correspondingly mundane version Hardy begins to unfold there of a potentially tragic human drama--the elopement of a runaway wife. Even the melodramatic potential of a young girl's reckless flight with a darkly handsome foreigner dissolves here into the mere comic bluster of a non-threatening farce, complete with a bumbling old father, an insufferably spoiled daughter, and a moustachioed Italian lover named Smittozzi--a supposed opera singer who actually "first [saw] the light as the baby of Mr. and Mrs. Smith in the vicinity of the City Road" in London (216), and a man who clearly lacks the courage of his amorous convictions. Nothing in either the setting or the interaction of these absurd figures leads one to expect a dangerous or violent confrontation, and it is not until halfway through the story that Hardy introduces a genuinely serious and troubling note. The mood shifts at the moment James Northbrook furiously proclaims his secret alliance with the truant Laura and, speaking in the tyrant's tone of "compulsion" and a husband's rights (217-18), cuts short the ineffectual blunderings of the other characters. It is Northbrook who forces the situation to a violent resolution and he who initiates the ensuing change both in scene and in the course of events.

The captain's own uncompromising nature is alone responsible for the excursion to the cliff and his consequent, ghastly plunge into the rocky chasm of the waterfall. He refuses to believe Smittozzi's protestations of ignorance regarding Laura's marital status, despite the man's obvious shock at the revelation, and instead, deliberately provokes the singer into a duel. He has, in fact, come grimly,

determinedly, prepared for such an event with his "small case of pistols" (220). Poor Smittozzi is completely unnerved, as the captain well knows, by his rival's cold logic in planning their deadly encounter; but, ironically, the same proud composure that enables Northbrook to intimidate his opponent also blinds him to the potential threat posed by a coward brought to bay: the unexpected shove from behind is Smittozzi's one chance for survival in a situation and environment so much more compatible with Northbrook's character than with his own. In this icy, moonlit scene, all the vivid sensory details lacking in the opening description of the hotel's surroundings emerge with unsettling clarity. In two brief paragraphs, Hardy rivets his startled readers' attention on action suddenly rendered as "weird and fantastic" and uncharacteristic of all that has preceded it as the wild new setting itself:

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.

The operatic artist looked down as he halted, but his thoughts were plainly not of the beauty of the scene. His companion with the pistols was immediately in front of him, and there was no handrail on the side of the path towards the chasm. Obeying a quick impulse, he stretched out his arm, and with a superhuman thrust sent Laura's husband reeling over. A whirling human shape, diminishing downward in the moon's rays further and further toward invisibility, a smack-smack upon the projecting ledges of rock--at first louder and heavier than that of the brook, and then scarcely to be distinguished from it--then a cessation, then the splashing of the stream as before, and the accompanying murmur of the sea, were all the incidents that disturbed the customary flow of the lofty waterfall. (222)

The effect of the description is dizzying. The tightly controlled but extremely graphic presentation of detail makes the action seem to occur simultaneously in one pulse-pounding fraction of a second and in the breathlessly protracted horror of slow motion. Suddenly, after a dozen pages of calmly observing the posturings and protests of absurd characters, one is thrust emotionally into the scene itself, to be

engulfed with the characters by its spectacular sights and sounds. Ears filled with the roar of the cascade, the reader is carefully shown the damage a descent over the cliff can do--through the stream's explosion into a "hundred spirts and splashes" upon the "jutting rocks"--just before Hardy shifts his focus from an externalized survey of what both men see to a specific record of the opera singer's inward responses to the unnerving landscape. As a result, one finds oneself unexpectedly experiencing a degree of the same tension Smittozzi feels and anticipating his desperate impulse a bare instant before he sends his tormenter reeling into the chasm. So intense is the identification with Smittozzi's perspective that one almost feels the pressure of his hand at Northbrook's back and the numbness of his emotions in watching the body careen downward through moonlight and mist. For the moment, at least, there is little room left to sympathize with Northbrook. Till now the undisputed master of the situation, he is signified here only indirectly and with progressively less distinctness--as "Laura's husband," "a whirling human shape," a mere "smack-smack" on the rocks below. With this sudden reversal of the expected roles of victim and brute, the startling glimpse into man's animal instinct for self-preservation, and the corresponding backdrop of uncontainable natural violence, this tiny night scene is one of Hardy's most powerful.

Despite its gothic melodrama, the electrifying moment at the waterfall is also the most credible scene in the story--not simply because it contrasts so sharply with the preceding farce, but because it jolts previously shallow, silly people into a world of real challenges and intense emotions. Its sudden shift in scene and incident has, moreover, been carefully, albeit unobtrusively, prepared for in the tale's prosaic early passages. Just as the topographical features of cliff and waterfall--already dimly perceived at the beginning of the story--emerge brilliantly now when the

curtain of snow is lifted, so too does the present crisis fully illuminate the dangerous undercurrent in the characters' battle of wills, an undercurrent hidden, until his sudden outburst of anger, behind James Northbrook's placid facade of self-control. His extreme response ironically places everyone in far greater peril than was ever necessary, by circumventing what would likely have been a tearful but anticlimactic reconciliation between father and daughter. Beyond causing his own catastrophic injuries, his insistence on pressing matters to such an unwarranted extreme certainly puts Laura in the only real danger she ever faces in regard to her elopement. Through his contentious pride, Northbrook leaves his wife, bereft of his own or her father's protection, at the mercy of a now terrified and desperate man, one whose dread of detection, at the very least, puts her at risk of freezing to death when they get lost amid the secluded, snowbound lanes. She saves herself only by shaking off the listlessness that has previously led her into difficulty, making her "agree to anything" the men in her life suggest if it promises relief from boredom or unpleasantness (223). Virtually blending into the natural scene itself, clinging so closely to a bush in the snowy copse "as to seem but a portion of its mass" (226), she cleverly eludes her companion and makes her way back to the hotel alone to face the unpleasantness her mistakes have caused there.

Laura's show of self-possession here is the first glimmer of that sober responsibility she exhibits through the rest of the story. With this shift in character, however, the splendid unity between setting and plot begins surprisingly to weaken. Although the frightening experience in the wood and the shock of Northbrook's battered body and later cold rejection of her undoubtedly constitute a turning point for Laura, Hardy offers little else to substantiate her instant maturation from petulant runaway to devoted wife and nurse (Brady 84). The motivation for her

response is never reflected in any intense scene such as that which at the waterfall makes Smittozzi's transformation into a potential killer so convincing. The really insurmountable problem, though, comes at the end, with Northbrook's return and supposed change of character. The dreary weather that marks his arrival--with rain dripping monotonously from the trees on his wife's estate--corresponds well enough with the unrelieved loneliness to which Laura has resigned herself during his long absence. But there is simply no reason to believe that a man specifically described as "quite a different sort . . . from one who altered his mind" would do just that (231), and thus make possible the uncharacteristically bright scene in the final paragraph, in which "the forlorn home of Laura Northbrook blaze[s] from basement to attic with light and cheerfulness" (234). His behavior now (in slyly ascertaining from Laura's servants her current mode of life before making his presence known to her) accords precisely with his earlier intolerance and suggests clearly that, had he found her less dutifully isolated, he would have disappeared again as uncharitably as before. His loving rush into her arms, like the brilliance of the final setting, is completely unjustified and unconvincing; and one suspects that Hardy ought to have left his heroine languishing in the gloom of her lonely estate.

The story's unsatisfactory conclusion results, however, not from any error in Hardy's creation of setting as such, but from the cursory development of character and plot, after the climactic moment, to which he must at last make the setting conform. No such problem disturbs the artistic unity of "The Three Strangers" (WT), a story which boasts one of Hardy's most famous night scenes and a superb fusion of setting with plot, character, and theme (Gittings 34; Millgate, Biography 238). And yet, so much critical attention has been focused on Hardy's fine suspenseful presentation of the strangers' consecutive arrivals at Shepherd Fennel's cottage that

the full impact of the opening setting has often been overlooked. Edmund Blunden even dismisses the first few pages as being too "stately and leisurely," their "slow local minuteness" delaying "the creation of imaginative intensity" and a sense of the "significances of secrets and dangers" (204). The very leisureliness he objects to, however, is vital to the examination of rural values that dominates the story. Opening with a lofty, panoramic view of furzy downs but "little modified by the lapse of centuries" (WT 3), Hardy seems at first ready to assume the role of a "cosmic ironist" who sees "human affairs not as they appear to human participants," but from a distant vantage point from which human struggles and concerns "dwindle to insignificance" (W. Van O'Connor 250). In fact, as he gradually focuses in on the lonely upland cottage--situated where the ravages of "long inimical seasons, with their sleets, snows, rains, and mists" (3), effectually isolate its inhabitants from the county-town only three miles distant--Hardy seems intent on making life at Higher Crowstairs a symbol of humanity itself, ever at the mercy of a blundering, indifferent universe. But that grim view of existence is not what the rest of the story illustrates. "[D]etached and undefended" as the cottage is (3), "exposed to the elements on all sides" (4), Hardy soon makes it clear that this is no scene of misery and defeat. He proclaims outright that the shepherd's family is not to be pitied; and the story turns out to be one of the most positive, upbeat examinations Hardy ever conducted of human life in an unpredictable world.

The scene narrows steadily to reveal, first, the cottage's rain-lashed exterior on the night of the strangers' convergence there and, then, the cheerful interior itself. Although outside the "level rainstorm" makes life seem harsh enough, forcing the sheep to huddle with their "buttocks to the winds" and blowing "inside-out like umbrellas" the "tails of little birds trying to roost on some scraggy thorn," the lively

scene indoors at the christening party proves how entirely "commiseration for the shepherd . . . [is] misplaced" (4). Despite the environmentally induced isolation and hardship, one finds inside both fellowship and plenty. Moreover, one finds in the polished sheep-crooks, "hung ornamentally over the fireplace" in varieties ranging "from the antiquated type engraved in the patriarchal pictures of old family Bibles to the most approved fashion of the last local sheep-fair" (4-5), proof of generations of success in wresting a good life from this wild, lonely place. The comic conflict at the celebration between Mrs. Fennel's studied frugality in matters of food and drink and her husband's "reckless phases of hospitality" captures perfectly the combined qualities that enable these rural people not merely to survive, but to live with joy (6).

Living in constant contact with the natural world, they are continually made aware, not only of nature's caprices, but of its timelessness as well--which, if it does not bring predictability, at least gives reassuringly to their existence a paradoxical element of consistency. Rather than be beaten by the extremes of wind and weather, they simply capitalize on the moments of seeming beneficence, using their fruits to sustain themselves in leaner times and trusting always in the eventual, time-proven return of a fair season. Wonderfully expressive of their relationship to nature is Hardy's explanation of the miscellaneous collection of receptacles that encircles the cottage beneath its eaves:

at Higher Crowstairs, as at all such elevated domiciles, the grand difficulty of housekeeping was an insufficiency of water; and a casual rainfall was utilized by turning out, as catchers, every utensil that the house contained. Some queer stories might be told of the contrivances for economy in suds and dish-waters that are absolutely necessitated in upland habitations during the droughts of summer. But at this season there were no such exigencies; a mere acceptance of what the skies bestowed was sufficient for an abundant store. (8-9)

The expedient is as common-sensical and unpretentious as the homestead itself, the "homelier features" of which its owners make no effort to mask with a "conventional

frontage" (8). But, above all, it illustrates the uncomplaining fortitude of a vigorously self-reliant class of people. Theirs is a practical, confident association with nature which Hardy echoes even in the music that greets Timothy Summers outside the cottage--the instruments indoors lending a harmonious accompaniment to the "surging hiss of the flying rain on the sod, its louder beating on the cabbage-leaves of the garden, on the straw hackles of eight or ten beehives just discernible by the path, and its dripping from the eaves into [the] row of buckets and pans" (8).

The whole story is a reinforcement of the fundamental values represented by Shepherd Fennel's family and friends. Summers avoids capture and execution precisely because he understands and shares those values, as the hangman who belittles his hosts as "simple-minded souls" does not (23). Extraordinarily astute in directing suspicion away from himself, the fugitive takes advantage of the familiar arrangement of vessels outside to quench his thirst with rainwater before entering the cottage; and, once inside, he deliberately establishes himself in the chimney-corner so as to appear one of the company to any newcomer. Though his pose causes Summers to "overstep the bounds of hospitality" in too freely offering the family mug to a stranger, he does it only to escape the "unjust consequences of a crime he committed out of need and without guile" (Brady 10). Once they know his real identity, the rural folk sympathize fully with Summers's plight, but even before that point, they never mistrust him, as they do the second stranger. His obvious familiarity with their environment and customs inspires instant acceptance and the same "[a]bsolute confidence in each other's good opinion [that] beg[ets] perfect ease" among themselves (5). They later protect him against the hangman's unjust law in recognition of his magnificent display of the very qualities they most revere: "courage, resourcefulness, shrewdness, and composure" (Roberts 192).

The clash here between rural and urban values brings to a climax all the encounters between contrary elements which dominate the action from the start; and, as Alexander Fischler notes, the crossroads located beside the cottage supplies the perfect "unifying symbol" for those contraries: "birth and death, freedom and captivity, boldness and timidity, natural violence and rural domesticity, justice and law" ("Techniques" 443). But just as the intense rainstorm not only heightens the story's air of mystery, but also serves the practical purpose of forcing each stranger to seek shelter in the cottage (Reilly 413), so too does the crossroads setting function realistically as well as symbolically. Providing more than a "sense of probability for the coincidence of all three men calling at the same house" (Fischler 443), the presence of the crossroads actually keeps the event from being a coincidence at all. As Higher Crowstairs lies directly along the route from Shottsford to Casterbridge, it is entirely logical that all three men should encounter it on this night--Summers in his flight from the Casterbridge jail, the hangman in his journey to perform his duties there, and Timothy's brother in his sad excursion to bid his kinsman farewell. If there remains a hint of cosmic caprice in the last two visitors living in the precise direction that dictates their near-disastrous meeting, it is not enough to disturb the story's credibility, and, in fact, rather aptly echoes the general tone of life on the down, where the inhabitants accept such occurrences without astonishment or complaint. The story ends significantly with a reminder of this outlook, as the scene shifts to convey once more the timeless quality of the opening setting. Faintly, one sees the grass waving over the graves of Shepherd Fennel and his wife; but, even though they no longer contend with the elements, the values that made the couple's life at Higher Crowstairs possible and prosperous live on in the tale-become-legend of Timothy Summers's victory there that night over hardship and injustice.

Less fortunate in their confrontation with injustice are the characters in "What the Shepherd Saw" (CM), a story subtitled "A Tale of Four Moonlight Nights." Each of the four night scenes takes place at the same spot on Marlbury Down, an isolated area known familiarly as "Lambing Corner" and dominated by the "Druidical trilithon" called the "Devil's Door" (188). Consecutively the site of a seeming lover's tryst, a murder, a cruel oath, and an eerie incident of sleepwalking, this locale (with its ironic mingling of mundane and pagan uses) comes to symbolize the horrifying ends to which ordinary human emotions can lead when they are inadequately controlled. While the Duke's violent lack of self-control is, of course, the primary cause of all the tragedy, Fred Ogbourne's sensual passion and Bill Mills's superstition also contribute unmistakably to the ruin of their own lives.

Despite the violence done to Ogbourne, and initially planned for the Duchess, too, the primary interest in each scene lies in the shepherd's response to all he sees. And in every instance, the action revolves around the "one conspicuous object" that rises to meet his gaze "above the uniform moonlit plateau"--the Devil's Door. At first, the ruin is completely unthreatening to the boy. As seen from the little hut he occupies each night behind the belt of furze, it is simply a familiar old landmark, rendered soothingly attractive now by frost and moonlight: "Each stone had been worn, scratched, washed, nibbled, split, and otherwise attacked by ten thousand different weathers; but now the blocks looked shapely and little the worse for wear, so beautifully were they silvered over by the light of the moon" (188). In such a peaceful setting, even the appearance of the first night's visitors does not unduly alarm the boy. Only when he sees the Duke murder Ogbourne on the second night and hide his body in the hollow of "furze and stunted thorns" behind the trilithon does terror seize the youth and the Devil's Door assume a ghastly, evil

aspect in his mind (196). Yet, horrific as the crime is, Mills's fear stems less from it than from his recognition of its aristocratic perpetrator--a man deemed almost supernatural in his ruthless power over his dependents: "the Duke was Jove himself to the rural population, whom to offend was starvation, homelessness, and death, and whom to look at was to be mentally scathed and dumbfounded" (195).

When, on the third night, Mills is discovered and fiercely interrogated by the Duke, it is largely this self-protective fear of a tyrant that forces him to submit to blackmail and swear his oath of secrecy at a pagan altar. He explains his very identity through his family's subservient relationship to the Duke, telling him, "I be but the under-shepherd boy, and my father he was but your humble Grace's hedger, and my mother only the cinder-woman in the back yard!" (203). He clearly accepts the Duke's bribe out of terror regarding the alternative consequences for himself and his mother, rather than out of any immediate comprehension of the educational and monetary advantages being offered him. He is too oppressed by his tormenter and by the dramatic ritual the Duke stages for his benefit beside the standing stones to consider anything but escaping Captain Ogbourne's fate. Trembling beside the moonlit formation, described to him now as "once a holy place" erected to gods older than his own, where "an oath sworn . . . is doubly an oath" (205), the superstitious shepherd repeats his master's terrible words and seals his promise by kissing the stones he has come to dread and associate with death.¹

Besides his fear of repercussions, however, there is another, more insidious reason for Mills's willingness to "keep a secret all [his] life" (204). Knowing no other

¹ In The Landscape of Thomas Hardy, Denys Kay-Robinson records an actual legend related to the Devil's Door: "at midnight this ancient cromlech . . . is liable to be visited by the Devil himself driving eight white oxen with which he tries in vain to drag the stones apart, while on the top one a white rabbit with burning coals for eyes sits watching and mocking" (188).

way of life than that pursued cautiously under the constant threat of the Duke's displeasure, he simply believes "that powerful nobleman to have a right to do what he [chooses] on his own lands" (198). This belief, deeply embedded in his subconscious, is what makes Mills keep his promise even after education and the passage of twenty-two years have enabled him to look back with wry amusement on the melodramatic oath he swore. Reenacting the moment in adulthood, he feels no terror in once more touching his lips to the Devil's Door, or even in watching the Duke's ghostly, nightgowned figure approach and kneel to scratch in the earth behind the trilithon. Rather, he is careful not to alarm the frail sleepwalker. And yet, while neither fear, nor solicitude for the old man, nor gratitude for his patronage has prevented the rise of "reactionary feelings" at the continual, abrasive memory of his own part in concealing the crime (209), Mills does not permit himself the relief of confession until his hand is forced by another, previously unsuspected witness and, most important, until the Duke himself is dead. In his loyalty to the all-powerful aristocrat, he carries within him still--however unwillingly--a remnant of the timid shepherd boy he once was.

This final night scene beside the Devil's Door is considerably less intense than its predecessors, owing partly to the intervening shift of the main action to Shakeforest Towers, and partly to the rather disconcerting acceleration of pace that permits only the barest summary of Bill Mills's gradual metamorphosis into an able man of business. But while the story as a whole loses some measure of its power through the leap over those guilt-burdened years, Hardy's careful correlation of setting and character never falters. By bringing Mills and the Duke to the Devil's Door one last time and demonstrating their now ironically reversed responses to the place, he manages to convey unmistakably the price the years of guilt have exacted

from each man. Obsessed by his crime, the murderer has been reduced to the pitiful shell of a man whose very dreams reveal his dread of the trilithon, while Mills's acquisition of knowledge and worldly experience has supplanted his superstition, leaving him simply weary of deception and bitter servitude. In light of the changes they have undergone, the weakened intensity of atmosphere surrounding their final meeting beside the stones is exactly right--a superb reflection of both men's wasted, empty lives, exhausted by a secret kept too many years from the world.

Such purposeful application of setting is sadly lacking, according to most scholars, in the story immediately preceding "What the Shepherd Saw" in A Changed Man. Although "A Tryst at an Ancient Earthwork" contains the most spectacularly expressive night scene in all of Hardy's short fiction, it has been almost universally criticized as being severely overbalanced--all setting and no real story to speak of. For Denys Kay-Robinson, the piece is "virtually an essayist's account of Maiden Castle by day, by night and during a thunderstorm, with the human element of no more moment than the traditional figures in a landscape painting" ("Wessex" 114). Still, he at least admires the tremendous force of the description. Most critics simply dismiss the work as a disappointing "seven or eight pages of gloomy and mysterious word-painting" introducing "a trivial anecdote" (Guerard 79).² But while the plot involving the archaeologist's theft of the Roman statuette does occupy little more than half the amount of space devoted to the preceding extraordinary evocation of place, the work is hardly the total loss as a unified story that these readers would proclaim it. Rather, the long introduction stands in relation to the later incident much as Mai-Dun itself stands to any who approach the massive earthwork: "with an obtrusive personality that compels the senses to regard it and consider" (171).

² See also Brooks 143; Brady 170; and Rutland 204.

Only because the reader is drawn carefully into the narrator's experience by his intense first-person account of his trek (physical and imaginative) into the heart of the monument does the plot at the end gain more than anecdotal significance. Together, this identification with the speaker and the sheer weight of sensory detail force one to "consider" the age, immensity, and historical reverberations of the place in a way the plundering archaeologist clearly does not appreciate.

Above all, the description does undeniably "compel the senses"--first, as the narrator observes the fort whole from his cottage a mile distant; and then as he moves closer, losing its totality in the towering proximity of individual features. To his imaginative perception, the hill appears, just before darkness falls, like a living thing--some "enormous many-limbed organism of an antediluvian time," complete with "warts, wens, knuckles, and hips" beneath its thin green mantle (172), its very breath the gale that races down its slopes. Even when the "night gauzes" descend to screen the ruin from view, he feels its hulking presence "as persistently as if it had a voice" (172). It is during his actual ascent of the hill, however, amid darkness and storm, that the speaker communicates most vividly his fascination with the place. As he laboriously negotiates the huge "concentric walls of earth" that ring the fortress (173), the text fairly bursts into life with images astonishingly visual, auditory, and tactile. All of nature becomes personified as the storm increases "with a heave of the whole atmosphere, like the sigh of a weary strong man on turning to recommence unusual exertion." The grassy "grey beard of the hill" undulates wildly in faint moonlight, paling to "vaporous phosphorescence"; the wind rushes "helter-skelter" down the dank, chilly length of the second gorge, "carrying thick rain upon its back"; and hailstones "fly through the defile in battalions--rolling, hopping, ricochetting, snapping, clattering down the shelving banks" (174, 175). For the

narrator, the event creates a kind of grand cosmic music, the elements "playing upon [the castle structure] bodily as upon a harp," setting the few thistles whistling and making even the humble mosses speak "under the stress of the blast" (174).

The speaker's capacity for such intensely imaginative responses to his surroundings is, in fact, the thematic crux of the story. For it is the quality which enables him effortlessly to conjure up in living images a forgotten people and ancient deeds known to his friend the archaeologist only in the tangible, but lifeless forms of dusty bones and buried artifacts. Though "not a page, not a stone, has preserved [the] fame" of those people and their heroic exploits (176), the speaker senses them everywhere around him once he breaches the outermost castle wall. When he is forced by the storm's violence to take shelter behind a spur in the second ditch, "where possibly a barricade stood two thousand years ago" (175), the "associations of the spot" are irresistible, and he simply "awaits events" (179, 175), resurrecting the fort's ancient population in his mind's eye. As if on cue, flashes of lightning, like the brassy glint of "swords in combat," give seeming substance to the "martial men" of his thoughts; and the consequent improved illumination reveals the actual mounds "whereon, doubtless, spears and shields have frequently lain while their owners loosened their sandals and yawned and stretched their arms in the sun" (175). The most impressive images, however, arise from the narrator's acoustic sense. Not only does he hear in the roar of the storm through the ravines the approach of a "circumambulating column of infantry" (175); he can almost hear the very "stream of years" that separates him from the heroic age he contemplates:

Strange articulations seem to float on the air from that point, the gateway, where the animation in past times must frequently have concentrated itself at hours of coming and going, and general excitement. There arises an ineradicable fancy that they are human voices; if so, they must be the lingering air-borne vibrations of conversations uttered at least fifteen hundred years ago. (176)

Clearly, the narrator possesses the same extraordinary receptivity to atmosphere that enabled Hardy himself to "penetrate the past imaginatively and clothe . . . hoary hulks of antiquity" like Maiden Castle "with vanished magnificence" (E. Hardy 196).³ The moment he stepped off "the macadamized road. . . to invade Mai-Dun" (173), he essentially left the present world behind. And he is recalled to it only by the white notice-board at the summit (prohibiting the removal of relics from the earthwork) and by the startling sound of his own name, pronounced a few moments later by the scholar he has come to meet. Hardy's inclusion of the cautionary signpost in the setting at just this point provides a clear foreshadowing of the two characters' conflicting attitudes toward the ruin. Even as the narrator lingers at the summit, still half-lost in the "barbarous grandeurs of past time" (172), to wonder who the man was that ordered the castle built here "on this best spot of all" (178), the archaeologist stands ready with spade and pickaxe to dig for buried treasure. As Julian Moynahan explains, the "conflict, which remains unspoken in the discreet dealings of the two men with each other, is between contrasted ways of appropriating a past that for neither man can or should remain buried" (5).

Despite his status as a "professed and well-known antiquary with capital letters at the tail of his name" (180), the archaeologist utterly lacks both the moral sense and the aesthetic susceptibility his companion displays in regard to their surroundings. The artifacts he unearths elicit from him "groans of luxurious sensibility," but less because they are beautiful than because they corroborate his theory about a Roman occupation of the stronghold and, thus, prove him alone right and all the rest of the world wrong (181). Worst of all, "so entirely is his soul wrapped up in his own deep intentions" that he actually destroys a portion of the

³ See also Moynahan 5; and Orel, *Vict. Short Story* 106.

things he covets (179). Not for him is the spectator's unobtrusive appreciation of the site, or even the straightforward sort of plundering practiced, of necessity, by local villagers before the middle ages to obtain building materials for their cottages and churches. He steals the gilt figure of Mercury merely for the satisfaction of his own ego. Pompously labelling his prize "Debased Roman" (184), he demonstrates little understanding of the great culture it represents and no feeling of connection with the real Roman soldier whose grave he dishonors and whose skeleton disintegrates "under his touch" when he tries to re-inter it (183).⁴

Ironically, even the act of excavation yields greater meaning for the narrator than for the archaeologist: their discoveries impress him powerfully with a sense of the Roman Empire's one-time inclusion even of remote Wessex, though he finds it "strange indeed that by merely peeling off a wrapper of modern accumulations [they] have lowered [themselves] into an ancient world" (182). It is hardly surprising that he finds the process strange since, through imagination only, he has already walked amongst the inhabitants of ancient worlds, while dead relics alone inspire the great scholar to live "two thousand years ago" (182). The latter's pettiness in

⁴ In December of 1893, Hardy complained to Florence Henniker that the editor of The English Illustrated Magazine had, by openly identifying the story's locale with Dorchester, made matters potentially unpleasant for him, "since it is just possible that a character who appears in the narrative may be said to be drawn from a local man, still living, though it is really meant for nobody in particular" (CL 2: 43). The character in question, of course, is the rapacious scholar; and despite Hardy's denial, there is little doubt that he was based largely upon Edward Cunnington, a local archaeologist with whom Hardy had tense dealings in the Dorchester Field Club. According to Harold Orel, "Cunnington--in Hardy's view--was not always careful about how he handled relics of the past, nor did he always recognize the significance of what he had unearthed. . . . Hardy saw Cunnington as a throwback" to a period in British archaeology when the diggers excavated sites carelessly, with no precise digging plans and frequent piratical motives: "So far as these diggers were concerned, they owed nothing to history, to the nation, or to the rights of those whose bodies and final resting places they destroyed. Like Cunnington, they often stepped on, and ruined, the very objects they were seeking to unearth" (Unknown Thomas Hardy 152-53).

hoarding till his death a valuable local artifact--the illegal acquisition of which ironically prevents his ever taking credit for its discovery or for the verification of his precious theory--is an insult to the grand enterprises of which humanity is capable and of which the construction of Mai-Dun is a compelling example. Even in ruins, as the narrator realizes, the fortress represents something noble in the human desire to leave some significant mark upon the world.

Despite his focus here on a monument of enormous proportions, it is interesting to note that, for Hardy, such marks need not be large to attain significance; in an 1877 entry he recorded in Early Life, he expresses this view in telling relation to landscape and setting:

An object or mark raised or made 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. (153)

For one who perceived meaning in even such humble records as these, how much more impressive to him must have been the man-made "Castle of the Great Hill" (172), standing unmoved amid the chaotic ragings of "unconscious Nature." One feels sure Hardy must once have explored the earthwork in just such a season of storm and darkness as finds his narrator within its precincts for him to have been able to capture the physical experience so breathtakingly in the opening description. But with the additional element of his characters' double excursion into the era of the ancient fort-builders' achievement, his story of Mai-Dun becomes far more than just atmospheric word-painting; it becomes "a tale of great interest and beauty," one altogether "as effective as many a story of excitement and action" (Grimsditch 96). No mere artificial yoking of poetic essay to extraneous anecdote, the story is a unified whole, with the plot of the tryst itself dramatically reinforcing the sense of awe and exhilaration produced by the lengthy emphasis on setting. Quite simply, as

Moynahan puts it, "to the many impressive nocturnal episodes or night pieces in Hardy's fiction and poetry this one adds something essential and unforgettable" (5).

Certainly, with their grandiose landscapes and sensational events, the extended night scenes provide the most imposing and memorable settings in Hardy's short stories. Just as effective, however, in terms of technique, are the shorter, less densely descriptive passages Hardy devotes to setting in the majority of his tales. Often, these passages contain too few physical particulars to do more than sketch in the faint outlines of such practical features as gardens, houses, streets, and fields. As in the night scenes, the creation of a meaningful atmosphere is more important than any regular delineation of external minutiae. But, with a careful selection of specific images, Hardy nonetheless manages to create remarkably vivid impressions of place as well as mood. In just a few strokes, he suggests unmistakably the essential physical qualities of the surrounding countryside, village, or town. Most important, however, is what those images suggest about the relationship between environment and character. While the spectacular settings described in the night scenes are fascinating in their own right, aside from their functional connection with plot, the more commonplace settings of these other stories are interesting only in their associations with the current state of affairs in which the characters find themselves. Thus, Hardy's main goal in rendering these settings is less to reveal a given locale than to reflect how his characters respond to the surroundings which have, in part, shaped their experiences and personalities. Though the resulting scenes lack the moody extravagance of the longer night pieces, Hardy's emblematic use of detail often makes of them subtly portentous backdrops for the working out of destiny.

Such is the case with the opening scene of "Interlopers at the Knap" (WT). This, too, is a night scene, set along a lonely stretch of road in "the gloom of a winter

evening." But there is nothing extraordinary or threatening here. Though Long-Ash Lane extends for many miles "without a village or hamlet" near, "and with very seldom a turning" (177), it inspires neither fear in the three men travelling upon it nor a sense of mystery in the reader glimpsing it for the first time. Even when the darkness thickens unpleasantly, "shutting down on the land in a perceptible flap, like the wave of a wing," the clamminess of the mist and the "simultaneous blurring of the air" give Farmer Darton and his companions no cause for alarm: "Countrymen as they were--born, as may be said, with only an open door between them and the four seasons--they regarded the mist but as an added obscuration, and ignored its humid quality" (179). All is familiar and reassuring to them in this old lane, which has been so long associated with the practical lives of old-fashioned country people that even the knowledge that it was once "a highway to Queen Elizabeth's subjects and the cavalcades of the past" conjures up no ghosts for susceptible imaginations.

In part, this calm response simply reveals that these pragmatic agriculturalists possess no such imaginations. Certainly, this is true of Charles Darton, whose character and destiny Hardy deftly uses the mild setting to define. The monotonous straightness of Long-Ash Lane over many tedious miles makes it an exceedingly apt place for Hardy to introduce his "unambitious" hero, who similarly pursues his way with "very seldom a turning." Having inherited his comfortable position on the large farm his father's shrewd business-sense brought to its present glory, Darton lives a life of near-complete passivity, having "neither advanced nor receded as a capitalist . . . since he had all that he desired" (178). Even when he comes to the daring conclusion that a wife would add appropriately to his comfort at this stage in his life, his strategy for choosing one follows the course which costs him the least practical and emotional effort: he opts for Sally Hall, whom he conveniently found visiting

relatives near his home, because he likes her well enough and "can do no better" (179). In short, he simply floats along the courses of least resistance, all but forfeiting his power of independent decision altogether.

This passive tendency in Darton's character is immediately put to the test when Hardy introduces the landscape's one mildly ominous detail. Leaving the main road to trace a smaller one to Sally's house, Darton and his friends come upon a fork in the lane marked by an "ironical directing-post" from which the elements have erased all information (182). It sports "'Not a letter, sacred or heathen--not so much as would tell us the way to the town of Smokeyhole.'" Even this detail fails to frighten or oppress thanks to Hardy's comical depiction of Japheth John's "tantalization" at the signpost's incommunicativeness and the spasmodic efforts of Darton's hired man, laden with gifts for Sally, to "climb the post, baskets and all" (181). And yet, its presence is of the utmost importance. Because the sign offers no assistance, does not point Darton clearly onward in his chosen course, the farmer characteristically votes in favor of pursuing "the straightest road" (181), thus meeting with the delay and subsequent events which change his course completely. Only because he reaches the Knap after the "interlopers" does Charles see Helena attired in the dress he has sent Sally for their wedding--a coincidence which instantly revises his notion of the easiest path. He admired Helena before Sally, and he has not the energy of will to resist the renewed attraction when, that night, Helena once more becomes available to him. Thus, he misses forever his chance with the genuinely worthy woman. Although the reader knows nothing of these coming events as the travellers move off along the wrong branch of the lane, Hardy does hint rather solemnly of uncertain times ahead by closing the scene with the signpost standing "in solitude as before, holding out its blank arms to the raw breeze" (182).

A much more intense foreshadowing of wasted lives appears in the early descriptions of setting in "The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion" (WT). A pervading sense of isolation is clear from the first, with the high, wide view of the downs, their surface undisturbed by plow and dotted with reminders of the military encampment which plays such an important part in Phyllis Grove's story. Life among these hills is lonely enough for inhabitants of the scattered hamlets, "where a stranger had hardly ever been seen till the King chose to take the baths yearly" at the nearby watering-place, bringing his picturesque soldiers with him (46). But Phyllis's seclusion is greater still, since her father's misanthropy has installed her in an "inland nook" so obscure that she is regarded almost snobbishly as "not precisely a girl of the village" (47, 49). Her lack of social contact has at last rendered her so shy that she is "ashamed" at the rare glance of a stranger (47); yet she clearly longs for some such relief from her twilight existence. With marvelously understated images, Hardy captures, in the everyday sights and sounds of her environment (Hasan 116), this young woman's desperate loneliness and natural yearning for companionship:

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. . . . 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. (46)

How cruelly do these phantoms continually crush her expectations, leaving her, each time, all the more securely locked in her lonely, loveless world.

Even before her father forbids Phyllis to "set foot outside [the] garden-fence without [his] permission" (53), Hardy makes it clear that the garden has long been for her the outermost extension of a prison that merely masquerades as a home. Since childhood, Phyllis's one pleasure has been to clamber up the boundary wall "and sit on the top," a feat which Hardy carefully describes as "not so difficult as it

may seem, the walls in this district being built of rubble, without mortar, so that there were plenty of crevices for small toes" (50). His attention to this detail is designed not merely, or even primarily, to create a visual image, but to dramatize his heroine's spirit-stifling situation. In the context of the whole passage, the tiny, subtle reference to "small toes" discovering leverage points in the wall poignantly twists an image generally associated with joyous childhood play into a pathetic symbol of Phyllis's lifelong wistful desire to join the world. That world passes by occasionally on a path that comes tantalizingly close to her wall, but never quite close enough to include her among its purposeful travellers.

Trapped thus by her environment, Phyllis acquires only an incomplete, and decidedly romantic, understanding of the world outside it. It comes as little surprise, therefore, that she succumbs so readily to the radiant soldier who is the first person ever to treat her with respect and loving kindness. And yet, neither is the reader surprised by the tragic result of their association. Their courtship is conducted, after all, across the same stone wall that has so significantly limited her experience and now hardly even allows a tangible meeting of their outstretched hands. Phyllis sees in her lover as much the glorious world of her lonely imaginings as the man himself and, to the last, regards him as an "unrealistic," essentially unattainable person (55). Thus, when the cruel progress of events proves her right, Hardy appropriately brings Phyllis back to her garden to witness the destruction of her last hope. Revealed in some detail for the first time, the garden is on this "greenish grey" morning of "fog and mist" a particularly rank and unappealing place where "slugs and snails [have] crept out" into the "disagreeable haze" (63). Its dismal atmosphere provides a fitting backdrop for Phyllis's last terrible glimpse, from her old vantage point atop the wall, of the lover she has lost through noble sacrifice to an ignoble man: not free and

happy in his homeland as she hoped, Tina is slaughtered before her eyes, and her romantic illusions with him. Though she lives many years to tend his grave, her personal prison is locked forever.

Characters trapped in some way by events and by environments unsuited to their personalities are, of course, common in Hardy's fiction. One of his subtlest reflections through setting, however, of the gradual closing in of such a trap appears, ironically, in what is otherwise one of his most technically troubled short stories, "A Changed Man" (CM). Unlike Phyllis Grove, Laura Maumbry is well-acquainted with the bustling world, and Hardy is careful to establish her participation in it when he includes her dwelling among the several landmarks visible from his observer's oriel window near the "Top o' Town." Aside from brief references to the observer's house, Laura's, and the cavalry barracks, however, the emphasis of this opening passage is on roads--the High Street, the Town Avenue, the Port-Bredy road, and, above all, the "white riband of road" which disappears

over Grey's Bridge a quarter of a mile off, to plunge into innumerable rustic windings, shy shades, and solitary undulations up hill and down dale for one hundred and twenty miles till it exhibit[s] itself at Hyde Park Corner as a smooth bland surface in touch with a busy and fashionable world. (3)

At each critical point in Laura's life, the imagery and transportive potential of roads become central in both the depiction of setting and the development of plot.

Early in the story, it is the literal connection of those roads with various points in the "busy and fashionable world" that means the most to Laura and the dashing soldier whom, as "a born player of the game of hearts" (7), she has managed to win and marry. Both are "light-natured, hit-or-miss, rackety people" (11), and as such, "the most popular pair in and about Casterbridge--nay in South Wessex itself" (8). Although he provides virtually no pictorial detail, Hardy conjures for the reader

a vivid image of the couple continually whirling along the roads of the borough to all the county balls, "amateur dramatic entertainment[s]," and "smart dinner[s] in the country-houses" (8). All is "laughter, and thoughtlessness, and movement" in their lives until Jack Maumbry's strange (and artistically unconvincing) decision to leave soldiering for the ministry puts an end to the "pleasures of a woman by whom the joys of earth and good company had been appreciated to the full" (9, 12).

Forced to leave the gayest part of town to take up residence in a small house in a "low-lying district . . . crowded with impoverished cottagers" (13), Laura finds herself trapped indeed. Nothing in her previous experience has prepared her for the sacrifices and boredom of life as the wife of a clergyman in a poor parish. But most galling to her of all is her utter lack of motility. The sight of the London road is a torment to her now, especially as she sits at the invalid's oriel window to watch the Hussars depart for barracks closer to that hub of English social life. Unexpectedly catching sight of her husband following slowly behind his old regiment, Laura finds the contrast between their brilliant martial uniforms and his "rather shabby clerical clothes" too much to bear. Gazing longingly after the "thin dusty line of Hussars, now smalling" along the road "towards the Mellstock Ridge," she complains bitterly that "I, . . . who should have been in their van on the way to London, am doomed to fester in a hole on Durnover Lane!" (15). Had the outbreak of cholera not forced Maumbry to send his wife away for safety's sake from their parish where the epidemic raged most furiously, one wonders if Laura could long have resisted the lure of the many roads leading toward the freedom and excitement she craves.

Tasting of those pleasures again in her sea-side retreat, thanks in part to the admiring Lieutenant Vannicock, Laura contemplates a permanent escape from the dismal hole which life with her husband now represents. But, while she is rather

frivolous at heart, she is not cruel; and Hardy reflects her agonizing battle of conscience in the perfect maze of roads that dominates the last pages of the story. She visits her husband twice weekly near the "high road" on the ridge separating her grim Casterbridge home from the gaities of Creston (17); she dubiously agrees to accompany Vannicock along the same route and thence to the fashionable world of Bath; and then, from the blatantly symbolic vantage point of "Standfast Corner" (19), she comes upon the hellish scene that stops her frivolous motion for good:

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. Some was thrown into the fires, the rest placed in wheelbarrows and wheeled into the moor directly in the track of the fugitives.

They followed on, and came up to where a vast copper was set in the open air. Here the linen was boiled and disinfected. By the light of the lanterns Laura discovered that her husband was standing by the copper, and that it was he who unloaded the barrow and immersed its contents. . . . Maumbry paused for a moment to wipe his face, and resumed his homely drudgery amid this squalid and reeking scene, pressing down and stirring the contents of the copper with what looked like an old rolling-pin. The steam therefrom, laden with death, travelled in a low trail across the meadow. (19-20)⁵

This graphic proof of her husband's heroic selflessness has an ennobling effect upon Laura herself, and she does "stand fast," assisting Maumbry in his labors that evening and renouncing Vannicock and her earlier "rackety" ways even after Maumbry's death frees her to pursue whatever lifestyle she desires. The persistent image of his thin form moving about the "ghastly furnace in the gloom of Durnover Moor" keeps her faithful to his memory all her life (23). Some element has been added to, or perhaps subtracted from, her character by what she has seen; and, though she travels

⁵ Hardy's source for this scene was the real-life heroism during the "cholera years" of Henry Moule, the Vicar of Fordington. In a letter to Moule's son, the Bishop of Durham, Hardy describes his memories of the vicar's work with the exact details that appear in the story--infected linen, steaming copper, bonfires, wheelbarrows and all (LY 194).

the road one last time from Casterbridge to Creston, she lives the subdued life of a changed woman. Indeed, the story's title seems somewhat inaccurate, for the change in Laura's outlook is presented far more dramatically and credibly than that which occurs, without apparent cause, in her husband's philosophy. At least one sees, reflected largely in the story's settings, what motivates Laura's metamorphosis.

In contrast, it is a lack of inward change that destines another mismated character, George Barnet of "Fellow-Townsmen" (WT), to be uprooted from the environment he has known all his life. And it is irony rather than inaccuracy that distinguishes the title of his story: unlike Laura Maumbry, Barnet has never fit in with his surroundings or their inhabitants. He has never been a truly committed "townsman" of Port-Bredy, and his emotional deracination from his birthplace is established clearly through particulars of setting long before his actual departure from it. Kristin Brady comments incisively on this interaction of setting, character, and theme, explaining that, "[w]here the narrator describes the community of Port-Bredy, it appears as a contrast to Barnet, rather than as a context for him" (30):

Barnet is presented not as a natural inhabitant of the place in which he lives but rather as a figure alienated from it. His position is defined mainly in terms of his inherited state of privileged unemployment.

The story is a demonstration of

how a man whose family has been in a town for two hundred years can be forgotten within one generation. Having no work, no children, and no wife with local ties of her own, Barnet uproots himself from his town just as definitely as he abandons the house his grandfather had built and bequeathed to him. . . . [He] leaves . . . because of a failure to act. (Brady 29)

More precisely--since he does on occasion take decidedly dramatic action--Barnet's error is a general failure to act in positive, productive ways. Having been brought up as a "gentleman-burgher" (112), he now has no tie to the town's flax trade, which so enriched his father and grandfather, but the occasional sight of his

own name "on the gates and warehouses, being used allusively by small rising tradesmen as a recommendation." He has no part in the enterprising vigilance of shopkeepers on the alert for customers or in the off-duty exuberance of "apprentices and shopmen . . . slamming up the shutters from end to end of the town" come eight o'clock (117), and in his inactivity, he often wonders if his father's way of life did not yield the greater happiness.

Even before Barnet appears, the first setting description establishes a clear sense of the rhythms of life that surround but do not include him:

The shepherd on the east hill could shout out lambing intelligence to the shepherd on the west hill, over the intervening town chimneys, without great inconvenience to his voice, so nearly did the steep pastures encroach upon the burghers' backyards. And at night it was possible to stand in the very midst of the town and hear from their native paddocks on the lower levels of greensward the mild lowing of the farmer's heifers, and the profound, warm blowings of breath in which those creatures indulge. But the community which had jammed itself in the valley thus flanked formed a veritable town, with a real mayor and corporation, and a staple manufacture. (111)

This opening paragraph, stressing the "inter-relatedness of town and country," has been criticized as serving "no useful function whatever" (Quinn 78-79); even Brady sees in it only a "silent opposition" that reflects Barnet's inner conflict (29). But the passage actually conveys something essential about the town itself, about the proud industry of its people and their vested interest in the community they have helped build. There is an air of cheerful aggressiveness in their manner of "jamming" their way into this otherwise pastoral location and setting about making the most of their town, carrying on its business "as briskly as the small capacities of its quarters would allow" (112). One sees an admirable show of energy even in the townspeople's unsuccessful attempts over "the course of ten centuries" to fashion a real harbor out of the seemingly perfect materials supplied by nature (132). And despite the images of opposition, the pastoral and commercial worlds really get along rather well. The

shepherds have no difficulty communicating across the burghers' rooftops, and no one in the town seems particularly to mind the intrusion of cows and calves among the rope walks, even if nature itself may feel "considerable inconvenience" (126).

Having no contributory role, however, in all this purposeful bustle, Barnet almost invariably sees the town as unresponsively dreary, walking its streets as he does on rainy evenings and carrying continually in his thoughts the depressing image of his own unwelcoming house. Images of houses, in fact, quickly become the central focus of setting in the story. As with the roads in "A Changed Man," every critical moment in the plot is linked in some way to a house in the town and Barnet's emotional response to it. The early contrast between his own family mansion and his friend Downe's nondescript dwelling is especially powerful and its prefatory description enlightening. The ponderous image of the other houses they pass on their way to Downe's--roofs bent "hollow-backed," walls bulging in the gauzy yellow lamplight under their burdens of heavy stone tile--seems to justify Barnet's grim view of the town. So, too, does the street where his companion's house stands in a "row of those two-and-two windowed brick residences of no particular age, which are exactly alike wherever found, except in the people they contain." The last phrase here changes one's perspective, though. Barnet's mansion may be his own freehold, resonant of his family's achievements, and "stout enough for a castle" (114), but it also contains a wife with whom he knows only strife and misery. Thus, while Downe's simple dwelling is outwardly unexceptional, the presence within of his devoted wife and daughters makes of it a home, the warmth of which Barnet sorely envies. A similar effect arises from the juxtaposition of Barnet's recently begun second house, Château Ringdale, and Lucy Savile's tiny lodgings in "one of the smallest of the detached houses" situated at the edge of town (119). The

grandeur even of the scaffold-hidden foundation of such a structure contrasts strongly with Lucy's cramped apartment. But the inescapable association of his unpleasant wife with the mansion she alone has caused to be built and christened so distastefully drives Barnet longingly to Lucy's little home, which--though quite plain--possesses the same warmth and quiet dignity that distinguish her character.

And so it goes with each dramatic turn the story takes. Barnet seems always on the move, shuttling from house to house. But it is empty motion, for he never takes any action that might improve his personal situation. In fact, most of his actions work directly against any possibility of happiness. He brings the apparently lifeless body of his wife back to the house she "had made a bear-garden" (136) and works tirelessly to resuscitate her even as the view from the window tempts his hopes in the direction of Lucy Savile. Later, when the revived woman relieves him of all but their legal attachment, Barnet acts not to mend their relationship, but to improve the quality of life in another man's home: ironically, by arranging for Lucy's employment in "the maimed home of the widower" Downe, Barnet manages to keep near himself a woman he is not free to marry. And in a strangely joyous response to his ambiguous situation--even as Lucy begins to restore order and comfort to the house which grief has turned into a jumble of "articles [lying] in places which could show no reason for their presence" (144)--Barnet begins to take a new interest in the "unnecessary structure" of Château Ringdale (147), overseeing its construction personally and regarding its design and fixtures for the first time in the light of a home rather than an affront to his dignity. What once represented the very essence of his miserable marriage he now associates with his beloved Lucy who, at his invitation, brings her young charges to play in its "empty, shaving-strewn rooms." In showing her about and explaining "the different ornamental fittings . . .

soon to be fixed here and there" (148), Barnet seems almost to be fitting up the house for Lucy, though he clearly has no expectation of ever being able to install her there. Instead, he contents himself with endless thoughts of "what might have been his lot if he had only shown wisdom enough to claim Lucy Savile when there was no bar between their lives, and she was to be had for the asking" (150).

Nothing could reflect Barnet's self-isolating tendencies more emphatically than this strange sad-happy limbo he creates for himself at Château Ringdale. He gains such odd satisfaction from his empty regrets and the mechanical completion of a house intended for no one in particular that he is never moved to seek ways either to "claim" Lucy legitimately or to accept his loss and generate meaning in his life on some other, non-romantic level. Finally, he does not even need Lucy's occasional visits to maintain this comfortable stasis, and when she stops coming by, Barnet does "not go anywhere out of his accustomed ways to endeavor to discover her" (152). This same inward focus blinds him completely to the relationship building between Lucy and Downe, even though she carries the greatest evidence of it to him herself on her last visit to the mansion--Downe's simplified, and obviously far less grief-inspired, plans for his late wife's tomb (Morrell 113). Ironically, but quite appropriately, news of their association has to be delivered to him in the unequivocal form of their wedding invitation, which comes to him, immediately after the liberating announcement of his wife's death, where he sits inside the empty shell of Château Ringdale. For a moment, the house gains real potential in his mind as a home, as he begins to select bright new wall-papers and wonder "who would sit in the rooms that they were to line" (156). But such a home is not for him, and his baseless dreams end like the wall-paper samples he casts, shredded, into the empty fireplace.

The ironic coincidence central to this scene makes it seem as if Barnet's freedom has come, unfairly, just too late; but, actually, it has long been too late for Barnet to secure his dream. Lucy does not even know that he still feels so strongly about her as to think of little else; he has certainly given her no reason to refuse another offer in the hope that chance might one day set him free. He has himself expected no such release, and his failure to pursue a meaningful relationship with either of the women he has associated in turn with Château Ringdale corresponds with his rejection now of the mansion itself, just as it is beginning--at least outwardly--to seem an established part of its environment:

the dewy time of day lent an unusual freshness to the bushes and trees which had so recently put on their summer habit of heavy leafage, and made his newly-laid lawn look as well established as an old manorial meadow. The house had been so adroitly placed between six tall elms which were growing on the site beforehand, that they seemed like real ancestral trees; and the rooks, young and old, cawed melodiously to their visitor. (153)

Though only just completed, the structure is already more a part of Port-Bredy than Barnet has ever been. He owns the house, but he does not belong there, any more than he truly belongs in the fine old mansion his father and grandfather earned by their labor. And when the pleasant dream of Lucy comes abruptly to an end, he willfully severs every tenuous link he has with the town, his rare show of action once again taking him away from rather than toward commitment and participation.

Even Barnet's self-imposed exile is presented in terms of the houses he sells and leaves behind. Just as his family name disappears in the course of twenty-one years from the local shop-fronts, so is it forgotten in the only two places that ever signified his individual presence in the town. His ancestral dwelling is destroyed outright, pulled down by the Congregational Baptists to make room for their new chapel; and the "elegant new residence" is bought by his friend and unwitting rival,

whose large, loving family turns it into a home at last. Thus, by the end of Barnet's first year of absence, "every vestige of him [has] disappeared from the precincts of his native place" (161); and, two decades later, the house which cost him so much emotional turmoil to build is believed by the present citizens of Port-Bredy to have been in the Downe family "for some generations" (165). Its once insistent newness has been softened into "a respectable mellowness, with ivy, Virginia creepers, lichens, damp patches, and even constitutional infirmities of its own" to admit the house readily into the ranks of "its elder fellows" in the town (162). The entrance alone appears the same when Barnet returns, but the graceful maturity of the house--with its uniform "beard" of creeping plants, its tree-vaulted walks, and its time-seasoned mortar and woodwork--makes it seem potentially welcoming even to this rootless man, and he wonders, "Could it really be waiting for him?" (167).

That Barnet does indeed have an opportunity to make a place for himself at last in his native community is evidenced by the striking description of Lucy which Hardy provides as a complement to that of the house itself. As in the house passage, Hardy deliberately focuses attention on "structural" details and draws many images from nature to depict the time-worn, but still appealing features of the only mistress Château Ringdale has ever known:

The round cheek of that formerly young lady had, of course, alarmingly flattened its curve in her modern representative; a pervasive grayness overspread her once dark brown hair, like morning rime on heather. The parting down the middle was wide and jagged; once it had been a thin white line, a narrow crevice between two high banks of shade. But there was still enough left to form a handsome knob behind, and some curls beneath inwrought with a few hairs like silver wires were very becoming. (168)

But, although Barnet makes a feeble attempt to attach himself finally to this lady and a real home (which, to his mind, her presence within a house guarantees), by presenting Lucy with a "'better late than never'" proposal (170), her surprise and

natural reticence are sufficient to make him abandon his suit at once. Unwilling as ever to make the necessary exertions to belong, he takes no time to assure Lucy of his sincerity after all these years. He simply responds to her hasty rejection with the typical attitude that he "must put up with it" (171), and thus throws away his last chance to establish a vested interest of his own in his home environment.

This melancholy, rather self-indulgent lethargy keeps the reader from sympathizing very greatly with Barnet, since he actually possesses the personal freedom and opportunity to reverse his deracinated condition. Less fortunate, and thus far more pitiable, is Sophy Twycott of "The Son's Veto" (LLI), a naturally timid person still further conditioned by her position in the social scale--as a servant and as a woman--not to assert herself even in matters involving her own happiness. Though in one respect she initiates her own "little tragi-comedy" by reverently accepting the vicar's marriage proposal (37), Sophy has no control whatever over her husband's subsequent decision to relocate, which takes her forever from her pretty native village of Gaymead. All the misery of her existence thereafter stems from the unwavering, and cruelly undisguised, perception her husband and son have of their relationship to her as a form of "social suicide" (40). While there are "worlds within worlds in the great city" of London for Sophy's husband (35), who likes the "freedom and . . . domestic privacy" it provides for one seeking to camouflage an embarrassing marital alliance (41), there is for Sophy only the one tiny, unchanging world of the street outside her window. Ironically, the step up in society her marriage ostensibly represents has only served to isolate her from all society and to replace her once cheerful, busy life with the insupportable "freedom" of a "lady's" boredom and inertia. These stifling effects of Sophy's deracination are, of course, the focal point of the story, and Hardy repeatedly emphasizes their impact by

contrasting her present environment with details recalled from or otherwise associated with her youthful days in Gaymead.

Everything that surrounds Sophy in her London suburb emphasizes that her life there is utterly devoid of beauty, freshness, variety, and vitality. Her "pretty country home, with trees and shrubs and glebe" and a "fine peal of bells," is relegated now to wistful memory--all abandoned for "a narrow, dusty house in a long, straight street" and "the wretchedest one-tongued clangour that ever tortured mortal ears" (41). Lame and virtually alone after the vicar's death and her son's departure for public school, Sophy can do little but sit in her "semi-detached villa,"

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-facades, along which echoed the noises common to a suburban main thoroughfare. (42)

Despite the "infinite length of the straight, flat highway, with its ever-waiting lamps converging to points in each direction" (47), there is neither space nor vivid illumination in Sophy's "vista." She has only a "fragment of lawn" (conspicuously colorless) and is surrounded by layers of structural barricades--in the railings, the window-frame, and the line of drab houses opposite. Even the lamps have enclosure as their primary function, standing "like sentinels" outside her prison (43). The highway seems "infinite" to Sophy only because she is so finitely fixed upon it, never moving even so far as to the points at which the lamps seem to converge.

When Sam Hobson appears on this bland thoroughfare, though, he changes it for her completely. He brings with him evidence of "a life quite distinct from that of the daytime toilers on the same road," a life filled with color, abundance, and productive motion. It is as if the fresh rural world Sophy longs for quietly invades the city during the remarkable nightly processions toward Covent Garden market:

She often saw [the country vehicles] creeping along at this silent and dusky hour--waggon after waggon, 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. . . . 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. (44)⁶

This "beautifully evocative nightscene" (Hawkins 113), associated as it is with the reappearance of her girlhood sweetheart, resurrects Sophy's interest in her own life and momentarily revives both her spirit and her health with hopes of returning to her native place. Having at last "something to live for in addition to her son," Sophy's lonely heart fills with joy during her few brief rides with Sam in the fresh night air; she becomes "almost beautiful" again while these thrilling respites from her dreary daytime bondage last (47).

Even on the first outing, however, the very image which should signify a permanent release from her urban prison is twisted to foreshadow instead her destiny to remain always here "where life [is] not blue but brown" (50): by the time she and Sam reach Covent Garden, a glorious dawn is in "full blaze"; but, at that symbolic moment of greatest hope, Sophy gets anxiously into a cab to make her journey home alone and undetected. Though she feels she has done nothing wrong in meeting Sam, she knows that her son would certainly disapprove. As she explains to Sam, "I am not a lady. . . . But he is a gentleman, and that--makes it--O how difficult for me" (46). More accurately, Randolph is a snob, one who cares more exclusively and vehemently for the good opinion of England's "few thousand

⁶ A note dated 7 July 1888 matter-of-factly records Hardy's basic inspiration for this scene which he later rendered so poetically: "One o'clock a.m. I got out of bed, attracted by the never-ending procession as seen from our bedroom windows, Phillimore Place. Chains rattle, and each cart cracks under its weighty pyramid of vegetables" (EL 276).

wealthy and titled people" than his reserved father ever did (43). His mother's happiness is as nothing in comparison if it means putting that good opinion at risk.

Thus, it is especially significant that the last two scenes that contrast the dreary world Sophy now inhabits and the one she longs to see again feature prominently the son who autocratically denies her her dream. In the first, set among the fashionable crowd at Lord's during the yearly cricket-match, Sophy makes her first attempt to tell Randolph of Sam's proposal. But there, surrounded by the great coaches on which "sat the proud fathers and mothers, but never a poor mother like her," she realizes the revelation would be fatal and awaits a more propitious time. The scene itself hints, however, that there can never be a propitious time with one so enamored of the privileged set as Randolph, who sees even in the jumbled "débris of luxurious luncheons; bones, pie-crusts, champagne-bottles, glasses, plates, napkins, and the family silver" (49), a world from which he would never allow a mere greengrocer to divide him. By pointedly describing in concrete detail only the refuse left behind by the people Randolph admires, Hardy prepares the reader not only for the boy's pettiness in rejecting his mother's suitor, but also for his continued display of distorted values on into adulthood. In the final scene, the grown, but still hostile Randolph glares blackly at Sam Hobson from the funeral procession which at last carries poor Sophy homeward toward Gaymead. The story ends appropriately, though, just short of that village, with Sophy's procession passing before "the largest fruiterer's shop in Aldbrickham" and its grieving proprietor, with whom, but for the unwarranted interference of her son, she might have led an idyllic and thoroughly respectable life in an environment natural to them both (52).

Just such an unnatural displacement as Sophy's marks the life of another of Hardy's simple country girls, Anna in "On the Western Circuit" (LLI). But more

important than the rural-urban contrast between her life and that of her London-bred lover, Charles Raye, is the evocation through the opening setting of a whole society's alienation from what it once was. Though the story quickly focuses in on this one "end-of-the-age young man" and his effect on two impressionable women (118), the description of Melchester Cathedral and of the oddly juxtaposed spectacle of the fair effectually casts over the whole tale a sense of the "vague latter-day glooms and popular melancholies" that influence Raye himself (111). This brief but intensely atmospheric night scene is all the more significant in that it contains the story's only detailed description of setting. Through it, Hardy achieves a remarkably rich layering of effects which foreshadow both the general modern emptiness of his characters' lives and the bitter personal results of their coming encounter.

The proximity of the cacophonous fair to the Cathedral Close in itself suggests something of the late nineteenth century's shallow materialism. At this evening hour, Raye understandably finds the church a "deserted edifice" (109), but even when he visits it again during services the next morning, it remains so for him, for he has no interest in the spiritual associations of the place. He goes there simply as a tourist to admire "the most homogeneous pile of mediaeval architecture in England." On the night he arrives in Melchester, even this attraction fades quickly before his curiosity about the noise in the square, a "roar of sound" that bounces back at him sharply from the ancient walls. Like Raye, the whole local population has been lured away from the Cathedral, the one-time peaceful, spiritual center of their lives, by the frenetic pleasures offered by modern technology--the first evidence of which reaches the young man through this graceless din "compounded of steam barrel-organs, the clanging of gongs, the ringing of handbells, the clack of rattles, and the undistinguishable shouts of men" (109).

It is the visual description of the fair, however, that indicates most profoundly the separation of modern humanity from many of the traditional values that formerly provided a meaningful, shared foundation for people's lives:

The spectacle was that of the eighth chasm of the Inferno⁷ as to colour and flame, and, as to mirth, a development of the Homeric heaven. A smoky glare, of the complexion of brass filings, 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.

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. (109-10)

Clearly, for all the continual movement and noise, something vital has been lost. In part, the scene reflects the two species of modern superficiality which Hardy links to Charles Raye's life in London: the first appearing in Raye's flirtatious pose, for Anna's benefit, as an urban sophisticate who frivolously defines London as the place "where everybody lived who lived at all, and died because they could not live there" (113); and the second in the brief account of his actual monotonous existence there, where he and other unretained junior barristers--looking much like the aimless, scurrying figures at the fair--elbow each other to get into the crowded Law Courts where they really have no business. In these passages, as in the opening scene, there is a depressing air of temporality and an unproductive expenditure of energy. Most disturbing of all, however, is Hardy's grim hint at the cause of this modern

⁷ Brady points out the special significance of this analogy to the story when she identifies the eighth chasm as that "set aside for those who have committed fraudulent acts," which is, of course, precisely what all three main characters do in their relations with one another (127). She further pursues the pertinence of the metaphor in a revealing discussion of the "unobtrusive but deliberate use of legal language throughout" the story, with particular emphasis on the climactic scene of Raye's "cross-examination" (125) of Edith Harnham at the end (125-27).

malaise--the sense that human destiny is presided over not by divine Providence, but by arbitrary forces which, like the "inexorable stoker, grimly lurking behind the glittering rococo-work" of the roundabouts, decide when each "set of riders [has] had their pennyworth." Hardy's careful cataloguing of the stoker's victims shows just how ineluctably all of humanity is bound to this infernal process, including as it does pretty girls and plain, old people and children, newlyweds and "sparkish youths," ladies and "journeymen carpenters" (112).

For all its implications of a chaotic universe, however, the description of setting in this weird scene reveals more than mere chance at work in the meeting of the three characters whose responses to one another on this first night lead to all their subsequent misery. All three are, in some respect, seeking to fill empty spaces in their lives, so it is hardly surprising to find them drawn to the excitement of the fair, and particularly, to the whirling spectacle of the "pleasure-machine" beside which they all meet (113). Viewed in turn from the perspective of each character, this dynamic image establishes at the outset the motifs of deception and unrealistic perception that permeate the story. In full revolution when he comes upon it, the brilliantly finished "steam-circus" assaults Raye's senses with an extraordinary convulsion of sight and sound, its "trumpet-mouths of brass" blaring raucous music at him and "the long plate-glass mirrors set at angles, which revolved with the machine, flash[ing] the gyrating personages and hobby-horses kaleidoscopically into his eyes" (110). But, for him, the most impressive "contrivance" of the machine is the "unexpected and quiet grace" with which the "revolving figures [pass] before his eyes . . . in a throng whose natural movements did not suggest gracefulness or quietude as a rule" (111). In the same way, he is won over not only by Anna's physical appeal as "the prettiest girl" among the riders, but also--and most significantly--by her

refreshing ability to lose herself completely in the enjoyment of the experience. Somewhat jaded by his own more worldly experience and frequent idleness, Raye thus begins, even before he has spoken to Anna, to fashion her imaginatively into the kind of woman he desires, ironically forgetting that she must lose something of her charm and grace when she descends from the artificial setting of the pleasure-machine to rejoin the throng. This same willingness to believe her what he wants her to be later prevents him from questioning the ability of so childlike a person to pen the mature, elegant letters that win his heart.

For Anna, too, the steam-circus is an inducement to see what she wants to see. Only lately arrived from her small country village, she hungers for exciting new experiences. Thus, quite oblivious to the garishness of the carrousel, she can only regard with rapturous admiration the mystery of "how such wonderful machines were made" (112). The same ecstatic attitude of awe extends to Raye, since the attentions of a genteel Londoner seem little less than miraculous to her. And when the ride begins anew, the two wonders become inextricably linked in Anna's mind:

to the light-hearted girl, the figure of the handsome young man, the market-square with its lights and crowd, the houses beyond, and the world at large, began moving round as before, countermoving in the revolving mirrors on her right hand, she being as it were the fixed point in an undulating, dazzling, lurid universe, in which loomed forward most prominently of all the form of her late interlocutor. (113)

While Anna's notion of being the center of the universe whirling about her is an absurd "illusion" (Brooks 146), with the "inexorable stoker" waiting silently to spoil her fun, nothing could more clearly represent the perpetual state of her conscious mind. Childlike in the extreme, Anna sees the world and events only as they impinge on her own life. Once Raye has intruded into her sphere, she cannot bear to forfeit the bright new pleasure of his company and, childlike, entreats him with

tears to visit her again. When she finds she is pregnant, she cannot, unlike her mistress, even momentarily consider her lover's welfare and worldly prospects before her own, but begs that the secret regarding the true authorship of the letters be preserved until she has secured him in marriage. Thus, Raye is trapped by the unrecognized negative aspect of the very quality he first admired in Anna--her ability to focus intensely and exclusively on her own immediate experiences.

This quality is, perhaps, also what compels Edith Harnham to make herself responsible for her young servant. The girl's eager, albeit indiscreet, approach to life provides a vicarious outlet for Edith's own pent-up emotions; though she adopts the manner of a stern mistress when she goes to fetch Anna from the fair, one soon realizes she would like to be "a wild girl" in Anna's place, free to linger in the square with a "very wicked and nice" young man. Her encounter with Raye at the carrousel is very brief. She takes no giddy ride on its revolving horses and exchanges no flirtatious words with the handsome Londoner, yet her few minutes at the fair bring her into more intimate contact with the man than Anna has known all evening. The crush of the crowd presses both women bodily against him, but it is Edith's hand he mistakenly clasps and caresses. So begins her disastrous vicarious affair with Anna's lover, whom she deliberately "refrain[s] from undeceiving," now as during their later tender correspondence, even though she knows "from the look of consciousness on the young fellow's face" that he believes he is wooing her maid (116).

Thus, while the hellish atmosphere of the fair--with its omnipotent stoker in control of life's merry-go-round--suggests the powerlessness of human beings to affect their own destinies, the encounters set at the roundabout itself show all three characters to be at least partly responsible for their fates through the ways in which they choose to perceive and behave toward one another. When the true nature of

their triangular relationship is finally revealed on the day of Raye and Anna's wedding, it is significant that they should all have to face the consequences of their deceptions and self-delusions, not in a fantastic, delusion-encouraging setting like that at the start, but in the dreary reality of a muddy London morning and an utterly unromantic ride in the technological commonplace of a second-class train carriage. In a strange way, though, the story comes full circle. The characters are never shown to be quite the absolute prisoners of fate certain early images, in reflecting contemporary philosophical sentiments, would make them; but, because they have based their attempts at independent emotional fulfillment on unrealistic projections of their own fantasies, the characters do end up more firmly entrenched than ever in the same mechanical, spirit-deadening mode of existence they endured before the night of the fair. Nowhere else in his short fiction does Hardy use so contemporary a setting as that in "On the Western Circuit"⁸ or depict so explicitly through physical description the mood and isolating effects of late Victorian society.

That he is able to create, with just a few sharply pictorial passages, a setting that accurately reflects this paradoxical Victorian combination of outward energy and bustle and inward torpor and ennui is a testament to Hardy's sensitivity to the power of place--in both life and literature. For H. E. Bates, it is the pictorial skills arising from this sensitivity that make Hardy's fiction endure:

what one remembers out of Hardy . . . is not the philosophical vapourings or the spiritual anguish, all impossibly unreal to-day, but the sharp bright scenes that have been painted by a man with his eye on the object. . . . No changing currency of social and moral action changes these; nothing can come between them and countless generations of readers. (169)

⁸ The story was first published in 1891, and, contrary to Hardy's method in most of his tales, its action seems not to have been shifted backward into the past at all.

These descriptive passages are more, however, than the mere "scattered bright scraps" Bates labels them (169). They are integral parts of the human stories for which they provide discernible physical environments. Hardy uses them not simply to produce picturesque effects, but to complement, anticipate, or clarify those issues which are properly the center of interest in fiction--character and theme. And, certainly, in the short stories, these multi-functional settings help illuminate important realities of human nature and experience without indulging in tiresome "philosophical vapourings."

Hardy's specific methods of incorporating setting vary, of course, from story to story, depending upon his primary area of interest in a given tale. Of the major setting patterns discussed in this chapter, the extended night scenes appear almost exclusively in those stories in which Hardy's main interest lies in the intricacies of plot rather than in a thorough development of character. In these often sensational tales of adventure or melodrama, one seldom finds characters distinguished by more than one or two basic personality traits. Hardy's focus here is on large themes that concern types of people rather than unique individuals, universal predicaments rather than a single human being's struggle, the attitudes and values of a whole class rather than one person's choices. For these subjects, the wild natural settings, the play of the elements, and the ancient man-made structures--all seen under night skies--provide an eminently suitable backdrop. In contrast, the stories which are essentially character studies of complex individuals (by far the majority) Hardy chooses generally to set amid relatively commonplace surroundings. Anything more extravagant than the few vivid images he includes to elucidate points of character would overpower his presentation of a credible human being rocked by specific and intensely felt circumstances. But whether he is punctuating with environmental

portents the crises in a character's life or mirroring through the pathetic fallacy some typical human response to a crisis, Hardy always makes the atmospheric effects of his settings demonstrate powerfully the formative influence environment often wields over human beings, their choices, and their destinies.

CHAPTER 5

CHARACTER: DEMONIC MESMERIZERS AND AMBITIOUS SCHEMERS

The preceding discussions of plot, point of view, and setting have inevitably involved considerable discussion of character as well, for Hardy uses each of those technical elements--and the patterns within them--to elucidate in some fashion the nature of the people he invents. Human beings held an endless fascination for Hardy, and one certainly finds among his inventions in the short stories many impressive and distinctive individuals. Yet, nowhere is Hardy's predilection for recurrent patterns more evident than in his creation of character. Even his most interesting personages tend to fall into some general type, the nature of which he explores repeatedly throughout his fiction. As Lord David Cecil observes, albeit in connection with the novels,

[Hardy's] memorable characters all have a family likeness. Most of them, indeed, can be grouped into a few simple categories. There is the staunch, selfless, tender-hearted hero . . . ; there is the dashing, fickle breaker of hearts . . . ; there is the patient, devoted, forgiving woman . . . ; there is the wilful, capricious, but fundamentally good-hearted girl . . . ; there is the passion-tormented, romantic enchantress. . . . (119)

The same general categories can be found in the short stories, too, but such character types are not mere stock devices for Hardy. They represent fundamental patterns--and thus fundamental truths--he saw in human nature itself, in real people all around him as they responded to the challenges of life.

That necessary human response, or rather, the variety of possible responses, is what interests Hardy most intensely in his fiction, so that his primary focus in characterization is always on the particular manner his characters adopt in dealing

with the obstacles, opportunities, and dilemmas life puts in their way. Thus, as Cecil goes on to explain, "Hardys's view of life made [the] kinship between his creatures inevitable. Always he conceives man in relation to ultimate human destiny, and in such a relation only certain qualities strike him as significant" (120), namely, those principles and deep-rooted passions that lead people to their destinies, according to the traits uppermost in their personalities. What is most significant, then, about Cecil's list of character types is what it reveals about the attitude toward life each type displays--stoic selflessness; callous indifference to the feelings of others; patient, non-judgmental devotion; childish caprice; and self-destructive romanticism. That Hardy's characters can be classified according to such criteria does not preclude the element of individuality vital to the interest of fiction; it simply means that "their individual qualities are made subsidiary to their typical human qualities" (Cecil 51).¹ Within their specific circumstances, Hardy's characters are distinct human beings. It is only in their overall approach to life that they appear as types of humanity, recognizable from one story to another.

In fact, despite the perceptible repetition, Hardy's exploration of these character patterns actually lends considerable depth of interest and thematic significance to his stories rather than limiting their appeal. His character types are too revealing to be tedious: they continually emphasize in the relationship between mankind and fate an insistent strain of cooperativeness that has been frequently overlooked in studies of Hardy's fiction. As I wish to demonstrate here, it is the typical attitudes Hardy's characters take toward life, their perceptions of the positions they occupy in the social and universal scheme of things, that largely determine the nature of their experiences. For their basic outlook governs their

¹ See also Allen, English Novel 234; and Brooks 17-18.

response to every situation, their relationships with others, their view of their right to satisfy their own desires, and above all, their "ability to stamp a design upon the neutral chances that touch [their lives]" (Morrell 55). Though chance may deal heavy blows to any life (and usually does in Hardy's stories), human beings have some degree of freedom, even in Hardy's world, to choose how they will respond to those blows and what they will make of the circumstances "fate" assigns to them. All of Hardy's characters stamp some sort of design on the raw materials of their lives; the quality of that design, however, depends entirely on the effectiveness of their choices from day to day, and especially in moments of crisis when their typical outlook on life may do them the greatest damage or good.

Naturally, it is these "times of conflict, indecision and choice-making" that reveal most clearly just what quality dominates a given character's mind-set (Sumner 20)--a literary, as well as human, reality that may well explain why the recurrence of specific character types stands out so sharply in the short stories. As Rosemary Sumner observes, in the novels "there is scope for showing how different people respond to a single event," whereas the spatial limitations of the short stories prompt Hardy to concentrate "usually on the reactions of a single character, often in relation to a single decision or a single facet of his personality" (20). There is simply less circumstantial and characterizing detail to obscure the ruling attitude behind a character's choices. At their most basic level, the choices and general conduct of the main characters in Hardy's short stories divide his presentation of human nature into two very broad personality types--those people (to be discussed in this chapter) who take a markedly aggressive part in forging their own destinies, and those more retiring ones (reserved for the next chapter) who possess less emotional energy or self-conviction for working directly toward what they want out of life. Neither type,

however, is necessarily better equipped than the other for wresting happiness or contentment from their circumstances, as the specific sub-types within each main category demonstrate. Almost every major character in Hardy's short stories fits into one of five sub-types, whose characteristic attitudes and approaches to life I have attempted to convey by labelling them variously as mesmerizers, schemers, stoics, drifters, and imaginative women. All five types illustrate some thoroughly human limitation in how they perceive--and thus, in how well they exercise--their ability to structure their lives.

As their labels suggest, the first two character types listed here constitute that group of people who aggressively pursue the things they want in life. Indeed, they are so selfishly aggressive that they often feel entitled to structure other lives besides their own if they can through such interference further their personal goals. Almost always the least sympathetic of Hardy's creations, they are great manipulators, driven by personal arrogance, class pride, and social ambition blatantly to disregard the rights and feelings of those whom they recognize only as objects, obstacles, or tools. Despite the degree of power this high-handed approach to life affords them, these characters often end by destroying their own as well as their victims' lives, because they pursue goals, based on empty values and negative choices, that yield little satisfaction even when perfectly achieved.

The first group of characters, the demonic mesmerizers, wield the greatest power over their victims and, at first glance, seem immune to any adverse effects of their own choices. In fact, they seem hardly to be involved in a personal battle with fate or circumstance at all, since their stories focus primarily on the struggles and suffering of those whose circumstances they deliberately complicate. Rather, as the instigators of trouble in other lives, they often seem the embodiment of fate itself,

an effect intensified by the air of mystery with which Hardy surrounds them. Male, and usually dark, enigmatic foreigners, these characters represent an unknown quantity to the other figures in the stories, especially to the women, over whose hearts, thoughts, and actions they invariably exercise some degree of mesmerizing control. Because Hardy repeatedly associates this hypnotic power with images of the supernatural and diabolic long familiar to him through both folk tale and literary tradition, his mesmerists have frequently been labelled "Mephistophelian" and their "magnetic power . . . over the more impetuous, simple and sincere, a power savouring of witchcraft and necromancy" (E. Hardy 180).²

Such a view is justified to a point by Hardy's own hints of the diabolic; but it often overlooks or minimizes the dark, but quite human qualities that distinguish even his eeriest mesmerizers. Most of these characters are really more human than preternatural in their presentation, and it is, accordingly, their maneuverings as human beings that are ultimately most important and interesting. Their ties to the Gothic and diabolic are not, however, mere gratuitous "exploitation" on Hardy's part "of the reading public's taste for the romantic and bizarre" (Hanson 28); rather, they help illuminate elements of meanness, perversity, and even genuine evil that have their place, too, in human nature. As Albert Guerard remarks in defense of Hardy's preternatural characters, the "realism of truth to human character is something quite

² J. O. Bailey's 1946 article on "Hardy's 'Mephistophelian Visitants'" focuses on the preternatural "invaders" of the rural worlds in Hardy's fiction, intruders who turn the current of other characters' lives and sometimes continue to deflect it to a tragic end. The discussion is intriguing but devotes only two pages to a single short story, "The Romantic Adventures of a Milkmaid." Thomas Mallory's 1957 dissertation includes extensive coverage of three short stories ("Milkmaid," "The Fiddler of the Reels," and "The Withered Arm"), but emphasizes supernatural rather than human evil in its attempt to "explain characters and plot in terms of the traditions of sorcery and possession." Mallory does provide valuable discussions, though, of the devils and demon-lovers of folk belief and balladry, which obviously inspired much of Hardy's characterizing detail.

different from truth to actual life" (74). These mesmerizers reveal, as much as any of Hardy's creations, the "psychologist" beneath "the skin of the storyteller," one who "studies feeling and conduct, affections and passions . . . with a naturalist's delight in what is strange and abnormal, out of the way, or in the way but not generally observed" (Minto 174).³ However strangely, these characters are influenced like all the others by human passions. The difference is that Hardy dramatizes very little of their decision-making process; one sees their victims, but rarely the mesmerizers themselves, choosing between conflicting forces, desires, or opportunities. By the time the reader meets them, they have already chosen a single-minded course in life, which essentially directs all their subsequent actions; and, largely to maintain the sense of powerful, mysterious forces at work, Hardy usually has them disappear physically from the scene just as one might be about to see the backlash effects of their manipulative choices on their own lives.

This disappearing act works most strikingly with Mop Ollamoor, the gimlet-eyed "Fiddler of the Reels" (LLI) who is Hardy's most intensely demonic mesmerizer. At first glance, in fact, Mop seems to be entirely the sinister demon-lover of balladry, so careful is Hardy to keep him and his physical seduction of Car'line Aspent at a distance from the reader. Though he repeatedly enters the minds of Car'line and Ned Hipcroft to explore their human reactions to Mop's interference in their lives, Hardy develops Mop's character almost exclusively in terms of external details and the effects of his hypnotic powers on his victims. Though he is ostensibly an ordinary country "horse-doctor" (170), mystery surrounds Ollamoor. No one in Stickleford knows where he came from when he rather

³ See also Carpenter, Hardy 74; and Wright 89, 104-05. Both critics see in Hardy's macabre stories in general a delving into the "Kafkaesque depths of the unconscious" (Carpenter 74) to illuminate "those areas of the psyche which are abnormal, obsessive and irrational" (Wright 89).

ominously "[rose] above the horizon thereabout," or even if Ollamoor is his real name (167). Moreover, he is significantly "un-English" in appearance, with his olive complexion and his rank dark hair, the latter made clammy by "secret ointments" and augmented on occasion by a double row of false curls (166). These physical suggestions of the foreigner's unfamiliar blood and potentially corrupting habits are in themselves enough to make the rural folk regard Mop with suspicion; for, as Mallory points out, xenophobia is a "well-known ingredient of popular demonology" (16). That Mop might, like his ancient fiddle, first have taken shape in "some Italian or German city" (182), is anything but a recommendation of him to his neighbors.

Their primary grounds for distrust, however, lie in Mop's skill as a musician. While his rakish appearance holds some appeal for the local girls, his "weird and wizardly" power over them and others in the community derives from his fiddling itself (166). He renders his "devil's tunes" with such "fantastical" plaintiveness that he "could make any child in the parish, who was at all sensitive to music, burst into tears in a few minutes" (167),⁴ and indeed, could well-nigh draw an "ache from the heart of a gate-post" with those haunting "chromatic subtleties" (167, 182). A girl of such "hysterical tendencies" as Car'line has little protection against this apparent demon who can manipulate her will irresistibly without speaking a word (169).

Much of Mop's credibility as a preternatural being, in fact, arises from Hardy's strict limitation of the fiddler's outward expressions to gratified laughter at his victims' tears; quizzical, one-eyed observations of Car'line's helpless dancing; and the compelling strains of the music itself, with which he draws her "soul out of

⁴ This detail, along with Car'line's involuntary dance at the end of the story, has its basis in Hardy's own "ecstatic temperament" and extraordinary sensitivity to music as a child: of the many country dances his father played, "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. . . . he danced on at these times to conceal his weeping" (EL 18-19).

[her] body like a spider's thread" (170). Further evidence of his wizardry and diabolical nature appears throughout the story: in his inexplicable reflection in the mirror at the Great Exhibition, his coincidental appearance at the Quiet Woman on the very night of Car'line's return to her home, his instant recognition of her despite her veil (Brady 135), and his disappearance without a trace with little Carry. The mirror passage is especially notable as an "emblem" of the strange "relation between Mop and Car'line":

Car'line's love for Mop has never been straightforwardly oriented toward him, but has been a fascination induced by his music and by his covert glances. This indirection is perfectly symbolized by the reflection in the mirror which cannot be followed to reach the real person. (Miller, Distance and Desire 126)

Nevertheless, Ollamoor is not pure demon, however uncanny and elusive he may seem. On one thematic level, he is the archetype of a particular kind of human being, "the dark, primitive, sexually powerful man who threatens the stability of conventional domestic life" with his "passionate, amoral approach to life."⁵ Even his name emphasizes the "irrational nature of sexual attraction": he is "all amour" (Benazon, "Dark and Fair" 75). The very first thing one is told about Mop is that he is "a woman's man . . . --supremely so--externally little else." His secret hair ointments even make him smell "like 'boys'-love' (southern-wood) steeped in lamp oil" (166). And the moment he discovers Car'line's vulnerability to him and his music, he is unable to "resist a little by-play with her too easily hurt heart" (170). On this thematic level, the "power of Mop's music-making" becomes a symbol not of his demonic nature, but of his "personal magnetism," through which he converts others "to his own creed of sensuality" (Page, "Reconsideration" 80).

⁵ Frank Giordano, Jr. presents a contrary and unusually generous view of Mop. He sees him as a "composite folk and mythical figure" whose pagan qualities and extreme emotional effects on human beings might, from a pagan perspective, be regarded as desirable and supremely creative (619).

Every description of Car'line's response to Mop's magnetism contains distinctly sexual overtones, the imagery revealing the mesmerizer's success in quickening his victim's own primitive instincts. Though involuntary, her "bewitched" reaction betrays "a kind of willingness which indicates the sexual attraction she feels" (Sumner 22). At their first encounter, her heart aches with "a wild desire," and "her tread convulse[s] itself more and more accordantly with the time of [Mop's] melody" (168). When she hears the beat of his footstep outside her house, she springs up "convulsively," "as if she had received a galvanic shock" (169). And in her final hysterical dance, in what Giordano calls "a terrible Bacchic orgy" accentuating "Car'line's irresponsible forfeiture of her free will" (627), the girl succumbs utterly to "those foods of love which, as manufactured by [Mop's] bow, had always intoxicated her" (182). Musician and dancer meet in a symbolic sexual frenzy, with the 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,

until the orgasmic moment of Car'line's exhausted collapse onto the floor and Mop's emission from his fiddle of an "elfin shriek of finality" (181, 183). Although Car'line "fancie[s] she [has] no power, while Mop play[s] such tunes" (181), Hardy carefully reveals, even before she becomes aware of her seducer's presence, that the girl has too weak a will to resist even the most casual supplication, much less the fiddler's powerful overtures. She does not "exactly want" the glass of "gin-and-beer hot" she is offered at the inn (179), but she drinks it anyway; she does not want to dance, yet she plunges into the figure at the first invitation. By degrees, like the "withywind" to which she is compared (170), she allows herself to be drawn toward the source of her real temptation, so that, at last, it is in a very real sense "her own pleasure which [leads] her on," "slavishly," in the dance (182).

That Mop preys exclusively on weak-willed "young women of fragile and responsive organization" argues more convincingly than any aspect of the story that this mesmerizer is human (168). As a man bent on sexual gratification, he simply seeks out those unsophisticated, impressionable girls least able to resist his charms. While this exploitation of innocence contributes also to his demonic potential, an early detail links it first to his humanness: the many girls he has already seduced and abandoned have not remained dutifully under his spell, but now hate him for his fickleness and openly ridicule his affectation of false curls. In many ways, Mop is simply a flamboyant country "dandy," in amoral pursuit of his own pleasure, who exercises no unnatural control over any but the weakest members of the community. The men find his appearance faintly repulsive and respond to him emotionally only with a natural resentment of his amorous successes. The old church musicians despise rather than succumb to the lack of solidity in his musical style. And even the enthusiastic dancers at the inn greet his exquisite fiddling only with pleasure at the unexpected diversion, not with a despairing forfeiture of their independent wills. The cleverest indication of Mop's humanness, however, comes paradoxically at the end, just when his abduction of Carry points most strongly to his demonic nature:

How better deflate the mythic pretensions of captivating musician and captured child than by referring to their present ages in the last lines of the story. (Quinn 80)

The final image the reader carries away from the tale is that of two rather tawdry performers, Mop now "an old scamp verging on three-score-and-ten, and [Carry] a woman of four-and-forty" (185). It is Hardy's seamless fusion in Mop of the realistic and the fantastic that makes many scholars regard "The Fiddler of the Reels" as "one of the great, if barely known, stories in the English language" (Howe, Hardy 82).⁶

⁶ See also Guerard 21; Brown 117; and Page, "Reconsideration" 80-81.

Less successful in its fusion of these contrary elements--and, consequently, less admired--is the long story, virtually a novelette, "The Romantic Adventures of a Milkmaid" (CM).⁷ Though it contains many more allusions to myth, demonology, and fairy tale than "Fiddler," and a lengthier description of its mesmerizer's human and inhuman traits, it lacks the latter story's ingeniously sustained allowance for both fantastic and realistic readings. Here, the details are less carefully integrated, so that the reader is forced, according to Mallory, unsatisfactorily to reject some part of them: if he "accepts the 'facts' . . . he cannot accept the supernatural interpretation; if he follows the suggestions of the supernatural with the trust that the reader normally feels in the author's guidance, he is unable to accept the 'facts'" (12). This confusion arises mainly from the complexity with which Hardy presents the Baron von Xanten, in both his human and demonic aspects. An ever-fluctuating combination of Byronic hero, fairy godfather, demon-lover, and irresponsible playboy, the Baron is less easily comprehended than Mop Ollamoor. Sexual desire is checked by self-restraint and a sometimes noble conscience; generosity is offset by moody self-indulgence; and the demon's hypnotic possession of innocent souls is matched by the aristocrat's idle meddling in the private affairs of common folk. Thus, the reader must not only choose here between real and supernatural, but must also synthesize a whole array of admirable and ignoble human attributes in order to come to terms with von Xanten's character. Ultimately, the story's length provides

⁷ Douglas Brown calls the story "the most truly ballad-like fiction in all Hardy" (116), and Michael Benazon deems it "one of the more successful of his short fictions" ("Hardy's Modern Romance" 64). But the dominant critical view, supported by Hardy's own acknowledgement of its "slight nature" (CL 7: 87), is that it "demands no serious consideration," due to its improbable plot (Trent 230). Joseph Warren Beach dismisses it as an "arrant pot-boiler" (Technique 125), and even the generally admiring Norman Page laments the "pad[ding] out with description and dialogue" of what is in essence a fairly simple tale ("Reconsideration" 79).

the interpretive solution, as the sheer weight of detail renders the other-worldly images secondary to the insistent human attributes, the former becoming a vivid, symbolic reinforcement of the particular personality type represented by the Baron.

The gentleman's first appearance in the story establishes that type perfectly, even as it initiates the air of romantic mystery that surrounds him in the rural folks' view. Discovered by Margery Tucker in the all-the-year-round, on the verge of committing suicide, the Baron is the epitome of the world-weary aristocrat burdened by the consequences of his self-indulgence. Fine-framed, white-skinned, carelessly clad in dressing-gown and slippers, he reveals immediately his link to the leisure class. And with the additional romantic touches of his dark mustachios, foreign accent, and melancholy anguish suggestive of some "tragical secret" (314), he is certainly "quite a different being from any of the men" Margery has ever seen (309). But there is nothing in the passage to suggest, even to her, that he is of another world. Indeed, though she understands little of his meaning, the Baron himself explains to Margery the essence of his nature in speaking of "the great clouds [that] hang over some people's lives, and what cowards some men are in face of them. To escape themselves they travel, take picturesque houses, and engage in country sports" (311). The letter which Margery's timely arrival has kept him alive to receive evidently frees him from any repercussions of the situation he has fled in coming to Mount Lodge, but the admission and demonstration of his escapist tendencies here at the outset set the stage for all his subsequent behavior as a man who heeds "nothing outside his own existence" (310).

The Baron's power as a mesmerist derives more from his privileged social position, habitual melancholy, and veiled private life than from any tangible evidence of magical qualities. Significantly, all the details that link him to the

supernatural are filtered through the perceptions of his rustic neighbors, as the narrator continually intrudes to emphasize. As he explains,

the facts of a life in such cases are of little account beside the aspect of a life; and hence, though doubtless the years of [the Baron's] existence contained their share of trite and homely circumstance, the curtain which masked all this was never lifted to gratify such a theatre of spectators as those at Silverthorn. Therein lay his charm. (362)

In short, the local community is free to fashion a reclusive stranger imaginatively into any mysterious entity it chooses, a transformation that begins the moment Margery's first encounter with him ends: "Strange as the incident had been in itself, to her it had seemed stranger even than it was" (314). So too does the postman she meets lend automatically to his limited knowledge of von Xanten an additional element of mystery, describing the man as "a foreign noble that's lived in England so long as to be without any true country," and his name as an unnatural one "no man's tongue can tell. . . . It begins with X, and who, without the machinery of a clock in's inside, can speak that?" (315). Again, the mere suggestion of "un-English" origins is enough to fire the superstitious imaginations of unsophisticated country people.

Most of the "supernatural" details appear early in the story, when the Baron plays fairy godfather to Margery in escorting her to the Yeomanry Ball, and at the very end, when he suddenly reappears in the guise of a demon-lover and very nearly seduces her away from home and husband. In the first section, fairy-tale allusions abound as he grants the girl her one wish, arranging as if by magic every detail to enable her to attend the ball in style: the "heavenly cobweb" of a ball-dress (325); the half-dozen pairs of shoes and gloves from which to choose the perfect fit; and the carriage, horses, and coachman standing ready for her, "as still as if they were growing on the spot" (327). Other images, though, give a sinister twist to this Cinderella story. The meeting at Three-Walks-End (crossroads being "the natural

haunts of all other-worldly visitors"), the Baron's insistence on "the exact terms of [their] pact" (Guerard 94), and the grotesque tree--"huge, hollow, distorted, and headless, with a rift in its side" (CM 327)--all hint of dark forces at work. So do the smoking nostrils of the Baron's horses, the ballroom floor like black ice, and the faintly demonic figures of the foreign driver who "heeds nothing" (327) and the twelve musicians "with romantic mop-heads of raven hair" and eyes "like fire under coals" (331). For simple Margery, it is truly as if the devil has shown her "all the kingdoms of the world" in the wondrous riches of Lord Toneborough's mansion (340), before her allotted time expires, the magic wears off, and her gossamer costume is consigned to flames. This demon who ruthlessly destroys her pretty clothes is apparently the same one who returns at the end in a "grand coach, ablazing with lions and unicorns, and hauled by two coal-black horses" (396), to lure her to his demon-ship and thence to destruction. Even practical Jim fancies he sees "more than earthly fire on the Baron's face" and in the "ruby flash of his eye" as the setting sun blazes upon him (401-02).

These powerful scenes, however, are continually undercut by reminders of the Baron's humanness and of the real source of his mesmeric influence over these young people, the "romantic milkmaid" in particular. Although Margery repeatedly testifies to a "magical and compulsory" power in this stranger (321)--to whom she responds as "an obedient familiar" to "some great enchanter," a Prospero or a Rhadamanthus--the narrator carefully points to Margery's vivid imagination and suggests the more probable explanation of the Baron's power as "only that of the cosmopolite over the recluse, of the experienced man over the simple maid" (355). And though her fascination leads her to promise, in turn, that she will come should he send for her, "no matter what" (334), and then that she will ignore the summons,

as her "salvation may depend on it" (357), Margery's regard for von Xanten's words as law reveals as much reverence for his social position as for his magician's status. Her vocal responses to him are liberally sprinkled with respectful "yes sirs" and "no sirs." Most telling, however, is the ambiguity of the Baron's warning, in eliciting her second promise, that "You don't know what I am" (357). In the context of his obvious sexual attraction to Margery, the words suggest to the reader less a spiritual danger for Margery than the young man's doubt of his own self-control.

The strongest argument against a supernatural interpretation of von Xanten's character lies in his continual alternation between such gestures of consideration for Margery's welfare and a cruelly selfish disregard for her feelings. He is at his most unattractive during what is, on the surface, his most generous, disinterested act--the fulfillment of his promise to take her to the ball. At first forgetting that he has even offered her a little reward for saving him from "an act of madness" (312), and then nettled at her unexpected request, the Baron approaches the whole situation as an ordeal, a "difficult duty" he has reluctantly agreed to perform (328). Except for a few moments of attraction to Margery's beauty, he conducts the proceedings with cold, aristocratic condescension. (Even when warmed by his Cinderella's outward elegance, his attitude is derogatory, as he muses, "who would have thought that clothes could do so much!") His main concern is that there be no evidence of his appearance in public with this lowly milkmaid--thus his arrangement to take her to Lord Toneborough's where neither of them is known, his purchase of the tickets under an assumed name, his engagement of a driver whose silence can be assured, and his heartless destruction of every scrap of Margery's finery, the like of which she is never apt to see again. An experience which is the most glorious of her lifetime is clearly nothing to him; and, in his determination to preserve his own reputation, he

is utterly oblivious to her pain at being denied a single souvenir. From his lofty position, he sees only that one such as she could have no further use for the things if she lived "a hundred years" (333), and he chastises her sternly for opposing him:

The things are my property. I undertook to gratify you in what you might desire because you had saved my life. . . . I have taken you to a ball. I have brought you back. The clothes were only the means, and I dispose of them my own way. (334)

Cruellest of all, in parting, he puts into her hands her own butter basket, presenting her not with a precious memento, but with a bitter reminder of her proper place.

Once safely through this public adventure, however, the Baron succumbs to a different species of selfishness. Having discovered Margery's betrothal to Jim Hayward and prudently cautioned her to "[t]hink of Jim, and forget me" (336), the stern aristocrat begins to think obsessively about this only creature of beauty in his immediate environs, and reverts to melancholy romanticism in his boredom and self-imposed solitude. Risking all he has striven to set right, he deliberately (though not without some conscientious resistance) puts himself in Margery's way, kisses her cheek, and, finally, summons her to his side in a way that irresponsibly raises her initial vague fancies regarding him to the level of outright infatuation and hopes of marriage. Though the Baron does not realize he is luring Margery away from Jim on the very day planned for their wedding, his note is grossly unfair, with its blatant hint that in refusing to visit him, she might provoke him to suicide. The morbid summons is all the more inexcusable in that what to her involves a sacred promise turns out to be on his side "a whim, nothing more," grown out of idleness and self-oppression (355). Besides manipulating Margery, the Baron continually deceives himself as well. He offers her a wedding present but, adding the stipulation that it be returned should she not marry Jim, leaves it open to interpretation as either a bribe to make her accept Jim or an enticement to make her look in his own direction--thus

relieving himself of the necessity of deciding which course he would truly prefer she take. He blames fate for the havoc he has caused in her life by demanding and then taking advantage of her promise. And, even as he rushes her home with the intention of salvaging her wedding plans, the Baron is wrestling with the notion of carrying her away with him--a precedent which, incidentally, diminishes the mythic nature of the genuine seduction attempt at the end.

The confusion and near disaster he brings to other lives through his almost total self-absorption make the Baron's magnetic power quite as formidable as any supernatural demon's. His "in-focusing" is connected, as George Wing observes, with an element of "nineteenth-century decadence" which "has the power to infect with itself, to multiply cancerously," and to drag "less selfish beings to the destructive centre of his own selfishness" ("Tess" 25). In short, he is an "aristocratic hedonist" who has "too much time on [his] hands for [his] own good and for the good of hard-working folk" (Guerard 21, 22). Yet, in all fairness to the Baron, he does have a conscience and tries to undo the harm he has done--though, ironically, he succeeds at last only by removing himself forever from his victims' lives. The problem is that even his generosity stems from self-indulgence. Together, his privileged upbringing and present boredom convince him that he has a perfect right to meddle in the lives of his social inferiors. Jim and Margery are in many ways more like toys to him than people. Thus, when he realizes he has inadvertently come between the pair, he tries to force them back together to ease his conscience, first by purchasing for Jim the elaborate furnishings Margery now longs for, and then by tricking the young woman into the secret wedding ceremony beside his "death-bed." Neither ruse is conducive to the couple's happiness, of course; for, through both, the Baron only further disrupts the natural courses of their lives by totally disregarding Margery's right to

decide if and when she will marry Jim. This strange combination in von Xanten of generosity and selfishness, consideration and manipulateness, is best explained by Guerard's distinction, in regard to Hardy's Mephistophelian characters, "between the fascinators (the mesmerists who attract and perhaps corrupt the innocent) and the spectators (inhumanly detached manipulators of tragedy, whose pleasure lies in 'arranging' rather than enjoying life)." Mop Ollamoor belongs in the first category since he seduces strictly for sensual pleasure. But the complex Baron von Xanten "is a benevolent spectator by inclination and a fascinator despite his good intentions" (96, 97).⁸ It is this inner conflict perhaps that leads, a few years after his departure from Silverthorne, to the Baron's rumored death at his own hand. Denied both the "arranging" of other lives and the object of his "fascination," he is consumed by his own idleness and constitutional melancholy.

The other two mesmerizers to be dealt with here possess a substantial share of the "fascinators'" power, but are predominantly "arrangers," stern, calculating manipulators of other lives. With them, Hardy focuses on psychological rather than supernatural effects, though images of the demonic still appear. Not demon-lovers in the traditional sense, these men nevertheless exercise an uncanny control over the minds and emotions of the women they pursue romantically. In fact, they effect a more complete and lasting "possession" of their victims' souls than either of the

⁸ Mallory explains this duality on the supernatural level, by describing the Baron as "the Devil of the peasant, the folk, rather than as the Satan of the theologian." This folk Devil is

capricious, almost humanly fallible in knowledge and judgment, frequently moved by kind impulses, and susceptible to the charms of mortal woman. The evil in him, as in nature or fate, being mostly a compound of caprice and irresponsible power rather than malice or a rebellion against good, the evil that he does is by no means always intentional. He can be reached by reasoning and by appeals to his sympathies, and his solemn word can be relied upon. (11-12)

more obviously preternatural figures. In "The Committee-Man of 'The Terror'" (CM), Monsieur B___ is a hazily drawn character who, like those other figures, gains much of his mystique from being a stranger and a foreigner. He is, however, recognizably French, rather than of indeterminate nationality; and, in the 1802-1803 historical setting, his foreignness makes him the object of political, not superstitious suspicion. Similarly, it is his link to another politically volatile period, the French Revolution's "Reign of Terror," that initiates his disturbing hold over Mademoiselle V___. As one of the committee that guillotined most of her family, he need not be literally demonic to seem so to her and to rob her of her "self-command" (217). The very fact that both victim and mesmerizer are strangers, foreigners in exile, shifts the focus of the mystery away from external details to the psychological effects of the Frenchman's personal magnetism and embodiment of their shared past.

Despite the rather shallow development of both characters, Hardy weaves an intriguing cloak of indefinability around Monsieur B___, and around the source of his magnetism, that subtly engages the reader's interest and emotions. The story's main strength is that, to the very end, one cannot decide precisely what sort of being he is. For the most part, he appears as a solemn, uncompromising man of principle, who yet inspires sympathy on occasion due to his own compassion and vulnerability to human suffering. When Mademoiselle V___ faints at the sight of her family's nemesis, he gallantly carries her to shelter and, though attracted by her "pathetic beauty," extends his "act of simple humanity" by keeping aloof from her once he knows the cause of her dread (218). He does not intrude upon her again until illness forces him to appeal to her, as the only person aware of his true identity, for help in settling his affairs. Despite her hatred of his former infamy, Mademoiselle V___ has by this time already begun, as a creature of "nervous and sensitive heart" (222), to

think more charitably of the man himself--the turning point being her glimpse of his solitary figure bending in apparent need to pick up a discarded fragment of cake.

In her lonely commiseration with a fellow exile worse situated than herself, the young woman even begins to consider her enemy's justifications for his actions under the Convention. While "the story itself passes too lightly over the premises of his logic and the immorality of his past" (Brady 187), there is no doubt that Monsieur B___ believes absolutely in the cause he followed and in his rationalistic distinction between "consequence" and "intent": "What I did," he tells Mademoiselle V___, "was a matter of conscience, and, from a point of view indiscernible by you, I did right. I profited not a farthing" (219). The very essence of his character is an unwavering adherence to his "God . . . Reason." And the same personal values that led him to act as the "instrument of a national principle" (221) now dictate his dealings with his countrywoman, whose plight has quickened in him a warmer feeling than sympathy. He rationaly proposes marriage to gain the right to protect her from the growing antagonism against French emigrants which, with the renewal of tensions between France and England, now makes life unpleasant for her and openly dangerous for him, as "a disguised man of no known occupation" (223). He risks imprisonment by refusing to leave without her, because reason tells him their union would provide the safest course for them both. And, finally, he sets her free because he realizes the horrors of the past live on too vividly in her memory not to form an insurmountable barrier to their happiness. Having sacrificed his life to the "cause of Liberty," he cannot now allow the woman he loves "to be fettered beyond release" (229).

Taken alone, these details present Monsieur B___ in a very noble light. But they do not stand alone. Continually interspersed among them are suggestions of a darker element in his character that enables him gradually to "absorb [Mademoiselle

V___'s] whole nature, and, absorbing, to control it" (226). Something of that power is apparent from the start, for the young woman tells no one of his real identity, even at the moment of her first horrified recognition of him, when hatred is all she feels. Even before his seeming starvation elicits her sympathy, he exercises a compelling power over her will: standing across the harbor from her one day, and observing her reluctance to cross while he waits there, Monsieur B___ ominously raises his hand like some grim specter to point at the ferry-boat, thrice commanding her to "Enter!" (220). Unwillingly, she obeys, and though she stiffly ignores him on the opposite shore, her resistance steadily weakens thereafter, giving way first to a dangerous interest in him and, finally, to an "abnormal craving, inclining to a tenderness for him that was founded on its opposite" (225). Like the other demon-lovers, he seems fully conscious of his influence, never couching his increasingly adamant proposals in an interrogative form, but always as the imperatives "you will" and "you must." Using her compassionate nature unfairly against her by laying the responsibility at her door should he be arrested while devotedly awaiting her acceptance, he forces her across the boundary between hate and love so that she ends by adoring the man who is, "in her tradition, vengeance and irreligion personified" (226).

The strongest evidence of his mesmeric power, however, is that it triumphs over "all reason and sense of family honour" (225) even after Mademoiselle V___'s letter from her friend renews her hatred for her lover's past actions--with "the effect of a pail of water upon a somnambulist" (226)--and inspires the gruesome nightmare procession of headless relatives through her bedchamber. This "divinely sent vision" (227), "the single scene which reminds the reader of the atrocities for which Monsieur B___ was responsible" (Brady 187), frightens the young woman into flight on the eve of her wedding, and fills her with self-disgust. But, even when away

from her enchanter's commanding presence, she is not free. She begins at once to rationalize, raising all his own defenses about having acted on principle, and turns back with a helpless conviction of her smallness against his greatness and a determination to be his "if it cost me my immortal soul!" (228).

Mademoiselle V___'s ironic glimpse, at this point, of her lover's shape on the same coach that now takes him on to London and out of her life is the masterstroke of the story. More than melodramatic coincidence, it emphasizes the eerie ambiguity of Monsieur B___'s character, which the ending does not resolve. Honor and principle guide the man in removing himself as a constant reminder of her family tragedy--though one now recognizes an undercurrent of self-indulgence in his pursuit of the intimate contact he at first wisely resisted. But, with his complete, irreversible fascination of her mind, heart, and soul, it seems that the demon wins. In a letter to Florence Henniker, Hardy wrote that "It did not occur to me that my story . . . was a sad one. The marriage wd have resulted in unhappiness for certain, don't you think" (CL 2: 139). His prediction is undoubtedly correct, but the final reality of the story is that her lover's departure condemns Mademoiselle V___ no less certainly to a life of unhappiness. She dies a spinster "at no great age," already white-haired and pinch-faced, and still possessed by that last mysterious image of her lover as a receding shape against the starlit sky (230). In a sense, this principled but manipulative man ironically destroys through love the last member of the family he earlier destroyed through political conviction--both in the name of Liberty.

No such ironic clash between motive and effect complicates Hardy's master manipulator, Lord Uplandtowers of "Barbara of the House of Grebe" (GND). An intensely destructive "arranger," Uplandtowers reveals his selfish bent from the start, in the "cynical doggedness" and cold "calculation" which circumstance and

heredity have combined to produce in him. Having been jerked into maturity by "succession to the earldom and its accompanying local honours" at the age of twelve, the young man loses any tempering effect a more natural movement into adulthood might have had on the development in him of his family's trait of "determination" (55). As it is, that development creates a grossly one-sided human being who, unlike the committee-man, "represents calculation without kindness, self-mastery without sympathy for others" (Brady 59). In addition, there is nothing genuinely mysterious in the Earl as there is in the Frenchman. His demonic aspect lies entirely in his cold detachment and unvarying "determination" to possess, master, and control. He is, ironically, both the least supernatural and the least human of all Hardy's mesmerists, as well as the most direct and methodical in the psychological conquest of his victim.

The tale's psychological emphasis begins at once, with the opening sentence's pointed summary of the Earl's attitude toward Barbara: "It was apparently an idea, rather than a passion, that inspired Lord Uplandtowers's resolve to win her" (55). Understandably, most critical studies have focused mainly on the terrible changes effected in Barbara's psyche by her second husband, but Hardy also provides an unnerving glimpse into the mind of her tormenter--a man so cut off from ordinary human emotion and interaction by his inherited tendencies and premature accession to social power, that the only pleasure he can now feel comes from ruthlessly wielding that power to control other people. He often seems as much a figure of cold stone as the statue he mutilates in order to bring Barbara completely under his domination. Hardy repeatedly describes him in terms denoting immovability: he is a "man of silence, of irresistible incisiveness, of still countenance" (77), who pursues the "design of his heart" with the same arrogant "equanimity" (56) and severity with which he metes out punishment to "poachers, smugglers, and turnip stealers" (78).

Before Barbara elopes with Edmond Willowses, Uplandtowers faces her "manifest dislike of him" with the impassivity and patience of a "calm young philosopher" certain of eventual success (56, 58); afterwards, he responds to the disruption of his plan with nothing more intense than "frigid despair" at the news and a greater "mechanical stiffness" in his bearing toward Barbara (60, 66).

The girl's own obvious desire not to be consigned to his control through the "doom of marriage" may well be the Earl's main reason for wanting her (60), as he can tolerate no challenge to his will. With "no more calculation in her than in a bird" (56), however, she is his complete opposite in temperament and no match for his hateful machinations. Images of helplessness continually emphasize her childlike vulnerability and dependence on others: her features are "almost infantine" (63), her nature like that of a "sweet-pea or with-wind . . . which require[s] a twig of stouter fibre than its own to hang upon and bloom" (78). And when Edmond returns to her, horribly disfigured but tender and loving, Barbara flees from him, like a child from a nightmare-monster, to hide in the greenhouse till daylight lessens her dread. Timidly gathering her skirts up in fear of field mice, she crouches "on a flower-stand" like a fragile hot-house plant, too weak to face directly the cruel elements of the real world outside (75). Certainly she lacks the strength to withstand the horrifying effects both her husbands bring to bear upon her.

Ironically, it is gentle Edmond--with his foreign appearance, "flapping black cloak and slouched hat," and flesh-colored mask covering "a thing of the charnel-house" (71, 74)--who seems, outwardly, the demonic figure. But his only hypnotic influence over Barbara lay in his original good looks, and though both are briefly revived later in the marble statue, the real man never controls her heart again. That power lies entirely with Lord Uplandtowers, who "invariably appears, devil-like, at

the precise moments when she is most vulnerable" (Brady 58). He rides past her ominously just when her shallow love for Edmond has begun to cool without the daily inspiration of his physical beauty. And he comes upon her again when the dread of meeting her now scarred husband has reached so intolerable a pitch that she indiscreetly reveals her misgivings, "in response to [the Earl's] leading questions" (70), and opens herself to his steely reproach that "It need not have been thus if you had listened to me!" Significantly, this "casual encounter" is sufficient to keep the nobleman's "voice and image" so oppressively before her as to exclude her husband "from the inner circle of her impressions" just when she most needs to concentrate upon the love they shared (71). After Edmond's sad departure and apparent death, Uplandtowers need only wait and put himself "frequently under her eyes" (78) to accustom Barbara to his stern company, gain her trust, and, finally, win her hand.

The moment he possesses her in marriage, however, Uplandtowers becomes openly diabolic and his destructive effect on Barbara instantly apparent. Before she even reaches her husband's home, she appears "pale, and the reverse of blooming" and, at the end of a year, daily shrinks and withers like a fragile flower in the chill of his resentment at her failure to produce an heir (79). At first, the Earl expresses his resentment only through frigid silence or harsh words. But, when Barbara's secret, love-starved adoration of Edmond's statue shows him that he does not rule his wife as entirely as he thought, he coldly "set[s] himself to strategy," the "simple stratagem of constant tenderness" never occurring to one of his starkly unemotional nature (84). Even his instant response to the sight of Barbara lavishing on lifeless stone an intensity of feeling never directed toward himself is "carefully controlled" (Morrell 116). Rather than indulge in natural human anger and jealousy by confronting her, Uplandtowers calmly--almost gleefully--begins his brutal "countermoves" (84),

discovering the specifics of Edmond's disfigurement and having them reproduced in the statue so as to effect the "good purpose" of his wife's "cure" (85, 87).⁹

The "ferocious correctives" he applies to force Barbara not merely to say, but actually to feel that she loves him best are designed to break her spirit and grant him total control of her will: it is not her heart or affection he really wants, but her "delicate soul," to which the former merely provide access (87). The Earl's fiendish enjoyment of these "virtuous tortures" lends the story its only real suggestion of the preternatural (88). It is as if his mask of frigid composure drops to reveal behind the obsessive man a malevolent demon who derives obscene pleasure from her pain. Quieting Barbara after her first sight of the mutilated statue, he utters a maniacal laugh, "compounded of causticity, predilection, and brutality" (86), and speaks to her in a "weird . . . condescending argot of fatherly comforting" (Wing, "Dames" 90):

'Frightened, dear one, hey? What a baby 'tis! Only a joke, sure, Barbara--a splendid joke! But a baby should not go to closets at midnight to look for ghosts of the dear departed! If it do it must expect to be terrified at his aspect--ho--ho--ho!' (86)

Even when Barbara collapses in an hysterical epileptic fit after her third night's subjection to his ghastly "scourge," Uplandtowers's only concern is that he has been "too exacting for his own interests," just as his relief when she revives is but a "selfish gloating" over the apparent success of his "treatment" (89, 88).

In his desire to possess his wife completely, the Earl does indeed succeed. Mesmerized by fear, she transfers every feeling of passion and devotion to him, "abjectly kiss[ing] him many times" between gasps of terror and swearing never to

⁹ In Thomas Hardy: Psychological Novelist, Rosemary Sumner analyzes this last part of the story as an account of an experiment in twentieth-century "aversion therapy," which Hardy's extraordinary insight into the workings of the human mind led him to anticipate long before its tentative beginnings in the 1930s (23-28). Sumner significantly points out that there is "a good deal of emphasis on how Barbara behaves (rather than on what she feels)" (23-24).

"dream of thinking a single thought that seems like faithlessness to [her] marriage vow" (89). With his "possession" of Barbara, however, Uplandtowers unexpectedly finds himself possessed as well, for the upshot of the cure is a "new disease." Left with no source of tender refuge, in life or memory, the Countess becomes slavishly attached to her tormenter, "till at length her very fidelity [becomes] a burden to him, absorbing his time, and curtailing his liberty, and causing him to curse and swear" (90). Moreover, the neurotic personality he has created in Barbara ironically leaves her too exhausted to produce--despite eleven pregnancies--"a living son and heir" (91). These last details bring the Earl's character precipitously back to the realm of human, albeit extreme, experience. He is the only mesmerizer, in fact, whom Hardy does not make mysteriously disappear at the end but, instead, shows having to face the eventual consequences of his self-absorbed approach to life (and, significantly, those also of the choices he has compelled his victim to make). For all his tyrannical strategies, Uplandtowers never manages to arrange life to his satisfaction; his one-dimensional, perversely in-focused attitude prevents it. The powerful elucidation of obsessive human behavior which Hardy achieves in the Earl through a symbolic overlay of demonic characteristics emphatically justifies his calm reply to a fastidious contemporary's outrage¹⁰ at the story's bizarre Gothic qualities: quite simply, he claimed, a "good horror has its place in art."¹¹

¹⁰ See "The Merry Wives of Wessex" 3. The anonymous reviewer finds the tale revolting and hideous, but one must question the judgment of a reader who can propose as "far less cruel and disgusting than Mr. Hardy's actual conclusion," an alternate ending in which "poetic justice" would grant Uplandtowers his longed for son and heir in the shape of an "earless, one-eyed, cretinous monster, the living reproduction of the mutilated statue." (The effects of such "justice" on the child go unaddressed.) See also "Contemporary Literature" 845; and for more recent objections to Hardy's depiction of the Earl's cruelties, see Stewart 150 and Eliot 58.

¹¹ Hardy, "The Merry Wives of Wessex" 2. This is Hardy's reply to the vitriolic review of the same title, the sentiments of which are indicated in the preceding note. A stronger defense of his story may be inferred from a note Hardy

Many of Hardy's short stories demonstrate his ability to incorporate, without indulging in mere horror for horror's sake, the kinds of grotesqueries, folk legends, and superstitions that appealed to his imagination. Wherever he includes fantastic elements, they always direct attention in some way to realistic aspects of human character, as in the tales containing demonic mesmerizers. Far more numerous, though, are the stories and characters Hardy presents--with however much strange and ironic coincidence--without the additional complication of the supernatural. He certainly observed in the human flux around him sufficient evidence of obsessive behavior to make him regard it as no rare occurrence suitable for examination only in a bizarre or symbolic fiction. And, judging from the frequency of its appearance in his short stories, the most obvious, and repugnant, among the obsessions he saw in his own society was the rampant display of social ambition. Himself "caring for life as an emotion rather than . . . as a science of climbing" (EL 96), Hardy was particularly sensitive to the dehumanizing effect of such ambition, to the way in which "honest human affection will become shamefaced and mean under the frost of class-division and social prejudices" (GND 111). It is hardly surprising that his most destructive mesmerizer also occupies the highest social position and exhibits the greatest personal arrogance and brutal disregard for those he deems inferior. Like Lord Uplandtowers, Hardy's ambitious characters are often emotionally hollow

wrote, concerning sensationalism, two years prior to the initial publication of "Barbara":

A 'sensation novel' is possible in which the sensationalism is not casualty, but evolution; not physical but psychical. . . . The difference between the latter kind of novel and the novel of physical sensationalism . . . is this: that whereas in the physical the adventure itself is the subject of interest, the psychical results being passed over as commonplace, in the psychical the casualty or adventure is held to be of no intrinsic interest, but the effect upon the faculties is the important matter to be depicted. (EL 268)

The horror story in "Barbara" is secondary to the revelation of character and to the examination of "psychical" responses to extraordinary stress.

creatures whose single-minded pursuit of social power, privilege, or advancement invariably leads to someone's unhappiness, often their own.

Indeed, as a group, they are quite as manipulative and destructive as the mesmerizers, only instead of "fascinating" their victims to get what they want, they resort to scheming, often with endless readjustments of strategy. Few of Hardy's stories are without some emphasis on ambition and class-consciousness, so pervasive were those elements in his world, but these schemers reveal starkly the stagnant, unsatisfying, emotionally crippling qualities life assumes for those whose choices and actions are dominated by materialistic values. Within the type are variations, of course. Some characters are ambitious for themselves, some for their children or other family members. Some ruthlessly manipulate innocents to strengthen or maintain privileged positions they already occupy, while others stoop to ignominious levels in their attempt to rise in the social scale. But, whether digging in or climbing up, all display an obsessive concern for appearances, rank, lineage, education, and wealth that precludes any real enjoyment of what they actually have. Occasionally, these characters discover--after seeing their ambitions and pretensions thwarted--some more worthy object to strive for, but invariably, the discovery comes too late.

Least repentant in such cases are Hardy's ambitious aristocrats, those arrogantly bent on safeguarding or promoting their social advantage regardless of the damage to other lives. The most extreme example, perhaps, is the rich squire in "The Doctor's Legend" (OMC) who, like his real-life counterpart, "calmly destroyed [an] entire market-town . . . because he found it an eyesore" that "lay too near his home" (Kay-Robinson, Landscape 80, 82). Although his snobbery and cold ambition ultimately circle back upon him, bringing to nothing the estate and noble line he has been at pains to establish, he is in no way humbled or reformed. More interesting,

however, because more thoroughly and convincingly developed, are the haughty ladies of A Group of Noble Dames. They at least respond emotionally to changes in or threats to their social position, often extricating themselves from trouble by means of "a desperate unscrupulousness" (Minto 175). Particularly significant in this respect are Maria Icenway and Lady Caroline, Marchioness of Stonehenge. While their calculating arrogance keeps them from inspiring much sympathy in the specific predicaments they bring upon themselves, these women nevertheless affectingly illustrate the self-destructive effects of adhering to inherited social prejudices. As one early reviewer comments, "when they suffer it is from self-indulgence, not from self-reproach" ("Editor's Study" 641); but their very incapacity for self-criticism is itself a reflection of the larger problem of their aristocratic indoctrination.

In "The Lady Icenway," Maria seems at first little more than a stereotypical snob, or a modern equivalent of "the haughty lady of the courtly love tradition" (Brady 70), because the bulk of her characterization is flatly descriptive rather than dramatic. One hears from the narrator that she has "a somewhat imperious temper and arbitrary mind" (137), that she marries Anderling because his slavish adoration gives her "the pleasure of power" (138), and that her "proud and masterful" nature responds like a thunderstorm to the discovery of their bigamous relationship (139). But only gradually does one begin to see the arrogance and absolute selfishness of her character, the first demonstration coming in her attack on Anderling's dignity and her total disregard for his self-reproaches and unshakable devotion. She values the latter only as it renders him acquiescent to her own will; beratingly, she exclaims, "I put it to you whether, if any manliness is left in you, you ought not to do exactly what I consider the best thing for me in this strait to which you have reduced me" (140). To one brought up among "folk o' note" (138), that best thing is the

preservation of her honor before the world; and, in her determination to ensure it, she unhesitatingly banishes both the man and whatever feeling she has for him.

Although the desire of a woman in her era to salvage her reputation is understandable, especially when she has been the victim and not the perpetrator of deception, one quickly realizes that, for Maria, more than her womanly virtue is at stake. Such is her pride that she cannot "brook the least appearance of having been fooled, or deluded, or nonplussed in her worldly aims." And, much to Anderling's later surprise, such is her notion of honor that, in order to barricade "her position against mortifying discoveries" (141), she is not above practicing on Lord Icenway the same deception she has so resented. What Anderling never understands about Maria is that the scandalous reality of her two marriages is immaterial to her as long as appearances conform to conventional morality. Moreover, her second marriage satisfies her "worldly aims" by elevating her to the "rank of a peeress," a position which only intensifies the haughty severity which has "grown part of her character" (144). However imperious and arbitrary her natural temperament, Maria has been shaped by time and privileged experience into a creature who recognizes value only in external things and regards other people only as tools for getting what she wants. But, ironically, just when her maneuvers seem most successful, she finds herself trapped in her own web of deceit by the very doctrine of materialism, prejudice, and hauteur that informs her social sphere.

In the story's last pages, all the cold calculation heretofore mainly described in Maria's conduct toward her husbands comes dramatically to life. Now subject to haughty treatment herself from Lord Icenway for failing to "oblige" him with an heir, Maria responds, typically, with a scheme to substitute appearance for reality. In planning to seduce the masochistically faithful Anderling and pass off a second

child by him as "a lineal successor to the barony" (147), she appallingly considers neither his feelings, the affront to Icenway's dignity, nor the fraudulent diversion of the baronial seat from its rightful heir. Nothing, however, more pungently expresses her preoccupation with her own position than her desperate, unadorned exclamation that "There's a reason" why Anderling "must not die" (148), a reason which takes no account whatever of his suffering and devotion. Despite its blatant melodrama, this scene makes painfully real the dehumanizing effects of Maria's perverse value-system. Besides exploiting other people, her approach to life dooms Maria herself to a life of little personal fulfillment, whatever its advantages in leisure and prestige. Awakened to this fact by the death of the one person who loved her, and by the now inescapable castigations of a resentful husband, she is sensitive enough to her loss to erect a handsome stained-glass window to Anderling's memory. But, ironically, even this gesture shows her still tied to the same old hypocritical values: scheming to indulge her emotional impulse without risking her prized social position, she cautiously makes sure her "tribute" cannot be "recognized as her handiwork" (148).

The same scrupulous, hypocritical attention to camouflaging disadvantageous realities with favorable false appearances distinguishes Lady Caroline's conduct in "The Marchioness of Stonehenge." Here, however, Hardy provides a more detailed view of motive and personality in his scheming young aristocrat and, consequently, a deeper understanding of the problems created for the lady herself by her privileged upbringing and ambitious expectations. Like Maria, Lady Caroline has been schooled since birth in the prejudices and prerogatives of her class and feels no compunction about using other people to smooth her own path. But her life of ease and indulgence has left her so "satiated with the constant iteration" of familiar pleasures that she deliberately seeks to escape her boredom through a romantic

alliance conventionally forbidden, and socially disastrous, to a woman of her station (95). Significantly, her pursuit of and eventual secret marriage to the parish-clerk's son are inspired partly by the knowledge that he is loved by another. Throughout the story, she is driven by a fervent desire for what is forbidden to her but open to or possessed by others. That is, until she gets it. Once the novelty has worn off, or she discovers she has genuinely put her social position at risk, she retreats instinctively to the pattern of life she knows.

This irrational desire to dabble in one world without relinquishing her hold on another very nearly ruins Lady Caroline by luring her into a marriage she can neither acknowledge publicly nor keep secret forever. Were it not for her young husband's sudden demise, she would undoubtedly face ostracism from both worlds. As it is, she accepts his death with far more relief than grief; for, "the first wild warmth of her love [having] gone off" within a month (97), she has begun to regret deeply her impulsive sacrifice of her prospects for a higher marriage. The very thought of "immunity from the social consequences of her rash act, of renewed freedom" (99), gives her the strength and presence of mind to divert attention from herself by cleverly disposing of the body and persuading poor Milly, the woodman's daughter, to assume her role as the young man's widow. And yet, no sooner has she successfully divested herself of the relationship she now regards with shame, than she jealously begrudges Milly the obvious sincerity of her "wifely" devotion and grief. This same perverse, but characteristic, vacillation also directs Lady Caroline in her later reactions to the unexpected complication of motherhood: from her first desperate demand to be reinstated as the dead man's wife, so as to save her moral reputation; to the more congenial expedient of having her baby abroad and relinquishing it too into Milly's keeping, so as to preserve her social prospects as

well; and finally to her jealous distraction at being denied the love of the son to whose worldly success and personal integrity she has made no contribution.

In her continual oscillation, however, always wanting what she does not have, Lady Caroline betrays more than a spoilt, childish nature. Her typical aristocratic upbringing, with its trappings of snobbery and mercenary ambition, has done her a real injury, of which her petulant covetousness is but a symptom. It has robbed her of any meaningful sense of self beyond her superficial identity as "the daughter of an earl" (98). Thus it is that the story, tracing her throughout her lifetime, shows her repeatedly trying on different roles, playing at being a person with a strong, definable purpose in life, and then transferring each role to someone else when she tires of it. That she does tire of her assumed identities is inevitable, for they simply are not real to her; she has done nothing to earn them and, having been trained to value nothing above the safety net of social privilege, can take no real satisfaction in them. She is a mere "actor" in the secret nuptials that bind her to the clerk's son and soon regrets her step downward (104), unlike Milly, who enters "heart and soul" into her union with the young man, though she is but "a corpse's bride" (103). The young noblewoman is drawn briefly back to her wifely role only because, initially, she envies Milly the personal fulfillment she has found in their subterfuge and then, later, because she fears the social repercussions of apparent unwed motherhood. Ironically, she rejects the one identity which, for a time, necessarily belongs to her and which offers her a real purpose in life; thinking only of the scandal and her worldly opportunities, she resigns that role to Milly as well.

Lady Caroline's desire to reclaim her son years later--after she has long enjoyed the worldly success she schemed for in her youth and he has attained his own estimable, unaided success--merely emphasizes how shallow is the satisfaction

her life affords and how little she understands her own character and the motives of unmaterialistic people. Her marriage to the Marquis of Stonehenge has given her the power to "defy the world's opinion" after his death and avow her first marriage and her son, but this time she is utterly thwarted in her inclination to play at a role she could once actually have filled. The bond of love between Milly and her foster son excludes entirely the link of "flesh and blood" the Marchioness believes can make up for her years of neglect (109). Shocked and heart-broken by the rejection, she is too self-absorbed to realize that it is only her inability to indulge her whim that sustains and intensifies its appeal. She is drawn to her soldier-son now only because he has turned out enviably well; there is no reason to believe that she would long have been content with her prize had she been able to win him back. In her impulsive wish that she had kept and "reared him as her own," she quite deludes herself in thinking she would not have resented passing up the "precious coronet of pearls and gold leaves" she has acquired by abandoning him. And she overlooks entirely her lack of those selfless qualities through which, by nurturing the boy and shaping him responsibly into a "noble and worthy son," Milly has earned the reward of his "love and protection" (108). Lady Caroline dies of a broken heart not because she desperately needs the love of a son she has never known, but because his denial of her throws her back upon the now empty consolation of her social position and leaves her at last without a role to play.

The saddest thing about the destructive, isolating tendency of the attitudes held by privileged individuals like Lady Caroline is that it is self-perpetuating, each generation passing on to the next its prejudices and formulae for success, regardless of the cost in terms of happiness. Hardy's frequent emphasis on parental ambition in A Group of Noble Dames demonstrates especially poignantly the "small count

taken of the happiness of an innocent child in the social strategy" of self-interested parents seeking ever higher, stronger ties to the world of aristocratic influence and prestige (GND 48). Themselves heir to the snobbish values that motivate them, these parents seek to force the same legacy onto their own children, with little thought for the emotional consequences. Thus does Emmeline Oldbourne's father, as the second man in his parish, condemn his timid daughter to the perverse cruelties of a boorish husband for the pleasure of linking himself thereby to the first family in the parish and of making her the Duchess of Hamptonsire. So, too, would Sir John and Lady Grebe gladly see Barbara wed to just such another, with his title and lands, rather than to the gentle, honest plebeian who loves her.

Hardy's most illuminating examination of this pernicious cycle, however, appears in "The First Countess of Wessex" (GND), where scheming parental ambition dominates the plot. Little Betty Dornell is among the few Hardy heroines who actually find happiness in marriage, but she achieves that contentment in spite of, not because of, her parents' interference. The great irony of the story, in fact, is that the elder Dornells, having encountered only conflict and dissatisfaction in their own experience of matrimony founded upon social ambition, unhesitatingly expose their only child to the same potential incompatibility by selecting, independently, their own candidates for a son-in-law, without reference to her tastes or right of choice. The very impulse to arrange their daughter's marriage grows ironically out of the Dornells' discontent with their own calculating selections of a mate. For Susan Dornell, years of intimate acquaintance with her husband have led to disdain for his simple, rustic character. His possession of a respectable estate near her own can no longer compensate for his continued association with "bumpkins" and "petty gentlemen," which makes him "less and less presentable to her polite friends from

town" (4, 6). Conversely, neither can the "airs and graces" of "the greatest heiress in Wessex" now reconcile the squire to his wife's domineering personality or to the affront her greater wealth has posed to his male dignity by pressuring him to live in her ancestral home rather than his own. Disappointed, but absurdly unenlightened by their experience, both parents betray in their reactionary choices of suitors for Betty their own unrealized expectations of marriage and their attempt vicariously to correct their mistakes by foisting their personal preferences and ambitions onto the only person whose destiny is still under their control.

In vying for control over Betty's matrimonial fate, the Dornells ultimately get so caught up in sly strategies and countermaneuvers that they lose sight altogether of their daughter's welfare in their determination simply to get their own way and, thus, emerge victorious from this, their final battle. Of the two combatants, Betty's father alone inspires a degree of sympathy. Beneath his bluster, he does love his daughter and tries admirably to keep her from being bound while still a child, and for purely social reasons, to a man almost twenty years her senior. His choice for her is at least a youth close to her own age who is known to her personally and half in love with her already. The squire's devotion is not, however, entirely the "uncalculating passionateness" the narrator labels it (5). Resentment of Mrs. Dornell's assumption of authority in their family life twists his desire to protect Betty into a desire for revenge against his wife. What to her is a "project"--a cool manipulation of others to secure for her daughter a husband with connections at Court and the likelihood of a title--becomes for the squire a "game" (8)--a chance to outmaneuver her and thus reclaim his sense of manly dominance. It never occurs to him that his scheme to match his little heiress to a young man from his own sphere would essentially repeat the hierarchical imbalance of his own marriage.

After the humiliation of his wife's effecting secretly Betty's marriage to Stephen Reynard, the squire's urge to thwart Mrs. Dornell waxes so strongly that it blinds him to the harm his actions may do the innocent pawn in his "game." He fails to see the danger of reintroducing "his man" Phelipson to Betty after she is legally wed to Reynard but of an age to be particularly susceptible to the younger man's attentions. Focused solely on his "joke's" effect on his wife's peace of mind (16), he obtusely encourages Betty to feign an attraction she genuinely feels; and, despite obvious signs of a burgeoning romance and future heartache, Dornell never sees beyond his stratagem to the reality he has helped create. Ironically, this parent who best loves Betty dies gleefully triumphant at the news of her elopement with Phelipson, all recognition of the social and emotional repercussions she must have faced had her flight been successful displaced by his sense that he has won the game.

More reprehensible, however, is Susan Dornell's role in manipulating her daughter's life, for she is keenly aware of Betty's changing attitudes toward her nominal marriage to Reynard--from the child's innocent indifference to the infatuated adolescent's active rebellion--but coldly regards the girl's feelings only as aids or obstacles to the attainment of her own ambitious goal. In setting her sights on Reynard, she considers almost exclusively those qualities in his character likely to bring him worldly success, with only the most casual reference to those apt to make him a solicitous mate for her daughter. (For his possession of the latter, Betty has only luck to thank.) Despite Mrs. Dornell's acuity as an "intriguer" (37), however, her ingrained perception of marriage as strictly a means of social advancement blinds her to the intensity of Betty's desperation regarding her entrapment until it is too late and the girl responds with her own defensive countermoves. An ironic shift in the story's language away from words denoting control accompanies Betty's self-

assertion and highlights her mother's almost comical astonishment at the "duplicity" the child has learned from her parents (20). In her own way, Susan Dornell is as obtuse as her husband, absurdly transferring responsibility for "things having come to this pass" to him and to "the treacherous girl" herself. Though she has deceived and manipulated all the interested parties to achieve her ends and is ready to keep the recalcitrant "under lock and key till her husband [comes] to take her off her mother's hands" (21), Mrs. Dornell never realizes that she has forced Betty into all her rebellious measures: from the initial "intrenchment" in her room (22) to deliberate exposure of herself to smallpox; attempted elopement with the unworthy Phelipson; and, finally, acceptance of her husband on her own terms of passion and commitment rather than on her mother's terms of mercenary calculation.

Though the last pages of the story show Betty cleverly practicing her own deceptions in order to be with the husband who has patiently won her heart, Charles May oversimplifies matters in claiming that "Betty has shifted from the passionate father's child to the calculating mother's child" (314). In fact, it is the reasonable balance in Betty of both her parents' dominant traits that enables her, with the help of a subtle, but compassionate man, to escape the cycle of self-defeating ambition that soured her parents' lives. Unlike her father, who abandoned part of his identity to marry an heiress, and her mother, who becomes conciliatory toward Dornell only after getting her own way--and respectful of his wishes only after he is dead--Betty makes of her marriage a true partnership, with her husband's companionship rather than his social privileges as her goal. Even before her second meeting with Reynard turns her affections toward him, Betty has demonstrated a notable lack of worldly ambition; moreover, her dignified response to Phelipson's faithlessness and her ready admission of her own foolishness in willfully endangering her health show

that she has become, in a few trying years, not only "more woman than girl" (40), but considerably more mature in outlook and self-knowledge than either of her parents. That her marriage ironically nets her both the romantic happiness she desires and the worldly success her parents schemed for, but found empty and unfulfilling in itself, is perhaps Hardy's cleverest indictment, through the medium of a fact-based fiction, of the materialistic values ascribed to by the majority of Betty's social class.

It is to Hardy's credit, however, that he presents materialism and ambition as human failings--not elitist flaws limited to the aristocracy, but part of the "intense interests, passions, and strategy that throb through the commonest lives" (EL 199). Indeed, one of his most poignant tales of ambition, "To Please His Wife" (LLI), focuses on a woman of quite ordinary social origins, who is nonetheless every bit as snobbishly and selfishly obsessed with social advancement as her class-conscious superiors. Like Maria Icenway, Joanna Jolliffe enjoys her power over a devoted lover, and is yet coldly prepared to sacrifice his affection for the chance of "mating considerably above her" (144). Like Lady Caroline, she covets what another woman has, though she herself completely lacks the qualities that would entitle her to it. And, like the Dornells, she risks her children's happiness and welfare to secure for them a social advantage they themselves do not desire. Almost savagely fanatical in her ambitious striving, Joanna not only ruins her own life; she destroys her entire family through selfish choices that make possible "a conjunction of circumstances which would not otherwise have occurred" (Carpenter, Hardy 73).

Had she never "contrived to wean [Shadrach Jolliffe] away from her gentler and younger rival," or had she at least remained true to her inclination to "give him back again . . . if her friend felt so very badly about him" (144), Joanna might well have made a more socially advantageous match, since she is attractive and initially

occupies a higher social plane than Emily. But the "green envy" that dominates her character leads her impulsively, for the sake of ego alone, to preclude the destiny she would have preferred. Though Captain Jolliffe is not the sort of husband she really wants, Joanna cannot let him go after secretly witnessing his tender display of love for Emily and sincere denial of any such feelings for her. Unable to accept what she interprets as another's victory over her, Joanna sets into motion the events that doom her to bitter defeat for the rest of her life. She effectively terminates the romance between Emily and Shadrach by holding the latter to his agreement with her. But by doing so, and by forcing him into work for which he is not suited, she makes possible both Emily's marriage to a thriving merchant and her own social descent to the small grocer's shop situated literally in the shadow of her rival's new mansion. She has not even the satisfaction of knowing her victims unhappy in their separation from one another, for they are cut from a nobler cloth than she and simply, quietly, make the best of the courses left open to them.

Indeed, it is in this "absolute acquiescence of Emily and Shadrach in the results she herself had contrived that [Joanna's] discontent [finds] nourishment" (150). To her warped perspective, it is as if Emily has bested her after all, especially after the other woman's good fortune in her marriage:

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 the genteel people of the town and neighborhood. This was what she had gained by not

letting Shadrach Jolliffe, whom she had so faintly loved, carry his affection elsewhere. (149-50)

Just as Joanna trapped herself in this galling position through her own actions, so does she now exacerbate her wretchedness by mentally projecting her own snobbish tendencies onto Emily. Incapable of understanding any motives but her own, she automatically assumes that her gentle friend regards her with the same self-satisfied condescension she would display were their positions reversed. Joanna continually imagines traces of patronage in Emily's kindness to her, a "sting of bitterness" in her loyalty as the shop's "only large customer," and an intolerable arrogance even in the rustle of her silks when she squeezes past the counter to pay a social call (157).

It is in the matter of their children, however, that Joanna most resents the differences between Emily and herself and most recklessly "meet[s] misfortune half-way" (157). She cannot bear to think that the sons she loves "to idolatry" are obliged to attend the parish school while Emily's will go to college or that her dear "boys will have to live by steering the ships that the Lesters own" (149, 154). And thus, driven by the tormenting irony that she was once Emily's social superior, Joanna makes her husband and sons the "slaves of her ambition" in order to free herself from what she alone regards as a "thralldom of subservience" (159, 156). Though neither Shadrach nor the boys would of their own accord seek enrichment through speculative trading at sea, having no great love for that life, Joanna ultimately sends them all to face the dangers she herself morbidly dreads. When Shadrach returns triumphantly from the first voyage, which he undertakes alone, her response to the gold he empties into her lap is, as A. F. Cassis says, "a masterpiece of suggestiveness and compression" (294), perfectly capturing the insatiability of her ambition: "'It is a lot of gold, indeed,' she said. 'And--is this all?''" (153). She cannot appreciate the fortune before her, simply because it enables her to count only by hundreds while the Lesters "count by

thousands" and have lately "set up a carriage-and-pair" (154). Dissatisfied with anything less than renewed domination over Emily, Joanna finally risks, and loses, all she has--sending with Shadrach on the second, fatal, voyage the sons she adores.

That her loved ones go to their deaths on a ship named for her is an obvious symbol of responsibility which even Joanna cannot ignore. The fear that leads her to a momentary admission of guilt, however, culminates in a burden of grief so debilitating that she can bear it only by shifting blame once more to her former rival, projecting onto Emily's supportive gestures her own bitterness and hatred. Half-mad with the pain of her loss, she suspiciously regards Emily's attempt to comfort her and provide her the dignity of a home as smug charity and an insidious desire to separate her from the loved ones she wistfully imagines may still return. When, at last, her shop having "eaten itself hollow" through her neglect (159), Joanna is forced to accept Emily's protection, one cannot help feeling sympathy for this lonely widow who has engineered her own misery: "As a personification of ambition, [Joanna] comes to her deserved end, but as a woman she is the object only of pity" (Brady 132). When the reader last glimpses her, she is standing barefoot in a foggy winter street into which she has pursued the phantom voices of her lost ones--a haggard figure eaten hollow, like her shop, by envy, ambition, and despair.

At least emotionally, the same withering effect follows in the wake of Timothy Petrick's odd species of class-prejudice and parental ambition in "Squire Petrick's Lady" (GND). Though "sprung of a scheming family" of lawyers, usurers, and forgers who have acquired wealth and land by exploiting the noblemen they served, Timothy is at first "no great schemer himself; he was the single one of the Petricks then living whose heart had ever been greatly moved by sentiments which did not run in the groove of ambition" (154). He does, however, share his family's

strange adoration of the very social class it has plucked and tortured for generations. Thus, when his wife's delusion convinces him that his son is actually the bastard of the exquisitely refined Marquis of Christminster, Timothy is proudly exultant rather than distressed. He essentially rejects his own identity in the pleasure of believing Rupert to be "of blue stock on one side at least" and not "a commoner to the bone" like himself. Fired by a deep, socially conditioned reverence of the aristocracy for its own sake, Timothy ironically stoops at last, in his desire to link himself to a purer line, to the unscrupulous level of the worst members of his own despised ancestry. He becomes himself a criminal, feloniously altering the date on his grandfather's will, in order to secure Rupert's position as heir and his legal right to continue "improving the blood and breed" of the nefarious Petrick clan (158).

The story's greatest irony, however, is the squire's bitter disappointment at discovering that

there was nothing but plebeian blood in the veins of the heir to his name and estates; he was not to be succeeded by a noble-natured line. To be sure, Rupert was his son physically; but that glory and halo he believed him to have inherited from the ages, outshining that of his brother's children, had departed from Rupert's brow for ever; he could no longer read history in the boy's face, and centuries of domination in his eyes. (162)

Rigorously schooled in time-honored beliefs in an hierarchical society, Timothy automatically assumes that a noble nature depends upon some mysterious quality of divine brilliancy inherited along with an "elegant knife-edged nose" (162). Though he is himself quite rich and able to afford his son an ennobling education, he simply cannot believe a child of his own flesh capable of rising above the commonplace. So, instead of nurturing the boy's development in a positive direction, he rejects him entirely, thus sacrificing the one genuinely noble aspect of his own character--the unambitious ability to love, which led him to marry a woman "of no better

beginnings than his own" (154); inspired his involuntary tenderness for the innocent, toddling boy he believed to be another man's son; and, in short, set him apart from the dishonorable elements in his family heritage. He rejects what is best in himself, and best for his son, out of envy and a distorted set of values which leaves him bitterly dissatisfied with the actual richness of his present life.

A similar distortion of values and contempt for non-aristocratic blood ironically lead the child to reject the parent in "The Son's Veto" (LLI), though it seems unlikely that Randolph Twycott has ever felt, like Timothy Petrick, the "human necessity to love something" (GND 157) other than the notion of his own social advancement. Like many of Hardy's clerics in the short stories, Randolph is, to a great extent, a caricature¹² in his unrelieved selfishness and obsession with social climbing. But, if Hardy's treatment is at times extreme, it is because he recognized the peculiar vulnerability of the clerical profession to those hypocritical, "vigorous aspirants of the lower class who use it as a career to rise by" (Bayley 227), rather than as a means of serving either God or man. In his worldly ambition and heedlessness of the pain he causes, Randolph certainly betrays every tenet of the faith he ostensibly represents. He does not honor his mother, cherish her tenderness, or even accept her love, but openly displays his shame at her country simplicity. He continually places his material goals before her emotional needs. And the oath that he demands she swear before the crucifix in his room is an obscene reduction of religion to the service of his own intolerant will. The only gods he really recognizes are the "few thousand wealthy and titled people" of England's aristocracy; but those worldly idols he adores absolutely (43).

¹² Brady 106. In part, this exaggerated effect may be due to what Lord David Cecil recognizes as Hardy's difficulty in "drawing odious people." He reasons that Hardy could not "get inside" a person of shallow feelings and absolute self-involvement to "see how life looked to him" (124).

In itself, Randolph's snobbery is absurdly disproportionate to his actual social position. Though given an aristocratic education, he is still only the unremarkable son of an unremarkable, rather reclusive London vicar. And yet, he spends his life ruthlessly guarding his social reputation against the slightest chance of censure from a class of people who are, by and large, unaware of his existence. Even as a child, he bursts into petulant tears at the thought of having a mere greengrocer as his stepfather, because he believes absurdly that "It will ruin me! . . . It will degrade me in the eyes of all the gentlemen of England!" (50). Both the tantrum and the blind conceit would be laughable were it not for their persistence into Randolph's adult life and their consequent destruction of his mother's happiness. The only difference between the boy's emotional condemnation of her choice of suitors and the man's indignant insistence that she swear not to marry Sam Hobson without his consent is that, in the latter scene, Randolph has learned how to dress his selfish objections and unchristian motives and prejudices in the guise of priestly authority and filial loyalty to his father's memory. The sheer consistency of his petty selfishness throughout the story, from his first correction of Sophy's grammar to his final black glance at Sam's grieving figure, makes the climactic oath scene credible. Randolph's education has by this time so thoroughly "ousted his humanity" (51) that the individual worth of other human beings and their practical and emotional welfare have no significance whatever in his perception of the world. The tender-hearted, quite respectable greengrocer is but a presumptuous "clown" to him (50), a social inferior to be dismissed for the good of Randolph's own social prestige, without reference to either Sam's or Sophy's right to happiness. Even Sophy herself, once safely isolated and incapable of embarrassing him, is essentially one of the "mere veneer of a thousand million or so of others who did not interest him at all" (43).

A lack of sincere interest in or commitment to anyone besides themselves is typical of Hardy's clergymen. As a group, in fact, they are the most narrowly focused and resolutely self-serving of all his ambitious characters, surpassing even the aristocrats in their consistent rejection of tender emotion for the pursuit of a social advantage. Above all, they are hypocrites, priggishly judgmental creatures driven by social convention to value, and to preserve at all costs, correctness in outward appearances, regardless of imperfections in the underlying reality. The latter they often excuse, rationalize, or ignore altogether if by so doing they can advance their own interests. For Alwyn Hill, for example, in "The Duchess of Hamptonsire" (GND), it is the risk to his social reputation and prospects, rather than the immorality of the plan itself, that prompts his refusal to help the woman he supposedly loves escape her abusive husband. Similarly, in "For Conscience' Sake" (LLI), the Reverend Percival Cope's fastidious affection for Frances Frankland cannot withstand "his natural dislike of forming a connection with people whose antecedents would not bear the strictest investigation" (69). Though Leonora Frankland's hard-won and painstakingly maintained respectability enables Cope to resist his friends' prejudices against her financial dependence on a music and dancing school before the advent of Mr. Millborne, the young curate's "judgment" urges him into hasty retreat when he observes the tell-tale resemblance between the sea-sick faces of Frances and her "step-father." The concern of this "scrupulously correct clergyman," however, is with the potential exposure rather than the actual fact of Frances's "irregular birth" (71). He holds aloof only as long as Millborne's continued presence threatens to embroil the girl in a public scandal. Once Millborne leaves and the family's secret is again well-hidden behind the facade of conventional propriety, Cope resumes the "manner of a lover" with a speed which

conspicuously owes as much to the "excellent style" of life Millborne's settlement has made possible for his daughter as to the charms of the girl herself (73).

Even in "The Distracted Preacher" (WT), where monetary ambition is not an issue and the comic nature of the tale largely obscures the darker aspects of the title character's selfishness, Richard Stockdale's prudish insistence on "correctness of conduct" is ultimately as destructive as that of any of Hardy's clerical figures (258). As Hardy himself wrote, "All comedy, is tragedy, if you only look deep enough into it" (CL 1: 190); and, here, the tragedy lies in the "shabby undertones . . . of human betrayal" that distinguish Stockdale's subjugation of high-spirited Lizzy Newberry to his own dull, conformist values (Wing, Hardy 18). Ironically, he chastizes her and, for a time, rejects her for the very qualities that attracted him to her in the first place--"her experienced manner and bold indifference" to laws issued by a king she has never seen, and aimed at destroying the only regular employment available to an entire community of basically honest, generous people (255). Lizzy's appealing vibrancy derives almost entirely from the excitement and risks of her role in the local smuggling trade. That trade is the essence of her heritage and the only way of life she has ever known; yet Stockdale never sees that in asking her to deny her values in deference to her love for him, he is expecting her to do freely the very thing he self-righteously refuses to do for her. While he appears for most of the story as a mere "preaching nincompoop" (Abercrombie 81), Stockdale's hypocritical desire to indulge his romantic fancy without risking his social character is perhaps the most detestable ambition of all; for it demands the destruction of Lizzy's independent identity.¹³ Significantly, her love alone is not sufficient to induce Lizzy to make so drastic a sacrifice of self and dignity. Only by resuming his pursuit after

¹³ See also Hasan 122; Brady 39.

the disruption of the smuggling trade has severely limited Lizzy's options for maintaining herself does Stockdale manage to win her hand¹⁴ and transform her into a proper minister's wife and dutifully subdued writer of clichéd religious tracts. Although Hardy resented the editorial insistence on this "de rigueur" ending (286),¹⁵ its emphasis on Stockdale's presumptuous "reformation" for his own benefit of another human being's personality brings his otherwise comic character clearly, and all too credibly, in line with the other destructively self-serving clerics.

In contrast, it is clear from the first that the Halborough brothers of "A Tragedy of Two Ambitions" (LLI) belong in that group. Joshua and Cornelius quite deliberately embark upon careers in the Church as a means of advancing socially and of shunning the scandalous family connection that shames and diminishes them in the estimation of polite society. But while most of his ambitious churchmen are rather one-dimensional as representations of obsessive self-interest, Hardy creates in the Halboroughs a complex, convincing, and grimly unexaggerated embodiment of "present day aspiration" (CL 1: 178); and, because they emerge, disturbingly, as real human beings rather than as caricatures, the brothers elicit a measure of

¹⁴ Grimsditch 145.

¹⁵ In his essay on "Candour in English Fiction," Hardy complains of the dilemma confronting the writer who must either "whip and scourge [his] 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, . . . bring down the thunders of respectability upon his head." The necessity of arranging a socially acceptable but otherwise "indescribably unreal and meretricious" ending, such as many scholars hold Lizzy's meek surrender to be, exacts from the writer "no less a price than the complete extinction, in the mind of every mature and penetrating reader, of sympathetic belief in his personages" (Personal Writings 130). Although Hardy is referring here specifically to the experience of novelists writing in installments, he makes essentially the same point regarding established beginnings and the logic of subsequent effects that Robert Louis Stevenson makes in reference to the vital unity of the short story, in which genre "the body and end . . . is bone of the bone and blood of the blood of the beginning": "To make another end, that is to make the beginning all wrong" (Vailima Letters 147).

sympathy not accorded their less thoroughly developed counterparts. One cannot help pitying these two young men who must provide for their sister and themselves despite being balked at every turn by their vindictive drunkard of a father, who not only constitutes a chronic embarrassment in their lives, but has cruelly exhausted the money saved by their mother for their university educations. Unlike Randolph Twycott, they have a legitimate reason for resenting their surviving parent and deserve some respect for attempting to "rise" by their own hard work rather than by the pitiless exploitation of others or by a sycophantic adulation of the upper classes.

The hypocrisy inherent in their calculating choice of the ministry, however, as the object of their endeavors and the most promising route to social success strongly qualifies whatever sympathy the brothers inspire, both together, as partners in the scheme, and individually, according to their level of ambitious zeal. The heaviest censure falls on Joshua, as the most worldly-minded and unequivocally aspiring of the pair. While Cornelius is merely saddened by the financial restriction of their dreams and takes some comfort in knowing they "can preach the Gospel as well without a hood on [their] surplices as with one," his elder brother is infuriated at the thought that they "can't rise" socially above the level of "despised licentiate" (79). Consumed with bitterness at what might have been, Joshua must persuade himself "that it was ardour for Christianity which spurred him on, and not pride of place." He has mechanically "shouldered" as a burden a body of doctrine he ought to have embraced as a strengthening faith, and doggedly prepares himself "to defend it tooth and nail," not out of spiritual commitment, but solely for his own "honour and glory" (83). Thus, his hypocrisy far outstrips that of his less aggressive brother who, though

less a scholar than Joshua, is concerned with the usefulness of Christianity for his own time. Cornelius's failings as a cleric are merely intellectual, while Joshua's are moral. . . . What Joshua knows as a preacher does not touch him in his own life. (Brady 116)

Yet so intense is his mercenary commitment to their chosen profession, his sense that "we are in for Christianity, and must stick to her whether or no" (83), that Joshua can--without recognizing the hypocritical absurdity of the juxtaposition--combine in a single sentence the observation that the "essence of Christianity is humility" and the angry, self-pitying assertion that, had his father been a decent man, he "would have brazened . . . out" (emphasis added) the reality of his commonplace beginnings (87). It is this morally inappropriate, but ironically passionate attitude toward his calling that makes Joshua an impressive preacher, able to thrill a flock long "steeped in indifferentism" while remaining himself unenlightened by the text of his first sermon at Narrobourne: "O Lord, be thou my helper!" (88, 87).

In one respect, Joshua can hardly be blamed for his attitude; that he relies impiously on his own wiles and strength of will to escape his painful family situation instead of humbly awaiting God's help in transcending misfortune makes him typical rather than extraordinary as a clergyman of his day. He is hardly the first of his class to have observed that "in old-fashioned country places, the Church conferred social prestige . . . at a cheaper price than any other profession or pursuit" (94). His own hypocrisy is, ironically, both a product and a perpetuation of the view of an entire society, in which success in the Church depends upon people believing in an aspiring cleric, "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" (87). Though he bitterly resents the obstacles such a class-conscious view puts in his way, Joshua shrewdly adapts himself to that view, the better to turn it to his own advantage (Alden 49).

Unfortunately, Joshua's absolute concentration on mechanically "boring the tunnel" to success (92) only distances him further from his already "limited human

sympathies" (82). In his determination to promote his own career, he arrogantly tries to control the lives of all those nearest to him, never once considering that they might wish to pursue a direction other than that he has mapped out for them. His readiness to escape the shame of association by bribing his father and gipsy "step-mother" to emigrate to Canada is understandable enough, if less than noble. But one would expect greater consideration for the sister and brother he loves than the purely ambitious care he exerts on their behalf in grooming Rosa for a prestigious marriage and Cornelius for a respectable place in the Church. Joshua makes great sacrifices to give Rosa an expensive, fashionable education abroad, but completely disregards her emotional needs by casually dismissing her plea of homesickness. He decides what "her destiny" ought to be, sets himself to "contrive" events so as to make "her face and her brains" her fortune, and is not above capitalizing on the spell her beauty casts over Mr. Fellmer of Narrobourne House to move "onwards and upwards" right along with her (82). Even before Rosa has been introduced to the local squire, his dinner invitation, which suggests to her only a pleasant evening's pastime, represents to Joshua's ambitious foresight "a serious step in life" (91).

Still, at least Rosa's marriage brings her personal fulfillment as well as the genteel social position coveted for her by her eldest brother; Cornelius is not so lucky. One doubts--even before the traumatic effects of their father's death--whether he derives much satisfaction from Joshua's continual supervision of his life. Though he is perhaps too passive in allowing himself to be dragged along in Joshua's wake, obediently stepping into each vacancy he leaves (at the National School, the theological college, the curacy of Narrobourne), Cornelius consistently commands the greater respect and sympathy.¹⁶ While Joshua regards the National School only

¹⁶ See Alden 48-49 and Brady 116-19 for opposing views of the brothers. Alden expresses an unusual degree of sympathy for Joshua and criticism of

as the despised first stepping stone in his career, Cornelius takes an active interest in teaching for its own sake and would likely find contentment and purpose as a schoolmaster were it not for Joshua's insistence on monitoring his studies and assiduously paving the way toward his ordination. Driven by no grand social aspirations, Cornelius displays, for the most part, a sensitive, compassionate nature which admits even a degree of concern for their reprobate-father. (It is no coincidence that the old man writes only to his youngest son.) The real tragedy of the story is that Cornelius, without ever having shared Joshua's extreme capacity for ambition, is forced to suffer its consequences with far more agonizing intensity.¹⁷

That is not to say, of course, that Cornelius is innocent of his father's death; he allows Joshua to check his instinctive impulse to save the drowning man, because he, too, perceives in the situation their one chance of salvaging all they have worked for and of freeing themselves forever from the dread of humiliating revelations. But Cornelius has not his brother's ambition-hardened conscience, and is, significantly, the first to shake off the dark temptation and move purposefully to their father's aid. In fairness to Joshua, it is possible that even his chronic resentment of the elder Halborough's vulgarity would not have checked his own nobler response at this moment were it not for his father's triumphant parting reminder that Joshua's reputation and prospects depend even more precariously than those of his siblings upon their parent's doubtful discretion. The maddening anticipation of the old man repeating publicly his derisive allusion to Joshua's illegitimate birth may well explain the young man's crucial hesitation beside the weir, since such a revelation would

Cornelius for their respective strength and "impotency" in using any available means to rise above their social predicament (49). Brady, on the other hand, stresses their moral responses to their situation and advocates the more common defense of Cornelius as the better man in terms of basic humanity.

¹⁷ Brady 119.

surely spell the end of his career and social ambitions. However that may be, both brothers' behavior in this crisis essentially reinforces what one has observed all along of the differences in their characters and values, as do their subsequent reactions to memories of the event.

Ironically, their father achieves in death that which he maliciously aspired to in life: he "spoils [their] souls for preaching" (98). Although they are now rid of "the obstacle that threatened their success," and have continued to move ahead, guilt has rendered the world of their ambitions "flat and unprofitable" (Richards, "Part One" 272). Were he not so emotionally devastated by the moral implications of their crime, Cornelius would probably be a better preacher because of the experience, for he now understands as truth the doctrine he has previously regarded mainly as a course of study: "To have endured the cross, despising the shame," he tells Joshua, "there lay greatness!" (105). As it is, he dwells despairingly on thoughts of suicide and fears of one day helplessly revealing the truth to their happy, unambitious sister. In contrast, Joshua is ruined for his profession not by guilt-induced enlightenment, but, paradoxically, by the freedom his father's death gives him to pursue his original goals. Nothing has really changed for Joshua in terms of values. He condemns Cornelius for even imagining including Rosa in their secret, but he is concerned, typically, not with sparing her emotional pain, but with protecting her social position so as not to "[d]isgrace her children, and pull down the whole auspicious house of Fellmer about our ears" (104). His first priority, as always, is social advancement, for his siblings and himself; that he, too, thinks sometimes of suicide reflects no remorseful sense of personal unfitness for his office, but rather, a galling dissatisfaction with the Church itself now as "a poor forlorn hope for people without influence" (104-05). He cannot bear to think that, even without the stigma of a

disreputable parent, he can rise no higher than his present "petty living" (104). Like Hardy's other ambitious characters, Joshua cannot appreciate what he has, for being continually aware of restrictions on how much he can get. Yet no amount of influence in the Church would likely satisfy him any more than does his present, really quite reasonable level of success, simply because he has chosen his profession as a means only of gaining the acceptance of his social superiors rather than of discovering meaning in his own life. Joshua ends, ironically, an embittered slave of the sterile, elitist values he has self-servingly endorsed and manipulated.

This failure to find contentment in life or satisfaction in the achievement of a goal is typical of both kinds of manipulators discussed in this chapter. Because the demonic mesmerizers and ambitious schemers both single-mindedly pursue their goals without the slightest consideration of the rights, potential reactions, or independent wills of other human beings, neither group is prepared for the natural complications those extraneous elements put in their way. They comprehend the world only in terms of what they want for themselves; and, because, like Joshua Halborough, they measure success according to dehumanizing, materialistic values, they generally find even the most complete attainment of their goals and desires but a hollow, disappointing victory. Only the least realistically human and the most emotionally uncomplicated of these characters emerge unscathed from their selfish machinations. Mop Ollamoor, for instance, remains primarily the symbolic embodiment of human sexuality, undeterred by social convention and immune to guilt; while such minimally developed figures as Randolph Twycott and Percival Cope apparently lack the capacity even to perceive the frigid poverty of their souls. The others, however, all pay some price--in disillusionment, bitter frustration, or agonizing personal loss--for their arrogant, self-absorbed attitudes and behavior.

In both character types dealt with here, such attitudes and behavior arise largely from social conditioning, from a life-long indoctrination into the class structure of their society and the accompanying artificial criteria for defining an individual's worth. When imbibed by such forceful personalities as Hardy's demonic and ambitious characters, this conditioning inspires a particularly destructive approach to life, for it renders them incapable of stepping outside themselves to empathize with others, especially those whose worth they estimate as inferior to their own. Instead, they become obsessed with exercising whatever degree of power and control their position grants them over the people who touch their lives. Not limited to any one social class, this autocratic obsession drives all of Hardy's manipulators--from highborn mesmerists like Lord Uplandtowers and the Baron von Xanten, who bully and toy with their victims because they regard it as their aristocratic prerogative, to commonplace social climbers like Joanna Jolliffe and the millwright Halborough's sons, who sacrifice other lives to their dreams of attaining a sphere of greater influence. Because both character types measure even their own worth in terms of external criteria--wealth, titles, ancestry, their relative place in the social scale--their only means of feeling significant and in control of their own lives lies in the occupation of a social position above somebody else. Even the Committee-Man of the French "Terror," who adheres to a radically different code of social prejudices, defines his identity in terms of the absolute authority he holds over a class of people he deems his inferiors. Strong-willed and self-motivated, Hardy's mesmerists and ambitious schemers are undoubtedly his boldest characters, actively taking on the challenge of shaping their own destinies, rather than passively acquiescing to the caprices of fate. But because every choice they make in meeting that challenge is based on the misguided and generally self-defeating strategy of

using or destroying anyone who stands between them and the destiny they desire, as human beings these characters inspire in Hardy and in the reader only an objective understanding of their motives and, at best, a grim sense of pity for the misery they bring upon themselves.

CHAPTER 6

CHARACTER: STOICS, DRIFTERS, AND IMAGINATIVE WOMEN

Despite the widespread tendency toward snobbery, materialism, and power-seeking among the characters in Hardy's short stories, an even greater emphasis falls upon those figures who move toward their destinies with little aggression, resistance, or willful clarity of purpose. While they do not always inspire respect or admiration, they certainly elicit from the reader and from Hardy himself, a deeper and more willing sympathy than do his manipulative characters. Most significantly, these milder personages rarely set out maliciously to harm or control other people or to promote their own interests at someone else's expense, but rather have a sincere regard generally for the rights and feelings of other human beings. Often, they are themselves the victims of more selfishly forceful and destructive personalities, the objects rather than the practitioners of cold manipulation and mistreatment. While the two character types discussed in the preceding chapter can both be accurately labelled as "manipulators," however, the three subtypes that compose the broad category of Hardy's less aggressive characters are more difficult to encompass with a single term. The closest one can come perhaps is to call them "copers," as they all yield in some way to the pressures of their circumstances in order to survive or to avoid unpleasantness. They are not all equally passive and acquiescent, though, nor are they all equally successful in weathering the emotional storm or drought life brings their way. The characters I have labelled Hardy's stoics, drifters, and imaginative women represent different approaches to life--three distinct methods of coping with its accidents and challenges--that arise from these characters'

general attitudes and respective tendencies toward acceptance, avoidance, and escapism. Even though they often seem helplessly at the mercy of others, Hardy's non-aggressors are, no less than his manipulators, largely responsible for their own fates; the way they view themselves, their rights, and their relationships directly determines the choices they make and the nature of the design they stamp on their lives. As the following discussion of these types demonstrates, even capitulation and inaction constitute powerful, life-structuring choices.

With very few exceptions, the characters in these groups fail to achieve, or even actively to pursue, the destinies they want. If they do take tentative, hopeful steps toward attaining their desires, their efforts are almost always terminated by their own sense of integrity or weakness of will or by some stricture imposed by the social climate. Lacking the ruthless arrogance of manipulators, they often consider their right to happiness secondary to their responsibilities to other people. With the stoics, those steadfast men and women who remain true to their principles and to their loved ones despite great suffering and loss, this attitude inspires respect for the quiet dignity and selflessness of noble hearts. When motivated by indecisiveness, ennui, or super-awareness of social convention, however, as it often is with the other two character types, the self-sacrificing gesture is more apt to inspire only pity and, sometimes, even a measure of disdain. The latter, mixed response occurs mainly with the drifters, a distressingly large group of characters marked by an "almost pathological unaggressiveness," a "temperamental impotence" and lack of motivational energy, that keeps them from making truly independent choices and leaves them instead subject to every stronger influence they encounter in the currents of life.¹ More consistently sympathetic are Hardy's imaginative women, typically

¹ Guerard 114, 115. Speaking of Hardy's fiction in general, Guerard applies this description to Hardy's male characters, especially to his heroes, the majority of

unassuming creatures who turn inward, often desperately, to find in some fantasy world a meaningful sense of self and respite from an oppressive real-life situation not entirely of their own making.

Few of these characters possess the emotional strength, personal enmity, or malicious resolve necessary to do conscious harm to anyone but themselves through the subdued lives they choose to lead. But, ironically, their very passivity is almost always the cause of suffering in other lives (Guerard 43). Worse yet, their victims are usually the people they care for most, innocents whom they could spare just by exercising a little foresight and taking purposeful action. Although their passivity often makes them seem helpless pawns of cosmic caprice, in most cases, the pain these characters encounter and spread to others is simply the result of their "failing to exert themselves in time, trusting to fate or chance or Providence, or not caring enough to have the minor 'accidents' [of life] under their control" (Morrell 45). Erring in the opposite direction of the manipulators, they assume too little control over the events that actually fall within their realm of power and choice.

Some characters, of course, make fully conscious choices not to control events to their own advantage. These are Hardy's stoics, who, alone among his passive characters, deliberately sacrifice some prized thing they have an indisputable right to, purely out of consideration for another's welfare. Indeed, they present exceptions in many ways to the general patterns of behavior that distinguish Hardy's other non-aggressors. They are genuinely passive only in that they are willing to resign themselves to a less fulfilling destiny rather than bring trouble or pain to another life. Even when faced with the most heartbreaking disappointments, they

whom he sees as spectators rather than as participants in life. In the short stories, however, one finds a significant number of women who demonstrate the same detachment and lack of aggressive energy.

do not respond, as most of the others do, with self-pity, bitterness, or retreat into a fantasy world. And, above all, they do not give in to inertia. They not only face their losses with dignity; they stay in the mainstream of life and make the best of their chosen circumstances with as much good humor as possible.

Especially in the latter regard, one thinks immediately of Sam Hobson, the faithful greengrocer in "The Son's Veto" (LLI) who works steadily at improving his business and social standing--at first, in spite of losing his beloved Sophy to the Reverend Twycott, and later, in hopes of persuading the widowed lady to marry him at last. From the days of their youth in Gaymead, Sam never stops loving Sophy, and never seeks consolation in marriage with another after she leaves the place; but neither does he make a barren desert of his life just because his foremost desires are thwarted. On the contrary, his character becomes a virtual symbol of life: he is continually linked to images of nature, health, abundance, and purposeful labor, and it is he who brings the fresh restorative power of these things at least briefly back into the brown, atrophied existence of his former sweetheart. At night, driving his "swaying howdahs" of market produce (44), he brings into Sophy's oppressive urban world something of the country atmosphere and values of her old home and gently urges her back into a world of energy and hope.

That world is one which Sam himself has never left. Though disappointed in his initial quest for Sophy's hand, he has remained a man of action, so that, by the time she is free again, he has gained sufficient skill in his profession to secure a position as manager at a market-gardener's in Sophy's part of London. From that position, he actively seeks out Sophy's house and company in order to begin his suit anew and, when answered with a conditional affirmative, swiftly turns into a reality his dream of setting up as an independent master greengrocer in Aldbrickham so as

to keep Sophy "as genteel as ever [he] could" (48). Indeed, despite Sam's deliberate pursuit of his own dreams, he always tenderly considers Sophy's comfort, material interests, and emotional needs before his own. He quickly locates her house, but does not intrude upon her privacy until she recognizes and calls out to him; he regards as personally unimportant the possessions she would forfeit by marrying again, but hesitates over asking her to accept such a husband as he after having been "a lady" for so many years; and, finally, though he does not understand why Sophy cannot defy her son and marry as she pleases, he recognizes her fears as genuine and nobly refrains from compounding her misery with selfish exhortation. For ten years he waits, like Sophy, for her son to relent, all the while devoting his energies to the prosperous shop he hopes will "form a home worthy even of her some day" (51). Though his course of action brings Sam only sorrow in the end, when Sophy dies without ever being his, it is at least real action, dictated by conscious choices and compassion for another. That he misses the destiny he desires and deserves is not a sign of personal failure, or even of defeat at the hands of a cruel meddler like Randolph Twycott, but is, rather, a poignant tribute to his strength of character and heart in refusing to join Randolph as a self-serving inflictor of pain.

The same willingness to forego their own dreams to spare someone else's feelings also distinguishes the two stoical figures in "To Please His Wife" (LLI), Shadrach Jolliffe and Emily Lester--though they are more fortunate than Sam, in that circumstances and their own natural resilience ultimately bring them a measure of happiness despite their sacrifices. Because they do not dwell, like the ambitious Joanna, on the disappointments of the past or the little inadequacies of the present, they do not live their lives consumed by resentment and focused continually on an unattainable future. Instead, they accept with good grace and their best efforts the

fates to which Joanna's selfish maneuvering and their own integrity consign them. Even before Joanna's jealousy forces the pair to sacrifice their love to her pride, the reader has been shown the simple dignity, resignation, and quiet optimism that characterize their typical response to hardship. Though forced to keep a little stationery-shop to supplement her father's uncertain income, Emily does not despise her humble trade as Joanna does hers when their positions are reversed, but makes the most of her limited resources by "tastefully" setting out "articles in themselves of slight value, so as to obscure the meagreness of the stock-in-trade" (145). Similarly, Shadrach does not rage against having faced danger and misfortune at sea, but, on reaching port, goes immediately to church to give thanks for his providential escape from shipwreck, "quite unconscious" in his earnest devotion of the strange spectacle he makes kneeling in his sailor's garb on the chancel-step (142).

In regard to Joanna, Shadrach's acquiescent sense of honor and faith often makes him seem "naive" (Brady 130), considering his apparent blindness to her manipulative nature; but his simplicity is neither absurd nor blameworthy, and his habitual expectation of goodness never foolish sentimentality. He is constitutionally "a religious and scrupulous man, who respect[s] his word as his life" (148), and can thus do no other than marry Joanna when she holds him to their casual engagement. The same unshakable honesty keeps him from making more than a very plain living from their small grocer's shop, for he refuses to recommend to his customers any of the inferior products that make their way into his stock. Nevertheless, Shadrach makes every effort to be happy in his life with Joanna and to give her no cause for jealousy or complaint. He enters a trade for which he is ill-suited in order to spare her "the semi-widowed existence of sailors' wives" (151); he determinedly lives down his love for Emily through an unfailing "devotion to the mother of his boys" (150);

and, finally, he gives his very life in an attempt to satisfy a craving in Joanna for financial and social success, which he neither shares nor understands. Though he receives no thanks for his efforts on her behalf and nothing of the passionate concern she expresses for their sons' safety, Shadrach never responds to his wife's querulous demands with anything but kindness, cheerfulness, and generosity.

The same can be said of Emily's treatment of her former rival, even though she reaps only hatred for her pains from the woman who, for sheer spite, schemed deliberately to spoil her happiness. Like Shadrach, Emily accepts what cannot be changed and, after a period of subdued grief, gets on with her life, finding in her own marriage and children greater happiness than she ever expected. That her marriage is more advantageous socially than her friend's is a matter of accident rather than design, and her step up in the world never has the distancing effect it seems to in Joanna's distorted view of their relationship. The "[t]races of patronage" Joanna senses in Emily's manner are essentially "a figment of Joanna's brain"; for, knowing her friend's envious nature, Emily actually "endeavour[s] to subdue the difference [in their current circumstances] by every means in her power" (151, 157). If her "kindly readiness to buy anything and everything" in the little shop suggests the "uncritical attitude . . . almost of a donor" after the departure of Joanna's husband and sons leaves the lonely woman almost destitute (157), the gesture is insulting only in Joanna's irrational perception. Indeed, the only arrogance, spitefulness, or desire for social competition between them has come from Joanna. Not only has Emily never flaunted her wealth and privilege; she has never looked condescendingly upon the Jolliffes' limited success as Joanna imagines. She has sincerely regarded them as "doing fairly well" (158) and cannot understand Joanna's willingness to risk her loved ones' lives to acquire a fortune. Nonetheless, Emily remains unshakably loyal

to her old friend through her bitterest misfortunes, bearing the wretched woman's accusations and reproaches without complaint and, at last, offering her not vengeful, degrading charity, but the dignity and protection of a home.

Loyal, uncomplaining stoics like Emily, Shadrach, and Sam have long been recognized as an especially significant character type in Hardy's novels--so much so that one is continually reminded that the "great Wessex virtues are fidelity, simplicity, endurance, and tolerance" (Guerard 20). In a letter presented to Hardy on his eighty-first birthday, 106 aspiring young authors wrote, "We have learned from you that the proud heart can subdue the hardest fate, even in submitting to it. . . . In all that you have written you have shown the spirit of man, nourished by tradition and sustained by pride, persisting through defeat" (LY 222). In the short stories, however, there are fewer genuine stoics than such comprehensive statements would lead one to expect. Most of the characters who seem likely candidates actually endure their disappointments for less laudable reasons than concern for another's happiness, and their type of "stoicism" usually makes them withdraw from ordinary life rather than adjust constructively to their new course and move forward. While Hardy clearly admired people who could make that adjustment, the very nature of the short story, with its restrictions on the number and development of characters, seems to have dictated his choice to focus, in that genre, mainly on those intriguingly flawed, and much more common, types of human beings whose motives and passions are both less noble and less courageously controlled.

Consequently, there are, in addition to the few true stoics, a number of quasi-stoic characters who are largely sympathetic, but to some extent undercut by a strain of self-indulgence. The most extreme case involves Maria Icenway's unfortunate Dutch husband in "The Lady Icenway" (GND). Anderling endures great pain and

makes dramatic sacrifices for love of his wife and son, but there is little dignity in either his bearing toward them or his attitude toward himself. His absolute subservience to Maria's will reveals a masochistic tendency in his character that cancels out the respect one might otherwise feel for his "selfless" gestures. His generous settlement with the woman he has unlawfully married is laudable, but his plan after their separation to be forever "a wanderer on the face of the earth in remorse for his conduct towards her" is mere maudlin self-indulgence (140). The "strict religious habits" and attitude of saintly self-denial he adopts for a time are really no different in spirit from his initial amorous obsequiousness or his later forfeiture of his heritage and faith for the sake of a son he is forbidden to acknowledge (142). His devotion is sincere, but his deliberate subjection of himself to circumstances which cause him pain without benefitting anyone else excludes him from true stoicism. His noblest course, after all, would have been to suffer the pain of never pursuing a relationship with a woman he had no right to marry. Barring that, he certainly need never have sought her out again after learning of her second marriage, or begged to see the child he can never claim as his, or gone to great lengths actually to establish himself on the Icenway estate, where routine contact with the family daily reminds him of his irreparable loss. In doing these things, Anderling continually rejects opportunities to put the past behind him and build a productive life for himself.

Anderling's intense love for his wife and child is not to be discounted, of course. His exquisite parental tenderness toward the boy is, in fact, the greatest argument in defense of his too ardent temperament and insistence on remaining near the source of his misery. The tiny scene in which he is permitted a clandestine visit to the nursery to see his sleeping son, and to bestow upon him the only fatherly kiss he is ever allowed, is quite moving, and Maria's cold, businesslike severity in

overseeing the visit directs one's sympathy entirely toward Anderling. Yet, even here, the man emerges as a pathetic, rather than a noble figure. In submitting completely to the rules Maria imposes, he betrays an apparent need for misery that rivals his capacity for love. His continued presence on the estate can bring no benefit whatever to him or his secret family, and indeed poses some risk, but he ultimately takes the risk and sacrifices the rest of his life to stay near them--zealously training himself in horticulture, not in order to regain his independence, but to become Maria's gardener, her subject socially as well as emotionally. Even his abandonment of Catholicism in order to attend the parish church, where he can regularly observe his son at close range "without suspicion or hindrance" (147), stems from the inextricable link in his personality between love and self-torture. What is on one level the ultimate demonstration of paternal devotion is on another the epitome of masochistic obsession, as he simultaneously robs himself of the spiritual comfort of his own faith and sentences himself to sit weekly behind the Icenway pew and contemplate as an outsider the family that should be his own. Endure Anderling does, but it is no stoic who, till the moment of his death, "sun[s] himself in [Maria's] scornfulness as if it were love" and drinks in "her curt monosyllables as though they were rhapsodies of endearment" (147).

Most of Hardy's pseudo-stoics, however, are less obvious in their failings than Anderling. Ned Hipcroft, for example, in "The Fiddler of the Reels" (LLI), strikes one initially as a strong, appealing character--estimable in his self-reliance and heartrending in his passionate love for a child not his own. He stolidly accepts Car'line Aspent's rejection of his suit and departs for London so that "she should not even be distressed by a sight of his form in the distant perspective of the street and lane" (170-71). But, while Car'line's refusal gives him "a new start in life" (170), Ned

makes little use of it. He pursues his trade in London with a "disinterested willingness" which, one gradually realizes, bespeaks stagnation more than stoicism. In four years, he improves his skill as a mechanic, but "neither advance[s] nor recede[s] . . . one jot in social position" or personal fulfillment. Attending to all his own domestic requirements "with the facility of a woman" and apparently forming no friendships in the city, Ned seems resigned to an exceedingly dull and isolated bachelor's life not because he is heartsick, but simply because he lacks the typical human need for companionship. There is no indication that his "outward placidity" conceals any real inward distress over the loss of Car'line (171). In fact, the narrator generally speaks of Ned's inner life in speculative terms of what he "must have" felt or thought at a given juncture, as when Car'line asks to be reinstated in his affections: "A tide of warm feeling must have surged through Ned Hipcroft's frame on receipt of this news," but he had "grown so resigned to, or satisfied with, his lonely lot, that he probably would not have shown much jubilation at anything" (172).

More damaging to his stoic facade than his emotional dissociation, however, is the tone of his reply to Car'line. Not only is it "[m]easured and methodical" like himself, making expressions of tenderness secondary to the "great deal of sound reasoning" in his agreement to take her back (172); it is unpleasantly self-righteous and belittling. He is certainly entitled to resent her past rejection of him in favor of Mop Ollamoor, but Ned's manner in renewing their engagement is "a gigantic piece of smallness" (Giordano 628). His "few gentle words of raillery" are really meant to shame Car'line into crawling back to him as a humble suppliant. One tends to overlook his pettiness only because it is so grossly overshadowed by Car'line's duplicity in keeping little Carry a secret until the basically kindhearted man has little choice but to accept this ready-made family and marry Car'line as planned.

Ironically, the pity he feels on the platform at Waterloo Station for the cold, tearful daughter of his despised rival marks the awakening of Ned's emotional life. Startled and warmed by the unexpected appeal of the innocent child, Ned is drawn into the marriage for her sake far more than for Car'line's; indeed, it is "without any definite agreement to forgive" Car'line that "he tacitly acquiesce[s] in the fate that Heaven had sent him" (177). He is well enough pleased with his wife, but it is his relationship with Carry that animates him and brings out the best in his character. Parental love gives him truly a new start in life, "something to live for again" (174), as sexual and marital love could not. Because he has attached real emotional value to no one else in his life, however, and now passionately fixes his "whole world" on Carry alone (184), Ned is almost destroyed when she is abducted by her treacherous father. His emotions have been engaged at last, and he can never regain his former placid disinterest. Even real stoic acceptance lies beyond his reach now, so extreme has his metamorphosis been, and he becomes a haunted man--shackled to a selfish, insensitive wife and quietly raging against the fate that robbed him of his one treasure, which he can but wander the streets of London in hopes of rediscovering.

In contrast, a stubborn, self-protective reluctance to give way to her emotions enables Sally Hall to maintain at least the semblance of proud, optimistic stoicism in "Interlopers at the Knap" (WT) when chance and her fiancé's wandering affections destroy her plans for the future. But while Sally's bold spirit and philosophical practicality make her a likable character, especially in contrast to the self-involved ineffectuality of Charles Darton and the woman to whom she loses him, her reaction to the loss becomes, ultimately, a withdrawal from the possibilities of life:

her self-reliance causes her to act too quickly and decisively in working out her destiny. . . . her confidence is revealed repeatedly to be a mask for her essential vulnerability. Her independent posture is evidence of an admirable determination not to be subdued by life,

but . . . her attempt to put on a brave face becomes more self-defeating than defensive. (Brady 35)

Even before she recognizes Darton's attraction to Helena, fear of risking her independence makes Sally reluctant to admit her true emotions. Awaiting Darton's arrival on the eve of their wedding, she imperfectly feigns nonchalance to cover her misgivings over his delay. She fiercely defends her prodigal brother's right to refuge in their family home largely to disguise her anxiety at the potential threat his poverty and unexpected entourage of dependents pose to her impending nuptials. And, thus, already insecure about her hold on matrimonial stability and dignity, Sally rushes to conceal her jealous disappointment when, only moments after Philip Hall's death, she learns of Darton's former relationship to her brother's wife.

Rather than risk being jilted for another woman, especially for one so intimately related to her now, Sally proudly releases Darton on the spot, impulsively making definite a breach only possible before. Instead of stoically accepting defeat after making every effort to realize her desired destiny, Sally steps out of the way before she even knows if retreat is necessary. After all, given time for the shock of the evening's bizarre reunions, revelations, and losses to abate, events might still have sorted themselves out in Sally's favor; but, because she cannot tolerate relinquishing control over any part of her fate to anyone else, she exercises her own power of choice before Darton can reduce her to a mere pawn of his will. In fact, in her eagerness to salvage her pride, Sally even forestalls Darton's power of choice over his own future to a large extent, for she not only terminates their engagement, but "essentially arranges Darton and Helena's marriage" (Brady 36). It is to Sally's credit, of course--as well as the greatest argument for her status as a stoic--that her decision to step aside never makes her vindictive. Even as her plans crumble about her on that first traumatic night, she is lifted above her fears and resentment

by a natural, unstinting compassion for Helena and her children; and, though she refuses Darton repeatedly when he renews his suit after Helena's death, Sally remains civil and friendly even with him. That she does refuse her former lover only increases one's respect for her judgment, considering his obvious willingness to be released from their initial engagement and his shallow motives for wanting to marry her now. But her rejection of marriage altogether, despite many other offers, goes beyond stoicism, beyond an intuitive "point of honor" (Moynahan 4-5). Her rejection of Japheth Johns in particular, a man long appreciative of her virtues and well-suited to her in temperament, shows that her "independence has become recalcitrance" (Brady 36), a means of keeping forever at arm's length the emotions that would make her vulnerable to another person's decisions, even though that vulnerability might bring her greater rewards than the solitary path she chooses.

Still, Sally does at least choose her path. She and the other quasi-stoics may cope with their losses less positively and productively than the true stoics, but they all at least remain in conscious command of how they respond to misfortune and to the awkward coincidences or intrusions that cause it. Many of Hardy's characters do not take even that much direct responsibility for their own fates but, instead, habitually avoid conflict and decision until the unchecked progression of events eliminates their options one by one and renders independent choice unnecessary or impossible. These are Hardy's drifters, characters "who refuse to live, who stand obstinately outside life, who look in through lighted windows" (Guerard 114). Held back by indecision born of shyness or social inequalities or by a strange constitutional inertia, they simply drift wherever the currents of external circumstances and other people's choices direct them. They often have a vivid sense of the destiny that could make them happy, but their dreams are usually too idealistic and too passively

envisioned to be called goals. Even when external forces occasionally provoke a drifter into vigorous action, that action is the result of impulse, not of a consistent pattern of choice and purpose. So unfocused and haphazard an approach to life makes the drifters Hardy's most pathetically miserable characters; for, while many of his other personages also end unhappily, often themselves causing the failure of their dreams, the drifters virtually invite failure with their passivity. They represent the most extreme illustration of Roy Morrell's assertion, in Thomas Hardy: The Will and the Way, that "to be effective, human efforts must be unremitting" (45):

Hardy is keen to show that no Being, or Force, is going to change the course of things for us. If we want things changed, then it is no good to let things drift, to trust to 'the favour of accident.' (37-38)

[C]ritics often complain that Hardy makes things happen in the way that is most awkward to all concerned, whereas what he is often doing is showing that if nothing is done to forestall an accident, or to control the way it happens, it is more and more likely, as time goes on, to happen in a way that is not convenient. (49)

No character more painfully illustrates the truth of this statement than Sophy Twycott, timid heroine of "The Son's Veto" (LLI). Sophy bears her unhappiness so quietly and displays such gentle, selfless devotion toward her son that it is tempting to regard her as a stoic. One quickly realizes, however, that her acquiescence is too self-deprecating, her devotion too indiscriminating to justify that classification. There is in Sophy's nature a "flexuous" quality (39) that makes her, at once, softly appealing and pitifully incapable of controlling the way her "little tragi-comedy" unfolds (37). She is, quite simply, too easily bent to the will of others--particularly of those whom she considers above her own natural sphere. In her youth, she can flirt and argue confidently enough with Sam Hobson as a social equal and, in later years, slips easily back into the familiar patterns of their long-suspended friendship. But with people of position, wealth, and education, Sophy loses all confidence in her

own worth and right to direct her own experience as an individual, a wife, and a mother. She does "not exactly love" Mr. Twycott, but assents "forthwith to be his wife," because "she had a respect for him which almost amounted to veneration. Even if she had wished to get away from him she hardly dared refuse a personage so reverend and august in her eyes" (40). Thus begins Sophy's self-destructive life as a drifter. Intimidated by Twycott's social superiority, though he is but a dull, middle-class cleric, Sophy submits her will to him completely, acceding without complaint to being uprooted from her beloved country home and to his selfish attempts to "educate" out of her the unladylike cultural "deficiencies" that embarrass him (41). The same reverence for persons of genteel upbringing makes her irrationally deferential to her own son, even when he is but a schoolboy, and keeps her from resenting or punishing his rude corrections of her grammar or the inexcusable tantrums by which he coerces her into foregoing a happy marriage with Sam.

That Sophy does not exercise her maternal prerogative to discipline her son and cure him of his disrespectful attitude and behavior is as much a disservice to him as to herself. By allowing Randolph's arrogance to go unchecked, she guarantees his obnoxious intolerance as an adult and his failure ever to reciprocate the love she lavishes on him. Such is Sophy's character and view of her situation, however, that she never feels the truth of Sam's puzzled reminder that "you can do as you like Sophy. . . . It is not you who are the child, but he" (49). The appalling fact of her life is that, except for the few precious, but guiltily stolen, night outings with Sam, the timid woman has not "done as she liked" since the moment she agreed to marry Mr. Twycott. Unlike Sam, both her husband and her son have regarded her as a child, one incapable of managing her financial and personal affairs appropriately--that is, according to what they regard as appropriate in their selfish concern for how her

actions affect their social reputations. Subjected continually to this condescending view over the years, Sophy comes to accept it too, seeing herself, if not precisely as a child, at least as one not "dignified enough to be [Randolph's] mother," much less to criticize his conduct or challenge his wishes. Perversely regarding him as hardly her son at all, but as "one I hold in trust for my late husband" (48), she makes possible Randolph's tyrannical control over her destiny. By refusing to value and act upon her own natural inclinations, she gives him the power to close her off from life itself. Increasingly, the roles of parent and child are reversed, as Sophy allows herself to be chastised and lectured by her son and virtually confined to her lonely house as punishment for wanting to marry Sam. At any moment, she might freely fulfill her dream by a single word; but she has drifted too long on the current of other people's expectations, as her final plaintive words, murmured only to herself, heartbreakingly reveal: "Why mayn't I say to Sam that I'll marry him? Why mayn't I?" (52). It is the helpless, frustrated question of the child she has long been supposed, one who recognizes the authority of the person forbidding her what she desires, but who neither understands his reasoning nor knows how to challenge it.

The "drifter's" mentality is often the cause in Hardy's stories of lovers being separated and left to live out their days in quiet yearning. Like Sophy, these lovers often appear touchingly stoic at first glance because of the anguish they endure and because there is usually a deliberately destructive third character who contributes conspicuously to the central couple's unhappiness and diverts attention from their own flaws. Such is the case with Nicholas Long and Christine Everard who, in "The Waiting Supper" (CM), are kept apart for more than three decades by the looming shadow of James Bellston. First as a sophisticated rival for Christine's hand and then as her malicious absentee husband, Bellston repeatedly prevents the pair from

marrying until they are, at last, too resigned to their loss to seize the opportunity when it comes. A closer look at the first half of the story, however, reveals the significant degree to which Nic and Christine's own early indecisiveness determines their final shared, but non-matrimonial fate.² The story's opening image of Nic standing cautiously in the shadows outside Froom-Everard manor-house to observe the goings-on behind its lighted windows becomes a striking emblem of the lovers' lifelong relationship, which Nic himself describes as "dead-locked" at the start (30). Although "in the bottom of their hearts [he and Christine are] excellently paired, the very twin halves of a perfect whole; and their love [is] pure" (49), both continually allow external things to obscure their fundamental compatibility so as to keep them locked permanently outside the bright, happy life they might share.

The major problem is that neither lover has a realistic goal for the relationship. Both have a clear, ominous sense of the "social breakers" that would greet such a union as theirs between a son of the yeomanry and a daughter of the "smaller gentry" (45, 27)--despite the fact that Squire Everard speaks with no purer accent than "the rustics on his estate" and falls considerably below Nic's farmer uncle in the scale of wealth (29). But the schemes they devise for navigating those rough social waters are decidedly impractical and shortsighted. Christine believes that objections to their outward inequality can be quelled by Nic's embarking on a tour of travel and study to acquire the social polish necessary to win her hand, while Nic himself wants to secure his prize before pursuing such a course of self-improvement, by gaining "absolute possession" of her first by means of a secret marriage (33). Neither one truly understands what his or her preferred course of action requires of the other, and it is this lack of insight that has kept the relationship stalemated for almost three

² See also Brady 176-77, 179.

years. In regard to this impasse, one tends to sympathize most strongly with Nic, because he struggles so valiantly to reconcile his love for Christine with pride in his own worth and resentment at being deemed automatically unfit to marry her simply because her family's name is "one of the longest chronicled" in the area. Enough of the traditional social values linger in his consciousness for him to delay his explicit marriage proposal for three years, in the belief that it had properly to come from her "as the superior"; but he never fully understands her view of their relationship or why a secret marriage now would seem a "trap" to her (34). For Christine, marriage with Nic is a venture she has only "toyed with as a vague dream," one to which his production of a marriage-license gives frightening, "unexpected substantiality" (33). At once both more romantic and more concerned about social opinion and worldly refinement than Nic, she has imaginatively fashioned her countrified lover into a hero who, only after having roamed the world and made a name for himself, would return to claim her. Between her insistence on that dream and Nic's reluctance to leave for fear of losing her to a worldlier suitor, their dead-locked situation might never change at all were it not for their extreme susceptibility to external influences.

Christine especially is prone to rapid pendulum swings of impulse and emotion, based on what she sees and hears. In a matter of hours, she agrees to the Nic's plan when stung by his doubt of her constancy; timidly regrets her rashness overnight and proceeds to the church only on "the momentum of [her] antecedent impulse" (37); and then is spurred irrationally to anger by the rector's refusal to complete what she regrets having begun. The same wild vacillation characterizes her emotions and conduct at the christening party at Athelhall, where the couple's non-committal tendencies at last provide an opening for disaster. Drawn toward the visiting James Bellston by his experience as a traveller and by the harmony between

them in small matters of social equality, Christine finds herself embarrassed to dance with Nic until his skill and their "perfect responsiveness" as partners--like "two interacting parts of a single machine" (44, 45)--make her forget momentarily his deficiencies in other areas. Almost at once, however, her father's request that she not dance too often with the young farmer sends her thoughts flying again in the opposite direction to argue only briefly with herself against "absurd conventional regulation[s]" (46) before lapsing into serious consideration of the practical desirability of a match with Bellston: "In great things Nicholas was closest to her nature; in little things Bellston seemed immeasurably nearer than Nic; and life was made up of little things" (47-48).

Above all, Christine is swayed by the outward look of things, in terms of both physical appearances and the impressions she makes in social situations. As a rather crude "new-lacquered man," Bellston owes his power to attract Christine less to his personal sophistication than to the vivid contrasting light he casts upon Nic: "The latter, idealized by moonlight, or a thousand miles of distance, was altogether a more romantic object for a woman's dream" (42), but "[n]oontide lights and dwarfed shadows always banished the romantic aspect of her love for Nicholas" (48). Thus, when he arrives at their next meeting--just after rumors of their "marriage" have begun to circulate--bearing in the "shaggy wildness" of his appearance the evidence of a working man's careless route through "brambles and briars, water and weed" (50), it is hardly surprising that Christine declines to attempt the private ceremony again. Though she continues to vacillate when confronted by her father--alternately defending Nic against the squire's initial outrage and then hedging when, in a calmer mood, her parent sadly resigns all hope of Bellston as a son-in-law in favor of Nic and the avoidance of scandal--Christine finally allows appearances

and the knowledge that she is being gossiped about to distract her completely, and at a critical juncture, from a clear memory of what she values most. The ways of the world are more to her than to Nic, and the satirical reference to herself, which she overhears in town, as "Mrs. Nicholas Long," embarrasses her so intensely that she deliberately, angrily snubs Nic when he approaches a moment later, still marked by the wild "amphibious" trappings of his trek through the meads (56, 55).³

The gesture is reflexive and not indicative of a permanent state of mind, but its effect is, like that of so many careless actions, irreversibly damaging. The sorrow, guilt, and indignation Nic feels in response to it lead him impulsively to misinterpret the tone of the letter he receives that evening, in which Squire Everard agrees to Nic and Christine's marriage. Having experienced a typical Hardyian "chance encounter" on the way home, with a man who casually mentions the squire's distress over "some bad news he has heard" (57), Nic mistakenly imagines contempt behind the squire's words and an insult in the offer made only because the writer had no choice. Out of the coincidental timing of these three tiny events comes Nic's drastic decision to exile himself from all he knows and loves. More than a deliberate contrivance of accident and coincidence to suggest the "too common human weakness of allowing chance to creep in," this turning point is one of the many plot situations in Hardy's fiction in which, as Morrell explains, "chance enters decisively simply because action is postponed. . . . and the time itself, by mathematical necessity, increases the odds of something going wrong" (144). Three years of hesitation by both lovers, years of drifting in accordance with every shift and eddy of the social current, have led to this renunciation of a dream which could have been achieved many times over. In his

³ Christine's reaction here illustrates what Roy Morrell describes as Hardy's interest in "the psychology of the 'object': the distress and sudden weakness felt by someone--often a woman--when she discovers she is being talked about, and has thus become an object in the eyes of others" (71).

rejection of that dream, Nic is, again, more appealing than Christine, in that his love for her has never faltered and is, in fact--more than his injured pride--his main reason for leaving. He is driven by a dread of the social stigma that would attach to their marriage, but only in his concern for how the potential isolation from and contempt of family and friends would make her feel. Still, he is too hasty. After so many months of finding excuse upon excuse for not beginning the travels Christine has urged upon him, he leaves without discussing with her this, their first parentally sanctioned opportunity to wed. Instead, "in forty-eight hours," he severs himself as completely from the From Valley "as if he had never belonged to it" (58).

The abrupt leap forward over the next fifteen years to the moment of Nic's return is rather startling; and when taken together with the ironic reversal in the lovers' fortunes, Bellston's melodramatic abuse and abandonment of Christine, and his mysterious return and re-disappearance by which he blocks the new wedding plans, it seems at first a rather contrived bit of plot-making designed to ensure a sad, ironic ending. As another general observation by Morrell reveals, however, Hardy's emphasis on chance and coincidence aims at and achieves a far more significant effect: Hardy's "ingenuity in this matter is used less often, perhaps, to make some startling change in the situation, than to unmake some change, to bring events full circle, so that almost the same choice is encountered a second time" (153). Beneath its air of unmerited suffering, as ignorance of Bellston's death on the eve of their wedding cruelly prevents Nic and Christine ever from marrying, the conclusion of "The Waiting Supper" shows those unlucky lovers not merely suffering the same misfortune twice, but responding to their second opportunity with the same old patterns of hesitation and reliance on external things to make their choices for them. They are both kinder and more generous now in their devotion to one another, and

admirably honest in issuing the public announcement that alerts Bellston to their marriage plans; but, after the passage of another seven years gives them the legal liberty to try again, nothing but their own doubts makes them choose to waste yet another decade before the discovery of Bellston's skeleton and watch removes from between them absolutely the dim shape of his haunting presence. And, certainly, their drifting natures are alone responsible for their failure to marry at last. As always, Nic pursues the issue with greater zeal than Christine, but even he gives way too easily to the sluggish complacency of a heart "sickened of tender enterprise by hope too long deferred" (83). Together, they reject their second chance and drift on in the same routine of the last seventeen years--every walk, every chat over tea "as periodic as an astronomical recurrence" (79), and every bit as indicative of a deadlock as their youthful, secret meetings in the shadows of the manor-house lawn.

The whole story is an ironic variation on the theme of Robert Browning's poem "The Statue and the Bust," which Christine quotes mid-way through the story, invoking as wisdom the sentiment that absurdly divides Browning's lovers: "Better wait" (51). The poem was Hardy's favorite of Browning's works because, as he told Elliott Felkin in 1919, "it has the characteristic of all great poetry--the general perfectly reduced in the particular. 'Procrastination, that's what it is, and there's nothing to be said about procrastination that is not in that poem'" (30). As a human weakness, procrastination clearly fascinated Hardy, and, certainly, it plagues all his drifters with its extraordinary potential for extracting emotional disaster from ordinary, readily controllable situations. In an unusual entry in his collection of plot "Outlines for Stories" (OMC), Hardy offers a particularly incisive, if extreme, example of the wastefulness caused by habitual procrastination. Plot E, entitled "The mistaken symbol" (or) 'For want of a word,'" tells the same story in two forms

(essentially identical but for a difference in perspective) of a young man and woman who regularly encounter one another in a London church, share a hymn book, and fall in love, but who are so abnormally shy and afraid of rejection that they never voice their feelings or even learn each other's names. In the second version, narrated by the young man himself, one finds in his self-portrait a telling description of his shyness as a quality now "crystallized in my character into a procrastinating slowness that was not likely to be overcome during my mortal term of years" (125).

An appropriate characterization of Hardy's drifters in general, the comment not only defines their habit of dealing with life through avoidance, but also exposes their typical defeatist view of themselves as powerless to change. Convinced that he cannot alter his character, the young man tries only half-heartedly to declare his love and finally delays so long that he opens the door for ironic coincidence to intervene. After several Sundays' absence due to illness, he returns to the church to find the girl apparently engaged, though, in truth, she has taken to wearing a ring as a symbol of her devotion to him and a means of warding off the attentions of other men. In their mutual hesitation to take even the simplest direct steps toward achieving their desires, they ironically act in ways that inspire misinterpretation and guarantee their unhappiness. Although both versions of the plot contain the option of a happy ending, in which the lovers discover their errors and marry, Hardy's first, instinctive, inclination in both cases is to follow the characters' too-passive tendencies through to their self-destructive end, with the young man's reactionary avoidance of the church and the girl's rapid decline and death due to "unrequited" love.⁴

⁴ While it has no direct bearing on Hardy's presentation of the drifters' personalities, his choice of narrative perspective in the first version of Plot E deserves mention here as a startling experiment in his fiction. The first narrator of the tale is a sparrow, which gradually pieces together the facts of the situation by observing the lovers and overhearing gossip about them in its continual search for food and rest in and around the church. Even more intriguing is Plot F (the last

Time and again, lack of forthrightness divides lovers and causes needless suffering in Hardy's stories. In "The Lady Penelope" (GND), the mere "want of a word" between the heroine and Sir William Hervey repeatedly ruins their happiness. His "backwardness" and Penelope's reliance on "indirect hints" of her love (180), conveyed through Hervey's friends, combine to give ironic substance to her girlish jest and leave the best loved of her three suitors the last to win her hand. Their mutual reticence so clouds their confidence in one another's affection that they allow external pressures to push them apart--Penelope giving way, in turn, to the insistent overtures of her other two admirers, and Sir William taking sad refuge in foreign courts. But even when Sir John Gale's death frees Penelope to marry her true love at last, the pair shrink, even as husband and wife, from the clear, direct communication that would ensure their happiness. When he overhears, by chance, the groundless speculations regarding Penelope's role in Gale's death, Sir William once again flees the scene of his doubts rather than confront Penelope with them; and when the rumors reach her ears as well, she resorts to her usual, and now fatal, indirection--writing to beg his return, but giving too little information to allay his suspicions. The local gossip is ugly and inexcusably irresponsible, but it is ultimately Sir William and Penelope's own forfeiture of responsibility for their fates that gives them but a few months of happiness and reunites them only at Penelope's deathbed.

outline in the collection), which Hardy titled "The Sparrow," and in which he projected a whole series of "Glimpses"--dramatic private moments in human lives, accidentally observed by a sparrow and made all the more engrossing by the writer's technique of plunging in medias res into a scene, breaking off suddenly, and perhaps resuming further on to simulate the bird's experience should darkness, a cat, etc. interrupt its observation of events. Although Hardy never explored the possibilities of such a strangely limited narrator in a fully developed story, his use of it in connection with the drifters in Plot E reminds one of the image in "The Son's Veto" of the singing birds which fly into the church and alight on the roof beams to be almost the only witnesses to Sophy's marriage to Twycott. For "want of a word" to express her real needs and desires, Sophy finds herself, like the lovers of Plot E, forever separated from her heart's choice.

In much the same way, the misfortunes that make George Barnet's life a "nightmare of frustration" (Miller, Distance and Desire 157) in "Fellow-Townsmen" (WT) are largely assisted by his own failure to communicate his feelings clearly and persistently. He thrice forfeits his chance to win his beloved Lucy's hand simply by keeping the evidence of his love too much to himself and by being too easily discouraged by minor setbacks, especially at the end when one more visit to Lucy would have meant success. The story's greatest irony lies in Barnet's making "no effort to revive the spark of Lucy's love for him, when he had recognized so magnificently the value of perseverance when it was a matter of reviving the spark of life in his unlovable wife" (Morrell 39). That same irony, however, also reveals that there is more to Barnet's self-defeating tendencies than a lack of openness and perseverance. He demonstrates in his actions a complex mixture of impulsiveness, detached emotionalism, and poor judgment, which appears also in several other male characters in the stories as yet another aspect of the drifter's mentality. One sees all of these qualities at work in Barnet as he alternately allows minor obstacles to turn him away from Lucy when they are both free to marry and then rashly seeks out her company when such a move can do only harm. He arranges for Lucy's employment by Downe, but fails utterly to foresee the consequences of his act or to recognize the evidence of the pair's growing attachment. And, while his pain at losing Lucy to his friend, at the very moment of his greatest hope, is unarguably real and intense, there is in it a strange, self-indulgent quality that keeps one from agreeing with Toby Herzog's claim that Barnet displays "the ethical responsibility, tolerance, and tragic acceptance of life that are important in Hardy's view of a meaningful existence." Barnet is admirably moral in saving the woman who makes his life a torment, but his manner of accepting misery is not "consistent with Hardy's

notion of a proper conduct" (239). Barnet is no stoic. He makes no constructive new path for himself after enduring bitter disappointment, but rather, stands back masochistically to "observe the effect of the spectacle" upon himself (WT 159), so that, finally, "the reader's exasperation at the tricks of fate becomes . . . an even greater annoyance at his submission to them" (Brady 32).⁵

One feels a similar exasperation with the other male drifters--most common in Wessex Tales and Life's Little Ironies--who share Barnet's tendency to oscillate between fear of "disturbing his own mental equilibrium" (WT 164) and an impulsive, self-indulgent submission to the temptations or pressures of circumstances. Hardy's presentation of another such character in "Interlopers at the Knap," the story which immediately follows Barnet's in Wessex Tales, suggests that the two men's similar personalities may stem at least in part from a basic similarity in their backgrounds. Like Barnet, Charles Darton has inherited his comfortable position in life and has, consequently, developed none of his father's shrewdness or energetic drive. His leisure has, instead, produced in him a profound complacency which makes him at once unwilling to upset it of his own accord and absurdly vulnerable to unexpected external challenges to it--chance events that alter "what he considers to be his fate" (Brady 35). His own definition of his approach to life identifies him unmistakably as a drifter: "Better go with the tide and make the best of its course than stem it at the risk of a capsize" (204). Unfortunately, besides the danger, inherent in such a philosophy, of basing vital choices on the "flow" of events, Darton seldom has a clear notion of the real direction of the "tide." Without the initial momentum of a specific plan for his own future, he simply reacts to every ripple on the surface of his life.

⁵ See also Chapters 3 and 4, in which discussions of the story's viewpoint and setting have already necessitated considerable detailed analysis of Barnet's character.

Convinced that "[h]anging and wiving go by destiny" (179), he decides almost randomly to marry Sally Hall, since she is nearest to hand and winning her requires the least romantic effort on his part. The mere sight of Helena, however, in the dress meant for Sally is enough to reverse the direction of the tide for him: "He seemed to feel that fate had impishly changed his vis-à-vis in the lover's jig he was about to foot" (195). The old attraction to Helena never assumes the proportions of a great passion and, for some time, merely sets him in a whirl of confusion; but, when Sally proudly refuses to demand the constancy of so irresolute a man, and thus define his course for him, "the transfer of Darton's heart back to its original quarters proceed[s] by mere lapse of time" (202-03). Motivated strictly by the outward look of things, he has no real understanding of the women he courts. Thinking to heal a "sentimental wound" by marrying Helena (205), he overlooks entirely the shallow vanity of her character and thus foresees none of the unpleasantness her conceit inevitably brings to their union. Awakened by that experience more appreciatively to Sally's charms, Darton feels the tide turn once more and, after Helena's death, blithely resumes his former suit, utterly unconscious of Sally's probable response to being taken up again so casually now that she suits the needs of his growing family. He still sees in her independence mere simplicity, the unambitious common sense of a woman apt to brighten rather than despise the commonplaceness of a farmer's household. To Darton, their marriage now merely represents a means of "setting in order things long awry" (206), of re-establishing his own mental and physical comfort, and it is the failure of the tide of events to carry him to the calm destiny he envisions, rather than a real desire for Sally herself, that makes him regret her loss.

Because of Sally's genuine independence and Darton's extremely limited emotional capacity, one cannot imagine Darton's drifting tendencies to be the cause

of great suffering for either character. With the two male drifters in Life's Little Ironies, however, the case is very different. Mr. Millborne of "For Conscience's Sake" and Charles Raye of "On the Western Circuit" are both self-absorbed, impulsive, but essentially directionless men, whose susceptibility to external influences brings ruin and anguish not only to their own lives, but also to those of the people closest to them. Millborne does manage to avert the worst damage to his wife and daughter's happiness at the end, but his selfishness and poor judgment in intruding on them in the first place severely limits admiration for his eventual sacrifice. Like Farmer Darton, he belatedly offers marriage to a woman he once wronged, but not, as he says, "purely with the idea of putting wrong right," but with the more selfish notion of restoring his own "sense of being a man of honour." Also like Darton, he is a well-to-do man of leisure whose tendency to drift through life has at last brought him up against obstacles that disturb his peace of mind. A "bachelor by nature, and instinct, and habit" (59), Millborne has drifted idly for fifty years--tracing the same route daily to and from his club; preferring the ease of renting rooms and furnishings, paid for ten times over during his tenancy, to the effort of having a house of his own; and generally exciting neither curiosity nor friendship among his London acquaintance. It is his very idleness and unconnectedness in middle age, however, that gives such force to the "accident" that reminds him of his "unfulfilled promise" to Leonora Frankland (56). With neither work nor "legitimate" family to occupy his mind and energy, Millborne responds with an absurdly belated "dissatisfaction with [himself] as a specimen of the heap of flesh called humanity" when he sees, by chance, in the law-report an incident similar to his own early betrayal of Leonora (57).

Were it not for another accident, Millborne might well have lapsed back into his placid routine with no more than a brief struggle with a vague regret, which is

precisely what his confidant, Dr. Bindon, advises him to do. Years before, he had let a friend's advice steer him away from Leonora (by convincing him that "it would be beneath [his] position to marry her"); but now, even though he has not the slightest wish to marry, Millborne yields to his misguided impulse to fulfill his old obligation, the "decisive stimulus" being his chance discovery of Leonora's continued residence in Exonbury (58, 60). His decision is bold and his action unexpectedly deliberate, but the purpose that directs both is dangerously shallow in comparison. Intent only on regaining his self-respect through a mechanical acceptance of his duties as father and husband, he sees neither the gravity of his past actions, nor the impropriety (and unwelcomeness) of his present intrusion into stable, happy lives. Throughout his life, Millborne sees inadequately, perceiving Leonora as commonplace despite the strength she has shown in forging a respectable life for her child and herself. Like Darton, he judges by superficial appearances rather than by character, and is thus unprepared for the cool indifference with which the lady meets his proposal.⁶

By pressuring Leonora finally into the marriage, with promises of its social advantages for their daughter, Millborne succeeds only in doing the pair more harm than he did by his initial abandonment of them. His obtuse selfishness makes the two women miserable, isolated as they are in the bustling unfamiliarity of London

⁶ In 1882, almost a decade before Hardy first published "For Conscience' Sake," he heard from an old country woman the tale of a woman she had known who had, by her own exertions, made a good life for herself and her child and refused years later to be "made respectable" by the man who had betrayed and deserted her. 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" (EL 203-04). While this anecdote clearly contributed to the plot and characterization in the present story, it is important to note that Leonora's "enfranchisement" is ironically limited. She is, as Brady notes, "profoundly conventional" in that "her hard-won respectability has led her to an unquestioning subservience to the expectations of the 'genteel' society in which she lives. This is apparent not only in her social and philanthropic projects but also in her happy endorsement of the . . . Reverend Percival Cope as a suitor for her daughter" (111).

and tormented by the threat of scandal which jeopardizes all Leonora has struggled to maintain. Only the blatant revelation that he has become, in their words, a cruel "enemy" and an "unmitigated curse" to his wife and child (71) shows Millborne at last the depth of his error in seeking to blot out "by tardy accomplishment" his former dereliction of duty (73). In his attempt to regain his typical mood of self-satisfaction, he finds that he has forfeited forever the very prize he has pursued:

he could not, as formerly, settle down into his favourite chair with the evening paper, reposeful in the celibate's sense that where he was his world's centre had its fixture. His world was now an ellipse, with a dual centrality, of which his own was not the major. (72)

Millborne's response to his enlightenment is certainly the most generous and rightly motivated gesture he has ever made: indeed, guaranteeing Leonora and Frances a comfortable home and then removing himself from their lives are the only suitable reparations he could make at this late date. But the gesture that restores hope and happiness to their lives spells the ruin of his own, for his enlightenment inspires no change in his basic approach to life. In his too arbitrary, drifting course through the currents of circumstance, Millborne has, by his own careless motion, shipwrecked himself; and rather than make for land and a more purposeful life, he clings to the flotsam of his shattered self-image--with the aid of "a little too much liquor" (74)--and ends his days as "human wreckage drifting" (Braybrooke 72).

In contrast, Charles Raye's heedless drifting in "On the Western Circuit" shipwrecks others besides himself. Although both the women he meets at the Melchester fair contribute significantly to the deceptions that devastate all their lives, Raye's impulsive responses to events and to the facts of his environments provide the essential catalyst for their subsequent misery. Bored with his dull professional life, he allows a casual desire for diversion to lead him first into an irresponsible sexual dalliance and then into a full-fledged marital commitment,

neither of which he approaches with clear perceptions or deliberate intent. The monotonous seclusion of his life in the "tawny fog" of London makes him too ready to see the pretty, countrified Anna idealistically, as a "fascinating child of nature" (120),⁷ instead of as the rather empty-headed girl she is. This attraction in itself might not have moved Raye to seduce Anna were it not for his habit of adapting his mental, as well as physical, posture to suit the mood of his surroundings. Confronted with the garish spectacle of the fair, he instinctively cocks his hat and joins the local throngs of "[t]hrobbing humanity" in their absolute abandonment of themselves to enjoyment of their brief holiday (110). And, for the rest of his stay in Melchester, Raye conducts himself, under the lingering influence of this scene, as a carefree hedonist. Back on the Circuit a few days later, however, dressed in his somber robes and wig and distanced from Anna by miles and by the tedious, formal atmosphere of the courts, he looks back upon his "unpremeditated conduct" with a sense of "dissatisfied depression" and deplores having "trifl[ed] with [Anna's] feelings for the sake of a passing desire" (119). As with Millborne, though, Raye's dissatisfaction with himself for the wrong he has done his victim is primarily intellectual and reflects no real sympathy for the young woman's suffering. Even in deciding to honor his promise to see her again, he clearly has his own welfare most in mind: "Awkward as such unintentional connections were, the interspace of a hundred miles . . . would effectually hinder this summer fancy from greatly encumbering his life; while thought of [Anna's] simple love might do him the negative good of keeping him from idle pleasures in town when he wished to work hard" (119-20).

Not only does this interpretation of the affair allow Raye to rationalize away his guilt; it allows him to go on drifting self-indulgently without making a conscious,

⁷ See also Brady 122.

responsible decision either to commit himself to the relationship fully or to end it before more harm is done. Thus, he encourages Anna to write to him in London, callously raising her hopes merely to brighten his own dull routine, but safeguards his independence by hiding all the while behind the anonymity of a pseudonym. As a true drifter, however, Raye warms and cools toward Anna repeatedly, allowing external factors to dictate randomly the depth of his infatuation and commitment. As a result, he continually finds himself acting in ways he had not intended: writing to Anna first, when no line from her arrives to relieve his gloom; urging her to write every week, when her charming reply overcomes his resolve to avoid a serious correspondence; and, at last--albeit after a cool spell following the announcement of Anna's pregnancy--vowing to marry her, when her next letter impresses him with her "nobility of character." Significantly, the generous consideration for his interests and the unexpected absence of reproach in that letter, penned like the others by Anna's mistress, appeal more strongly to Raye's sense of responsibility than "the intelligence itself" of Anna's predicament (127). Even so, he lacks the energy and conviction to act upon the whisperings of his conscience alone, and looks outside himself, as usual, for a guide: "He meditated, he wavered; and finally resolved to consult his sister," whose opinion at last persuades him to send the letter of proposal "he would never have decided to write on his own responsibility" (129). Unlike most of Hardy's drifters, Raye is apparently jolted out of his haphazard approach to life, by the disastrous consequences it breeds, and into a more mature, if despairing, acceptance of responsibility for his own choices. Though devastated by the discovery of his bride's social inadequacies and of the true, unattainable object of his passion, he responds to his fate not with his former reflexive movement away from negative external stimuli, but with conscious resignation and an admirable

display of kindness toward Anna despite his private vision of their remaining years together as the miserable life-sentence of an ill-teamed pair of galley slaves.

Only one other character among Hardy's drifters actually undergoes a substantial change in the way she perceives and responds to the events of her life. Ironically, it is his most extraordinarily passive character, Baptista Trewthen of "A Mere Interlude" (CM), who, alone among them, attains sufficient enlightenment both to assume direct responsibility for her choices and to take on gradually the same dignity, generosity of spirit, and undemanding contentment with imperfect rewards which one finds in Hardy's noblest stoics. The "traveller in school-books," upon whose testimony the tale is based,⁸ hints at some such metamorphosis with his opening "nicety of criticism on the heroine's personality." Opposing the general opinion that Baptista "was a young woman with scarcely emotions or character," upon whose face changing events left no mark, he cautions his listeners that "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" (263). It takes the cumulative effect of a series of crises, however, to uncover this notable "ore."

More than any other character in the short stories, Baptista is dominated by inertia and swayed by the choices and behavior of other people. Much of the time, in fact, she seems to have almost no interest in her own destiny. She trains to be a teacher because her parents wish it and, then, for the same reason, agrees to marry their old friend David Heddegan, a man more than twice her age, whom she regards merely as a lesser evil than continued drudgery in a profession she hates. Even this momentous decision, though, to "take what fate offered," provokes little active

⁸ This personage is an example of the artificial frame narrators discussed in Chapter 3. His presence is a formality which does not extend beyond the first paragraph, and his narrative voice is completely framed, in turn, by that of an unnamed omniscient narrator.

involvement on Baptista's part in the future she is accepting. Everything about her response is "off-hand." She readily gives up her teaching position, but leaves all preparations for the wedding to her parents and intended husband; and, while she admits that only "Heaven knows if [the union] will be for the best or not" (265), neither her delay of her return home until the last moment nor her "indefinable relief" at the additional postponement when she misses the usual steamboat suggests any desperate dread of the impending nuptials (267). She simply faces both the present accident and the coming event with the same undemonstrative demeanor and habitual non-resistance that distinguish her as "preeminently a young woman who allowed things to drift" (292).

As with the other drifters, Baptista's passivity often leads her into impulsive actions that make her seem, paradoxically, quite boldly decisive. Those impulses, however, are merely the all but involuntary movements of a weak object along the paths of least resistance. Thus, when chance ironically strands her in Pen-zephyr along with her former lover only days before her intended marriage to Heddegan, Baptista "passively allow[s] circumstances to pilot her along" (280). In disobeying her parents for the first time, by rashly marrying Charles Stow "at the last moment," she is not so much following her own desires as simply shifting her obedience to Stow's immediate, masterful influence. Stung by his sarcastic criticism, she accepts him mainly to avoid further unpleasantness; for she has no strength to oppose this tyrannical young man who treats her "as if she were his chattel to be taken up or put down at will" (272). She submits to his management of details as she had to that of her parents and Heddegan, allowing Stow even to "dictat[e] . . . each phrase" of her explanation to her family (274). Because Baptista is so little engaged in directing her own life, even in regard to so serious a matter as marriage, her undemonstrative

response to being made wife and widow on the same day comes as little surprise. When Stow's accidental drowning relieves her suddenly of his forceful presence, the events masterminded by him over the last three days fade just as quickly for her into unreality. He becomes, in Baptista's confused, "listless mind" (283), almost a "fantasy," an "ephemeral, meteor-like husband" (279), whose influence over her ends at the instant of his death. Within an hour, she is aboard the packet and sailing toward St. Maria's Island as if her encounter with him had never happened.

With this uncalculated departure of Baptista's particularly in mind, Peter Larkin argues that, ironically, her "moments of greatest passivity are also her moments of most effective decision" (19). Considering her "trance-like state" (CM 279), however, it is impossible to regard Baptista's action as being prompted by truly independent decision. Deprived of her most recent directing influence, she simply reverts automatically to the preceding one, resuming her homeward journey "ere she had come to any definite conclusion on her course" (278). In the same way, without intending to deceive anyone, or even consciously deciding that silence is best, she drifts back into the original marriage plans and, indeed weds Heddegan the next day, without uttering a word about Charles Stow. Confused by Heddegan's presence on the boat, her mother's "maladroit" didacticism, and the steady dimming of Stow's memory among the more familiar things of home (281), she finds it increasingly difficult to speak, and finally opts for the "easy course" of going through with the wedding rather than "undertake so explosive a matter" alone (283, 282). Until the last pages of the story, all of Baptista's "decisions" are instinctive, unreflecting options for the easy course: she agrees to the wedding trip to escape the standard local gossip about newlyweds; spends the night "in hideous contiguity" to her two husbands (289), in the hotel where Stow's corpse has been taken, to avoid a quarrel

with Heddegan; and even thrice submits to being blackmailed by a witness to her first marriage rather than tell the truth and face unpleasant consequences.

To an extent, this same short-sighted, escapist tendency that causes most of Baptista's problems also helps her survive them emotionally: "[h]ad she been of a more reflective nature she certainly would not have been able to float successfully above events" (Larkin 20). Stow's death and her wedding trip with Heddegan do cause some strain upon the young woman's nerves, of course; but, after her symbolic gesture of closure in attending Stow's funeral in widow's weeds, Baptista soon emerges from her "state of cold stupefaction" (289) to settle complacently into her new passive role as Mrs. Heddegan--taking, typically, no steps at all to "conceal traces of her first marriage" in order to secure her second from future risk (292). When the threat of exposure does inevitably arise, her repeated payment of hush-money offers little indication that she will not continue indefinitely as she has lived up to this point, allowing chance and other people to dictate the conditions of her life. But the glazier's extortion scheme apparently stacks one too many crises in Baptista's path for her passive nature to ignore. As the narrator intimated at the outset, Baptista is made of sterner stuff than her youth and inexperience have yet revealed. Now, having developed a greater liking for her husband and found, at last, something of her own to protect, she takes an enormous step toward maturity by defying her blackmailer, revealing her secret to Heddegan herself, and taking responsibility, for the first time, for her own past actions, present choices, and consequent experiences. Moreover, having moved forward at last, Baptista never retreats. Even her mortification at Heddegan's unexpected counter-confession--of having married her mainly to acquire at no cost a teacher for his four, only recently legitimized daughters--does not send her scurrying back to her old escapist habit of

floating above rather than confronting unpleasant events. Though she feels "bitterly punished" at being bound to do "the one thing she abhorred" (299), especially in light of the unpromising mental capacities of her pupils, Baptista has gained sufficient insight into her own failings to see a "retributive fairness" in her fate (300). Most impressive, however, is her ability to learn from those she does not care to teach. The confusion of her former drifter's life gradually gives way to clarity, serenity, and love, as she observes her long-suffering step-daughters' sublime unselfishness and comes to share their ability to see themselves and their troubles as merely a part--and not the focus--of all humanity. As "her heart expand[s] in sympathy with theirs," she acquires purpose, depth of character, and a stoic's constructive brand of acquiescence--one which enables her to forge a "sterling friendship" within a marriage once based solely on deception and misguided motives (301).

Essentially, Baptista achieves contentment because she courageously takes control of her circumstances at last and discovers a meaningful identity through the assertion of her own will. Many of the women in Hardy's short stories long to make such a break from oppressive circumstances and establish a more rewarding identity for themselves, but very few ever find the strength to risk what they already have by challenging the social conventions and personal obstacles that stand in their way. For most, the desire for independence or fulfillment remains a dream, a bitter contrast to the reality of their lives; and, for some, it becomes a kind of secondary existence in their imaginations, to which they can escape when reality becomes too distressing. As much of this discussion of Hardy's character types has shown, the various human responses to thwarted dreams held a special fascination for Hardy--from the ambitious aristocrats' ruthless scheming to the humblest stoic's dignified acquiescence. Most intriguing of all, however, are his imaginative women--not

those who merely retreat into an imaginary world from time to time,⁹ but those whose imaginative powers are so intense that their dream worlds collide with the real, actually influencing events and significantly redefining the dreamers' emotional, and often material, destinies. In rare instances, this phenomenon works to the woman's advantage, carrying her past all impediments and into a position of gratifying self-sufficiency. Most often, though, it serves only to add agony and despair to her original dissatisfaction with life.

This type of imaginativeness and its extraordinary effects are certainly not limited to Hardy's women. Nowhere are they more pronounced, in fact, than in Timothy Petrick's shifting attitudes and behavior toward his son in "Squire Petrick's Lady." The trait is, however, most common in the women, who are subject to many more social constraints, after all, than conventionally apply to men and are afforded far fewer socially acceptable outlets for the expression of their natural talents and desires. Indulgence in fantasy is often the only outlet these women have if they are not to risk complete ostracism or social ruin. Their stories are among Hardy's most poignant examples of "short fiction's power to examine social conventions and to . . . express a sense of wasted, rather than exhausted potentiality" (Shaw 218-19). With very few exceptions, his imaginative women live out their lives playing roles sadly unsuited to their needs, personalities, and natural inclinations. Saddest of all is their tendency to doom themselves to unhappiness, not only by accepting those roles, but by either openly or subconsciously endorsing the very social prejudices that limit

⁹ In general terms of escapism and fanciful natures, Alexander Fischler is correct in saying that Hardy's imaginative characters constitute an extremely large group, including almost all his heroines and a good many of the men ("Major Trends" 108). But while his discussion emphasizes the frailty and foolishness of those characters (109-10), mine focuses on the disquietude of a select group of women for whom imagination is a means not merely of coping with disappointment, but of working their way (however incompletely) toward the identity they would prefer.

their choices. Even when they rebel inwardly against the narrowness of their convention-sanctioned positions, these women generally keep within the conventional framework of wifehood or motherhood when projecting imaginative identities for themselves. They may wish desperately to change partners, but they almost always continue to define themselves in relation to a man.

This ironic trait is true even of Ella Marchmill, whose story title--"An Imaginative Woman" (LLI)--lends its name to this category of characters. Even though, in her aspirations as a poet, she is the only one of this group to pursue a non-traditional identity, Ella still judges and defines herself in relation to men she deems her superiors in some way. While submission to conventional expectations that she get "life-leased at all cost" has left her miserably disillusioned with the "stagnation caused by the routine of a practical household and the gloom of bearing children to a commonplace father" (4, 7), there is, at bottom, little difference between Ella's disdainful acknowledgement of William Marchmill as her legal "proprietor" and her envious acceptance of Robert Trewe's authority as her aesthetic "master" (4, 11). The only difference exists in her imaginative fashioning of Trewe, a man she knows solely through his poetry, into the ideal romantic opposite of the faintly boorish, matter-of-fact tradesman she knows only too well. Shrinking from her husband's "sordid" trade as a gunmaker, Ella tries to vent her "delicate and ethereal emotions" by writing a few poems of her own (4); but even the publication of her meager stock indicates no concerted attempt to achieve independence or challenge the prejudicial conventions of her day, as her use of a "masculine pseudonym" reveals (7).

Ironically, the identity Ella truly desires is neither her real one as wife and mother, which she dutifully (albeit indifferently) maintains in obedience to social dicta, nor her precarious, all but unrecognized one as poet John Ivy, which she

invents to keep "her heart alive" (4); rather, like Emma Bovary, she yearns unrealistically to be the heroine of some perfect romance, lover to a sensitive, passionate hero of such extraordinary qualities that he could exist nowhere outside of fantasy. It is Trewe's very elusiveness, Ella's galling failure ever to meet the real man, that enables her to "specialize [her] waiting emotion" on him and regard him as more than just an admired poet (11). Encouraged by the landlady's own apparent infatuation with the young man and surrounded by his things in the rooms at Solentsea, Ella is free to infer whatever she wishes concerning his character, never realizing that, had she been faced with an imperfect, flesh and blood man, "the dream might have been smashed" (Braybrooke 66). Although the descriptions by other characters of Trewe's poetry, habits, and personality provide some basis for Ella's romantic view of him, his own words and conduct show him to be cut of the same idealistic, self-pitying cloth as Ella herself. His extreme sensitivity to criticism and his tendency to isolate himself in lonely places when, according to his suicide note, he longs to find a tender "female friend" suggest that he, too, prefers "unattainable" perfection to the demands of immediate, real-life situations. There is no reason to believe that, had they met, these two people could have helped each other; and it is hardly surprising, considering their similar outlooks, that the last few months of Ella's life parallel Trewe's own melancholy, self-destructive course.

Both characters agonize over the generally lukewarm reception of their work and over the absence in their lives of a true soul mate, and both attempt to fill that void by inventing a perfect fantasy lover, for whose sake they ultimately reject life in the real world. Of the two cases, however, Ella's is the most extreme. For, while Trewe's melancholy fantasy finds at least artistically meaningful expression in his last volume of verse, "Lyrics to a Woman Unknown," and his suicide constitutes

escape from a reality he dislikes but sees clearly, Ella's lesser poetic talent restricts her imaginative outpourings primarily to daydreams, which gradually become so intense that they displace actual events in her perceptions of reality. After just a few days at Solentsea, thoughts of the poet overpower her concern for her own children, making her feel that she "could not . . . [care] about them half as much as usual" (14). And, although "images of sexual desire and poetic inspiration are inextricably mixed" throughout the story, "as if the two impulses were one in Ella's mind" (Brady 100), it is not long before "personal interest rather than literary" has decidedly the upper hand (LLI 11). It is her poet's imagination, perhaps, that enables her to transform so clumsy a garment as Trewe's mackintosh into the "mantle of Elijah" (12), but it is without question the passion-starved woman's "luxuriousness of fancy" that inspires her to take the poet's portrait into her bed like a lover. From her afternoon's anticipation of uncovering the photograph, "with a serene sense of something ecstatic to come" (15), to her slow undressing and positioning of her body in the bed as Trewe would have lain to scribble his ideas on the wall, "everything . . . is carefully prepared for a positive orgy of eroticism" (Wright 98).

The irony of Ella's being interrupted and apparently impregnated by her husband at the very moment that, in her imagination, she essentially becomes Trewe's mistress marks a turning point in her life. Even after the return to her own home, the poet's image dominates Ella's thoughts. She is carrying her husband's fourth child, but initiates a correspondence with Trewe using her male pseudonym. She seeks comfort with her children when disappointed in her plans finally to meet her mentor, but rejects them in disgust at their resemblance to their commonplace father. And, finally, in a "frenzy of sorrow" over Trewe's suicide (26), she rejects the realities and responsibilities of her life entirely, "[c]aring very little now what her

husband or any one else might think of her eccentricities" (27), as her fantasy becomes "almost visible to her" (26). With no hope of meeting her lover in this life, Ella virtually wills her own death, so as to be once more at least in the same world as he, the only one in which she imagines her proper identity lies. The final irony, the "trick of Nature" by which her imagination ostensibly stamps Trewe's features on the countenance of the last child she leaves behind, has struck many critics as excessive; but, in symbolic terms, it drives straight to the heart of both character and theme--the power of her fantasy over her own mind and its repercussions on those she leaves behind.¹⁰ It is her carelessness of the real world, reflected in her absently offering only half-explanations on her deathbed of her infatuation with Trewe, rather than the child's appearance in itself, that makes possible Marchmill's groundless conclusion that the boy is not his and his subsequent rejection of him on that basis. By turning her back on the only identity society has allowed her, Ella unwittingly robs her own innocent child of the identity that is his birthright.

The stories in Life's Little Ironies are filled with women like Ella for whom the conventional views of marriage and motherhood are in some way the source of personal dissatisfaction or hardship. Through them Hardy spotlights a whole range of injustices--from the automatic condemnation of unwed mothers (and not of their seducers) to the advocacy of marriage as a means of social advancement--all of which arise from "the too practical conditions which civilization has devised for [passion's] fruition" (LLI 12). Even the character most like Ella in imaginative power and in her initial assent to a loveless marriage for security's sake represents a different aspect of the same basic situation and deepens one's understanding of the Victorian woman's emotional and social experience. In "On the Western Circuit,"

¹⁰ See Chapter 7 for further discussion of this image.

Edith Harnham is, if anything, more oppressively situated than her counterpart, for she has not even the outlet of motherhood, as Ella has, for her "passionateness" (128). Paired with a gruff, elderly husband, Edith is languidly resigned to her lot until Charles Raye's misdirected, flirtatious touch of her hand awakens the physical and emotional needs of her "deeper nature" (125).¹¹ With no hope of having those needs met within the confines of her dull marriage, the lonely, impressionable Edith responds to her awakening imaginatively, transforming--like Ella--a virtual stranger into a fantasy lover. Her "ecstasy of fancy" (128) leads her into even more harmful extremes of irresponsible behavior, however, than does Ella's; for she not only rejects her real identity in favor of a fictitious one, but attempts literally to project herself into the specific identity of another human being--to become, vicariously, her maid Anna, and thus, "the mistress of Charles Raye, and the mother of his child" (Brady 124).

This eager grasping at a vicarious romance begins the instant Edith feels the "magic" in Raye's touch at the fair. She neither resists the caress meant for Anna nor reveals the error, and minutes later, she spies on the kissing couple "from a screened nook" (116). Outwardly, she plays the stern employer for Anna's benefit, but Edith's subsequent thoughts and actions ironically belie her conventional bearing. As unaccustomed as Anna to "the subtleties of love-making" (118), she finds herself "prepossessed, in spite of general principles, in the young man's favour" (117) and,

¹¹ In his "Reconsideration" of the short stories, Norman Page describes the bowdlerizations Hardy was forced to make for "Circuit's" magazine publication: changing Edith into a widow and her elderly husband into her uncle so as to preclude even a spiritual infidelity. Most significantly, however, Hardy did more than simply restore the original state of affairs when he revised the story for Life's Little Ironies; he added the sentence about Edith's "deeper nature" never having been "stirred" as well as the later one attributing much of her fascination with Raye to the latter's having successfully seduced two women in two days. As Page observes, the additions dramatically strengthened the story's "frank diagnosis of the power of sexual needs and impulse" (82).

increasingly, uses her authority to manipulate the girl irresponsibly so as to indulge her own desires. She instantly rationalizes her role as "Anna's only protector" into a legitimate reason for assuming her illiterate maid's part in the correspondence with Raye: even before Anna herself discovers her pregnancy and thus adds an element of desperation to the affair, Edith convinces herself that it is her duty to do all she can to "keep alive [Raye's] attachment to the girl" (124). Then, spilling more and more of "her own impassioned and pent-up ideas" into letters Anna knows nothing about (125), Edith gradually turns the affair into her own--intellectually and spiritually, at least. Although she agonizes over being denied the physical intimacy Anna has shared with Raye and the tangible link with him of the child she wishes were hers, Edith derives a brief, but very real sense of power and independent identity from the imaginative association with her "lover." As Richard Carpenter observes, it is "Edith's crowning touch" that "the letter she writes for Anna in reply to Raye's temporizing, for all its self-abnegation," is primarily what "convinces him that he must marry her" (Hardy 70). She overrules Anna's natural inclination to blame and pressure the young man, because--as his real correspondent--she knows by now that a subtler, emotional appeal promises greater success with him.

Indeed, Edith's greatest satisfaction in the charade, her strongest sense of identity, comes from knowing that it is to her words only that the young barrister has responded and that she alone has "wrought him to this pitch" (130). The realization is more bitter than sweet, of course, and Edith never consciously wants to harm anyone; but it is pure self-deception that allows her to rationalize her continued concealment of the truth from Raye as a gesture of mercy toward Anna. She knows the couple's marriage will ruin the man she loves, but she willfully sacrifices all their futures to secure for herself the luxury of two or three more emotional outpourings.

True mercy would have urged her to forestall the union and to provide, with Raye perhaps, for Anna and the child so as to give them all at least a chance at recovery, if not happiness. Instead, Edith "deal[s] treacherously" (136) with all concerned and quite literally "see[s] the end of [Anna]" as well as of Raye when she insists on being "in at the death of her dream" (132, 131). Although Edith's fantasy romance does not end in her death as does Ella Marchmill's, her abrupt awakening from her dream in the last scene to the grim realities of her life, to the unwelcome memory that she "had a husband" (137), dooms her to the worse fate of an unrelenting psychological torment. Crouched in the dark in a stupor of grief, she is not merely faced again with her real identity, but feels its cold limitations with the excruciating intensity of one now superaware of the passion and possibilities that lie beyond her reach.

For all its temporary, vicarious ecstasies, the imaginative response to life's circumstances provides neither Ella nor Edith with the satisfying sense of self, purpose, and emotional fulfillment she longs to create in her real life. In general, the only women who achieve some measure of success in actually establishing new identities through the force of their imaginations are those who, due to their social circumstances, have nothing to lose by asserting themselves and actively pursuing their desires. Two of the most striking cases involve Selina Paddock of "Enter a Dragoon" (CM) and young Milly, the woodman's daughter, of "The Marchioness of Stonehenge" (GND), both of whom achieve an admirable independence by setting themselves up as, and genuinely feeling themselves to be, the widows of men to whom they were never actually married. For Selina, the pose is her only means of retaining a precarious hold on respectability in a society that would condemn her for bearing the child of a man she came within two days of marrying, and yet would cast no blame on the man himself for not returning to her until three years after the war

which interrupted their plans. Because she ironically accepts the validity of this inequitable moral system herself, Selina's imaginative identity brings her only partial satisfaction with her eventual worldly success.

Her preoccupation with how people see her keeps her from seeing them clearly. At first, she expends so much energy in persuading her neighbors that she and Sergeant-Major Clark "meant to act straight" (147)--preserving her wedding cake and bridal gown "as a testimony to [their] intentional respectability" (149)--that she overlooks the most blatant indications of Clark's faithless character. Then, upon his unexpected return, her need for public acknowledgement of her "womanly virtue" betrays her basic human dignity (155), as she begs forgiveness of Clark and rejects Bartholomew Miller--the suitor whose loyalty, generosity, and charming affection for her son offer Selina not only the unreserved social acceptance she craves, but a far more considerate and reliable partnership than seems likely with Clark. She has so long associated "recovered respectability" with completion of her original marriage plans, however, that, even after Clark's sudden death, she prefers to assume the "moral relationship" with him of pretended widowhood rather than pursue a legal one with another man (163). Ironically, the very determination with which she enters into her imaginary role--donning widow's weeds, calling herself by Clark's name, and tending to his grave--does enable her to command the world's respect at last. It lessens her pain at twice losing her intended husband and gives her the courage to set up her own business and forge an independent life for herself and her son. But, because her success is founded on compliance with an arbitrary social standard rather than on a desire for independence as such, Selina is particularly vulnerable to the return of pain when confronted at the end by irrefutable proof of Clark's duplicity, in the shape of his real, "respectable" widow and legitimate heir.

George Wing writes perceptively that there is, in the real Mrs. Clark's conduct, "human paltriness . . . and an inverted pride in marital legitimacy" (Hardy 20); but there is paltriness too in Selina's willingness to define herself by the same superficial values. Beneath her modest material independence, praiseworthy as it is, her inner life has never moved beyond the critical point of Clark's initial desertion.

No such stagnation undermines the new identity Milly establishes for herself in "The Marchioness of Stonehenge." Even though she has been, in reality, neither lover, wife, nor mother, she successfully takes on the semblance of all three, reveling in each role for its own sake, almost to the exclusion of any consideration of public opinion. Indeed, her only thought for her social reputation arises when Lady Caroline, frightened by her unexpected pregnancy, tries to take back the role of widow which she has thrust upon the grieving girl. By then, the part has become so real to Milly's "emotional imaginativeness" that, even though she had been nothing to Lady Caroline's secret husband while he lived (104), she feels--and fiercely defends--"the right to bear his name" (105). Like Selina, Milly also dons widow's weeds and regularly tends her make-believe husband's grave; but, for Milly, both gestures are motivated by real love, not by a concern for respectable appearances. Deep grief for the loss of her beloved has "maim[ed] her young life" in a way Selina never experiences (103). And if Milly's devotion to a dead man keeps her from ever pursuing a real romantic relationship, one feels that it is because she has already experienced her life's one great passion, and not because she foolishly refuses to move on. In fact, Milly's life is quite productive and rewarding, thanks to the other role she accepts from Lady Caroline--motherhood. The reciprocal display of devotion she never enjoyed with the youth she loved Milly now finds with his son, whom she makes the object of all her care. Much to her credit, however, Milly does

not spoil the boy, as one might expect of a woman so "possessed with a spirit of ecstasy at her position" (103). Instead, just as she has acquired an air of dignity through her sincere assumption of the status of a widow, so does she produce in her "son" an honest, noble character by seriously accepting the responsibilities as well as the pleasures of parenthood. With no help from Lady Caroline beyond the original, never-increased allowance for the child's care, Milly educates him and "pinche[s] herself almost of necessaries" to give him the best possible start in life (108). She has, in her own mind and by her daily efforts, become his real mother, and has as her reward his unequivocal, tender validation of her right to that identity when he rejects, without hesitation, Lady Caroline's attempt to claim him on the basis of their bond of "flesh and blood" (109). Unlike Selina, whose self-invented identity is snatched from her by the real widow, Milly has earned the right to hers, and the final irony of her story falls upon her legitimate, but unworthy rival.

The same quiet feeling of pride and triumph that fills Milly's heart at her son's gesture of loyalty also distinguishes the confident attitude displayed by the title character at the end of the story immediately following Milly's, "Lady Mottisfont" (GND). The effect of that confidence on Philippa Mottisfont, however, renders her character less, rather than more admirable. Like the other women in this group, she spends much of her story seeking a meaningful identity through the imaginative assumption of a role not literally her own. She is alone, however, in chancing upon a satisfying realistic alternative to her fantasy-based identity. The birth of her own child, after years of sad resignation to her seeming barrenness, make Philippa's desperate vicarious mothering of her husband's illegitimate daughter unnecessary to her continued sense of personal significance. That her good fortune also makes her cruel, in rejecting absolutely the little girl for whom she once felt such passionate

devotion, is painfully ironic, but does not, as one early reviewer claims, impose "too large a draft on one's credibility" (Wallace 153). It seems, on the contrary, the inevitable response of a woman whom Hardy has carefully shown to have been too long dependent on the acceptance of others for her sense of self.

Until the moment she discovers her pregnancy, Philippa considers herself a "supernumerary"--an unworthy object of her "illustrious" husband's love (116), and one who is bound to regard little Dorothy's presence as an undeserved "special kindness of Providence." She is not so obtuse as to be unaware of Sir Ashley's true relationship to Dorothy, but she defines herself so completely in terms of her own relationships that she dare not risk losing her husband by refusing kindness to his daughter. The consequent, extraordinarily unreserved expressions of love in which Philippa indulges are indicative of both her sense of inferiority and her desperate need to feel important: she loves "her husband without criticism, exhaustively and religiously, and the child not much otherwise," and indeed, "could have loved stocks and stones if there had been no living creatures to love" (117). The emotion is quite simply her only medium of self-assertion. Philippa's ironic insistence, however, that she "forgets," in love, that Dorothy is not her own provides an early hint of the fundamental inadequacy of that medium and of the deep dissatisfaction she feels subconsciously regarding her ambiguous position. Had her attachment to Dorothy never been challenged, Philippa might actually have been as happy as Milly in her nurturing of another woman's child, for her possession of "something to watch over" has already inspired her imagination "with the sense of maternity" (124). Her sense of inferiority, however, to such an accomplished, "divine creature" as the Countess (122), Dorothy's real mother, is so strong that she instantly gives up all hope of competing with her. She is terrified of losing her fragile imaginative identity by

losing the child but completely ignores the strength of her real position and identity as Sir Ashley's legal wife. With typical "over-submissiveness" (124), Philippa absurdly regards herself as the wrongful party, an intruder into a natural (albeit illegitimate) family circle; and, instead of fighting for what she wants, she simply waits and hopes that Dorothy will not be taken from her. Ironically, for all their gentle persuasion, neither the Countess nor Sir Ashley ever demands that sacrifice of Philippa. She finally surrenders Dorothy voluntarily, on the questionable basis of her own feelings of inferiority and the six-year-old girl's current fascination with the pretty Contessa. This hopeless, deliberate relinquishment of the child in relation to whom she has largely defined herself is essentially an act of emotional suicide and is mirrored soon after by Philippa's genuine suicide attempt: she simply has no sense of independent identity to sustain her.

The moment she realizes her pregnancy, however, Philippa's life as a supernumerary ends. The knowledge that she is "not a beggar any longer," forced to accept gladly the leavings of others, suddenly fills her with all the pride and self-confidence she could wish for in her matrimonial position. A mother in her own right now, she finds "the aspect of many things . . . greatly altered." Her past self-deprecating attitude toward her husband's former mistress, for example, gives way to a cool, accurate assessment of the Countess' motives in offering to give back the child who now threatens her impending marriage. But, above all, the new Philippa finds that possession of the once-beloved girl is no longer "absolutely indispensable to her existence" (129). There is "one nearer to [her] now" than the foster-child who, after all, once rejected her in favor of the Countess (130); and, after the birth of her son, Philippa flatly refuses to take Dorothy back. There is an unpleasant pettiness in this retaliation against a helpless child, but there is no denying the extraordinary

increase in Philippa's self-esteem and sense of her own rights. In one respect, she still defines herself in relation to another, as her baby provides her with the identity of motherhood. Her unprecedented pride and assertiveness, however, reveal that it is not so much the child himself as her having, in childbirth, accomplished something significant on her own--something for which she need not be obsequiously grateful to someone else for providing--that truly gives Philippa her sense of worth, confidence, and identity. She has become, at last, in her own view--and not merely in the realm of imagination--a person of importance.

Few of Hardy's imaginative women experience such self-satisfaction even during the most intense moments of their fantasy lives; but, for one last group of these characters, the inability to achieve their ideal identities and see themselves as important in real life is a disappointment that drives them beyond the usual response of quiet despair. With these few characters, Hardy explores a darker aspect of the imaginative pursuit of identity, one in which the women's intense frustration with their circumstances leads them ultimately into destructive hysteria or semi-madness. Not surprisingly, these characters appear in two of Hardy's most unusual stories--the seemingly supernatural tale of "The Withered Arm" (WT), commonly regarded as one of his best short works, and the unique first-person "excerpt" from "Alicia's Diary" (CM), almost universally regarded as one of his worst. Despite the extreme variation in quality, both stories deserve attention for their reflection of Hardy's interest in human psychology and, especially, of his belief in the mind and imagination as "both the creative principle underlying all visible phenomena and the organizing source of physical existence" (Brennecke 19).

Alexander Fischler uses the term "semi-madness" to describe both Rhoda Brook and Gertrude Lodge ("Major Trends" 130), the central characters of "The

Withered Arm," who are strangely linked by their triangular relationship with Farmer Lodge and by the physical injury Rhoda supposedly inflicts telepathically on her innocent rival. The story's complexity prohibits any simple interpretation of its events on either a purely psychological or a purely supernatural level--on the one hand, because Gertrude's arm does actually wither and bear the marks of a grasping hand just in the area where Rhoda seizes the incubus of her dream to fling it off; and on the other, because both women clearly read more into the basic events, however strange, than is reasonably warranted. Established largely by the narrator's refusal omnisciently to ratify either interpretation, this complexity ultimately becomes the story's greatest strength.¹² Nevertheless, Hardy's thematic emphasis does fall primarily on the women themselves and on the changes wrought in them by their increasingly obsessive, imaginative responses to their situations. Ironically, both characters begin as women of steady common sense; it is only when they find their identities threatened that the desperate intensity of their emotions lures them into superstitious attitudes and behavior. And, despite the story's supernatural element, the real culprit behind that mental transformation and the wholesale ruin it brings to all concerned is not the intrusion of Satanic influences into the women's lives, but the familiar one of social convention and prejudice. Like their other imaginative counterparts, Rhoda and Gertrude live lives circumscribed by traditional, inequitable expectations of women, expectations which, ironically, they tend to accept without objection. Both define themselves solely in relation to the man who

¹² See Mallory 160-61 and Keys 110 for discussions of the strengths of this limited point of view. Mallory also provides an insightful supernatural reading of the story; he traces Rhoda's development as an instrument of the Devil, one whose initial hatred and jealousy of Gertrude makes her an unwitting "channel of supernatural evil" (151), the effects of which she cannot later undo (151-59). Keys, on the other hand, examines the story's "shifting levels of reality" (106) in its complex mixture of the real, the uncanny, and the supernatural.

has essentially assigned them their social identities by taking them, respectively, as mistress and wife; and, when he rejects them in turn, they appallingly direct their feelings of resentment and blame inward or toward each other rather than at him.

That Rhoda's identity should be determined for the rest of her life by her past physical relationship with Lodge is especially unjust. Although his is the greater "indecentcy," in denying even financial assistance to Rhoda and the son he never acknowledges, Rhoda is the one rebuffed by the community. One's first glimpse of her, milking "somewhat apart from the rest" at the Holmstoke dairy (69), instantly establishes the isolation to which her part in the indiscretion has doomed her. She works among the villagers still, but, as a continual subject of gossip for them since her "fall," lives apart from them with her son on a lonely upland. Though she has been once a lover and, now, for twelve years a mother, Rhoda's possession of neither legal nor moral claim on Lodge in society's view has left her with virtually no identity in her own view. Her only sense of personal significance comes from clinging stubbornly to her earlier intimate connection with Lodge. Thus, when she finds herself utterly "supplanted" even in that respect by the farmer's new wife (77), Rhoda's bitterness becomes unbearable; and, because she cannot challenge the social code or force Lodge to make reparations for his past conduct, her anger manifests itself in jealousy of the usurper. Increasingly obsessed with her rival, but too proud to seek her out personally, Rhoda repeatedly sends her son to observe and report on Gertrude's appearance, until she can raise from the boy's descriptions a "mental image . . . that was realistic as a photograph" (76).

Finally, Gertrude's image comes to dominate Rhoda's waking thoughts so completely that it enters her unconscious dream world as well. Whatever its later supernatural associations, the incubus of Rhoda's midnight vision is, at first, clearly

"the culmination of a prolonged effort of imaginative creation," a "psychological projection of [her] jealousy," so that Rhoda is herself the source of the specter that oppresses her (Keys 112, 114). Every detail of the dream reflects some aspect of Rhoda's complex mental and emotional state. The distorted features of the incubus, for example, present Gertrude "as Rhoda desires her to appear: older, deformed, sexually undesirable, a projection of the wrong done her" (Keys 115). Its flaunting of the wedding ring reflects both the humiliation Rhoda feels at having been denied the dignity of marriage and her desire to believe Gertrude maliciously triumphant over--and thus legitimately blamable for--her predecessor's displacement. And the demon's oppressive weight on Rhoda's chest reveals the suffocating effect of the wretched woman's own powerless hatred and anger. It is her very powerlessness in the conventional social world, however, that so concentrates and channels Rhoda's mental energy that she actually succeeds in leaving her mark on Gertrude's arm when, in her trance, she throws off her rival's spectral representative. A personal victory of sorts, this subconscious achievement illustrates Hardy's literal belief "in the imagination's effective power over matter--in the power of the mind to effect bodily changes, in the telepathic fascinating power of the strong mind over the weak" (Guerard 92).

If, however, the initial faint marks on Gertrude's arm appear there somehow through the agency of Rhoda's imagination, they are worsened and made permanent by Gertrude's own imaginative tendencies. The jealous hatred that makes Rhoda's "telepathy" possible vanishes when she meets the real Gertrude, whose generous, unpretentious nature totally invalidates the evil spirit of Rhoda's vision. Indeed, Rhoda begins guiltily to view herself as the unnatural figure, worrying that she may "exercise a malignant power over people against [her] own will" and be, in fact, the

witch she has been deemed by the community since her fall (81).¹³ While Rhoda's mind is thus "chained" superstitiously to the subject of her new friend's injured arm, Gertrude is becoming equally obsessed with it for her own reasons. The "fancy" that some witch or devil has "blasted [her] flesh" would never gain the least credence in her mind were it not for her well-founded fear that the imperfection in her beauty has already made her husband "love [her] less" (83). Her identity is threatened now, for she too measures herself in terms of her hold on Lodge; and the more he exhibits his disgust at her disfigurement, the worse it grows in response to her own anxiety.

For both women, Lodge's rejection is the catalyst for uncharacteristically superstitious behavior. With all conventional sympathy clearly on Lodge's side, they finally agree uneasily to consult the local "white wizard" (95), Conjuror Trendle, for help with Gertrude's ailment. Rhoda's interest in the visit stems, significantly, as much from her fascination with the growing rumors of her "power" as from genuine concern for the woman for whom she now wishes no worse fate than "a slight diminution of . . . beauty" (83). The work-folk's assumption that she, as a "sorceress," would "know the whereabouts of the exorcist" instills in her an ironic mixture of dread that Trendle will name her as the "malignant influence" over Gertrude (85), and nervously triumphant anticipation of being proved "something greater in the occult world than she had ever herself suspected" (87). Such a discovery would provide her at last with an identity beyond that of a pitifully rejected mistress. Rhoda's obvious longing for such a splendid transformation suggests that it may be simply her imagination that Trendle looks at her "singularly . . . the first moment he [beholds] her" (88) and that he makes her wait outside his house because he

¹³ Ruth Firor explains the rural folk's suspicions of Rhoda as owing to "the apathetic patience with which she accepted Lodge's slights. . . . In her indifference to their sympathy, there was something sinister. They sensed in Rhoda a strong and baleful personality, and readily took her for a black witch" (84).

recognizes her as a witch. He does not, after all, close the door against her or in any other way obscure her view of his ritualistic proceedings within.

The same manner of subconscious self-persuasion may account for much of Gertrude's experience at Trendle's as well. She has by this time become imaginative enough to recognize Rhoda's face in the water and egg white the conjuror combines to reveal to her her enemy (Fischler, "Major Trends" 131), even though the mixture creates but an "indistinct form." Ostensibly, she does not yet know that Rhoda is the "only woman in the world" with a "reason for bearing her ill-will" (92), but it seems quite likely, considering the avid community interest in her arrival and the rampant gossip regarding its possible consequences, that some hint about Lodge's former mistress has already reached her. Or, Gertrude may be prompted to see Rhoda's face simply because the latter's name has been paired mysteriously with Trendle's and because Rhoda has repeatedly betrayed a nervous interest in the withering arm. Whatever the extent of its role in this regard, the local gossip certainly exacerbates the harm already done to both women. Saddened, rather than dignified as she had hoped, by the tale whispered about the dairies of her having "overlooked" Gertrude Lodge (90), Rhoda leaves Holmstoke altogether, while Gertrude remains and gradually succumbs to the superstitious views of the gossipers themselves.

Ironically, the last half of the story, tracing Gertrude's desperate search for a magical cure, is the part least encumbered by suggestions of the supernatural. Despite the return visit to Trendle and the remedy he suggests of touching her arm to the neck of a man just hanged, the emphasis here remains entirely on the natural causes of Gertrude's unhappiness: her husband's undisguised revulsion regarding her withered limb and his displeasure at being still without an heir. Having had "[s]ix years of marriage, and only a few months of love" because of Lodge's resentful

obsession with her disfigurement (92), Gertrude has become as obsessed as he with the equation of love and beauty. In her desperation to retain the identity he has given her through marriage, Gertrude poignantly illustrates "the nervous strain of living with a man when you know he can throw you over at any moment" (LY 23). She knows all too well that her looks are her only sure hold upon her husband, and thus, instead of challenging the shallowness of his regard for her, she desperately seeks "renewed love, through the medium of renewed beauty"--and the gruesome help of the hangman (95). Too long and keenly taxed as Gertrude has been by her situation, her shriek at the instant of touching the dead boy's neck is as apt to be the result of horror at the act itself and imaginative expectation of some dramatic effect as of an actual curative "turn o' the blood" (106). Regardless, the efficacy of the attempt is never known, for the shock of finding herself in the presence of those who have ruined her happiness--Lodge through his rejection and Rhoda through her jealousy--robs Gertrude of her life as well. In that last, almost obscenely ironic meeting of the four principal characters, Rhoda has the bitter satisfaction of knowing her own and Gertrude's imaginations to have combined over time to transform the timid usurper miserably into something like the woman of the hate-inspired vision; but the knowledge holds no victory. With her son, her rival, and (in a few years) her former lover dead, Rhoda returns to her native place; but, despite her proud refusal of Lodge's belated provision of an annuity for her, she finds there no more rewarding an identity than before. She is still an outsider, still the "lorn milkmaid" (69) gossiped about by "those who knew her experiences" (108).

For all their social and emotional exclusion, none of Hardy's imaginative women appears more appallingly isolated than the one whose life is almost claustrophobically recorded in "Alicia's Diary" (CM). The story is unique in Hardy's fiction,

in that the very nature of its narrative form precludes any trace of omniscient analysis of his central character--a limitation he avoids even in the predominantly first-person "A Tradition of Eighteen Hundred and Four" by means of an additional narrative frame. Here, one has only Alicia's subjective account of her relationships with her sister and her sister's lover, and of the events that lead to the latter's death. For many scholars, the sacrifice of "outside [narrative] intervention" renders the story "insipid" (Fischler, "Techniques" 442); but a few, like Kristin Brady, discover the considerable psychological interest created by the Browningsque perspective, through which Alicia "indirectly disclose[s] far more of [herself] than [she] intend[s], or even can comprehend." One needs no external direction to recognize, very early on, beneath Alicia's "expressed affection for her younger sister . . . a disturbing jealousy and possessiveness" (174).¹⁴ For Brady, the real weaknesses of the story arise in the second half, where the emphasis on Alicia's characterization lapses into "trivial melodrama" and an unnecessary onslaught of plot and scenic detail. But while the latter objection is woefully accurate--the tedious wanderings through the canals of Venice taking up, in particular, an unwarranted amount of space--Brady overlooks an important characterizing aspect of the melodramatic turn of plot, an aspect which creates a far more effective blending of "situational irony" and "irony of form" and theme (175) than is immediately apparent. The melodramatic shift reflects a strange deterioration in Alicia's mental state as she tries imaginatively to wrest from her sister's experiences a romantic identity for herself.

At first, Alicia's diary entries, self-righteous and self-deprecating by turns, merely make her seem jealous of the opportunities for travel, society, and romance granted her little sister, Caroline, while she is left behind to attend to dull parish

¹⁴ See also Baker 63.

duties and pour out her father's tea. Running continually beneath her professions of selfless, even motherly, devotion to Caroline are ironically ill-concealed criticisms of the whole family which, at least in her view, so little appreciates Alicia herself. To bolster her sense of importance, she invariably depicts everyone else as helpless. Caroline is a prattling child, long dependent on Alicia's "stronger nature" for support through her "little troubles and great griefs," especially since "poor mother never sees the drift of anything" (89) and poor father is "unable to cope with any difficulty" (93). Actually, it is the ability of all three to cope quite well without her assistance that so disturbs Alicia. She tries to cover her indignation at not having been told more, as "Caroline's elder sister" (90), about the girl's engagement to Charles de la Feste by displaying superior generosity in a hypothetical willingness to see her father "settle something more" on the couple than originally intended "and diminish by a little what he had proposed for me, whilst it was imagined that I should be the first to stand in need of such" (91). Typically, the pretended selflessness points to an even deeper source of resentment--here, the smarting of Alicia's ego at not being the first to marry. Both this concern and her maternal posturing are made entirely ludicrous, however, by the ironic revelation in the same entry that Caroline is only two years Alicia's junior. In the same way, Alicia's martyred resignation to being the one who "could best be spared" to stay at home when her mother falls ill abroad is undercut by her memory, at the news soon after of her mother's death and her sister's grief, that Caroline "was always more my mother's pet than I was" (93, 94).

With the return of Alicia's family to England, however, for the interment of her mother's body in the family vault, all this petty brooding gives way to something more disturbing. One begins to catch glimpses of an instability in Alicia's character that makes her perceptions not only of herself and other people, but also of many

ensuing events highly suspect. Standing with Caroline before the vault where their father's two wives lie side by side, she experiences in "a sort of dream" the morbid "fancy" that, some day, she and Caroline "might be also beloved of one, and lie like these together" (95). A pivotal moment in many ways, the passage provides the first evidence that Alicia is not the practical woman she pretends to be any more than her sister is the helpless, shallow child Alicia likes to think her. Indeed, it is Caroline who rouses Alicia from her reverie and leads her by the hand from the gravesite. From this point on, the diary which has begun as a vent for Alicia's frustrations becomes increasingly a vehicle for her fantasies. Hardy's manipulation of the dramatic monologue is not perfect, but he manages it cleverly enough to suggest strongly that much of the melodrama that dominates the rest of the story takes place only within the diary itself, and that Alicia spins her own imaginative interpretation around events, particularly around those involving Charles de la Feste.

Ironically, Alicia's attitude toward the young man exactly matches that which she earlier condemned in her sister, but which Caroline herself never exhibits: "She sees him irradiated with glories such as never appertained and never will appertain to any man" (91). Moreover, like Ella Marchmill, she raises this ideal romantic figure from the flimsy evidence of a handsome face in a photograph.¹⁵ It is she who is depressed over Caroline's maturely considered postponement of the wedding, and she who is so giddily excited over Charles's first visit that she cannot perform her "duty" as the eldest to greet him when he arrives. Instead, she spies on the lovers from the landing and jealously imagines the details of their reunion in the drawing room. Having exchanged but one long glance with the handsome stranger, she

¹⁵ Brady notes this similarity, too, and also sees Alicia as a precursor of Edith Harnham in her "jealous possessiveness toward Caroline and simultaneous appropriation of the younger woman's lover" (174).

retreats to her diary in undisguised self-pity, writing, "It is all I am fit for." Such a grim conclusion, however, is apparently more than Alicia can bear, for she begins at once to appropriate, at least in her imagination, the love affair rightfully her sister's. She looks at Charles and is "moonstruck," talks with him of art and seems inwardly "another woman." After one evening's acquaintance, she speaks of "understand[ing] him" and imagines that he is disappointed with Caroline's inferior intellectual and emotional capacity (100); after a full day, she finds their affinity so strong that she must work consciously at "not occupy[ing] his attention to the exclusion of Caroline" (101); after two days, during the walk in Wherryborne Wood, she finds him immune to Caroline's attractions and well on his way to a "wild passion" for herself (103).

While Alicia insists that she and Charles have been irresistibly bound by love "at first sight" (106), several details suggest that the passion is a figment of her imagination and any attentiveness on his part mere courtesy to the rather obtrusive sister of his betrothed. Letting slip a rare hint of another character's response to her, Alicia records her discovery that "Caroline had alluded so slightly to [Alicia] in her conversation and letters that [Charles] had not realized [her] presence in the house" before his arrival (101). That information certainly explains Charles's long curious glances at Alicia the first night, but makes one wonder why Caroline kept her sister virtually a secret. If the current situation is the customary one, as seems likely, the younger girl may simply have been resisting her sister's suffocating possessiveness and envy. (One recalls that her early letters to Alicia revealed a conspicuous reluctance to share detailed information about her lover.) Thus, Caroline's silence during the trio's walk in Wherryborne Wood may be frustration over Alicia's envious domination of the conversation rather than the vacuous docility Alicia would have it. By now, the reader so doubts the soundness of Alicia's judgment, that even if he

accepts the basic plot events as true, he cannot attach the same significance she does to the "series of slight . . . actions" she interprets as proof of Charles's passion for her. Even his supposed caress of her photograph is suspect, since he is standing with his back toward her at the time. With so little to substantiate Alicia's version thus far of her hero's sudden change of allegiance, her account of his "declaration" (104) deals the final blow to her credibility. Even in his weakest stories, Hardy never made his characters spout such unmitigated absurdities of sentiment as fill this speech:

it is you I love; my sentiment towards your sister is one of affection too, but protective, tutelary affection--no more. . . . I have fought against this discovery night and day; but it cannot be concealed. . . . At the moment my eyes beheld you on that day of my arrival, I said, "This is the woman for whom my manhood has waited." (105)

The declaration and ensuing dialogue are the stuff of bad romance novels and surely have little substance outside the pages of Alicia's diary. But one line following this passage rings absolutely true: Alicia yearns desperately for "the compulsion of a god, and the self-sacrifice of a martyr" (106). Because she has no real hope of trading places with her sister, this is precisely the two-fold identity Alicia tries to assume through the rest of the story. She briefly escapes her dull, impotent life by becoming the god-like director of her own private melodrama, reveling in her power over the other actors even as she plays her own martyr-like role of ensuring her lover's loyalty to her sister. Whether Charles actually cools toward Caroline or simply ends his visit according to prior arrangements--thus eliminating a "broken heart" as the cause of Caroline's illness--their subsequent difficulties are clearly caused by Alicia's interference. She first delays informing Charles of her sister's grave illness until Caroline is almost beyond help, and then revives her through the romantic ploy of the secret, unlawful marriage forbidden by their father and agreed to, against his better judgment, by the guilt-stricken Charles.

The gross impracticality of the deception, however, is almost the ruin of Caroline after all, since Alicia perversely withholds the truth from her even after she has recovered and grown anxious to join her "husband." In the effect of the revelations necessitated by Caroline's flight to Italy, one sees at last Alicia's true relationship to all the other characters. Both Caroline and her father respond to Alicia's fanciful manipulations with the natural indignation of people too actively engaged in living their own lives to welcome the attempts of another to live vicariously through them or at their expense. Being "decidedly *de trop*" with them (122), Alicia desperately rides out her fantasy with Charles. Just as the false marriage scheme provided her some power over his actions, a way to keep him in her life a little longer, so do her renewed efforts to help him overcome Caroline's objections to his part in the scheme and persuade her to marry him in earnest give her a last taste of the bittersweet illusion of control and martyrdom on which she thrives.

Ironically, the sheer weight of detail and incident in the last half of the story almost lulls one into accepting Alicia's fantasy romance with Charles, but Hardy carefully qualifies her version of events again at the end when it seems that the young man may really have committed suicide for love of her on the very day he has married her sister. The only evidence of such an intention on his part lies in his supposed warning to Alicia in Italy that he would "not answer for the consequences" of going through with the marriage as purely a gesture of honor (122). This doubtful incident, however, Hardy counters with a shower of contradictions: no one but Alicia "seems to observe [the ghost-like] strangeness in [Charles's] mien" before the wedding; and only she perceives anything unusual in his fatal trip across the meads to give a last gift and word of farewell to the landscape-painter he had befriended. She persuades herself that he would not have taken the gift himself on such a day;

but a personal visit actually seems the most natural course, considering his plans to leave England that day with Caroline. The final ironic undercutting of Alicia's credibility, however, is the almost comical revelation in an entry dated five years later that Caroline has married the young scripture-reader whom Alicia had persuaded, supposedly as an admirer of hers who "would do anything" for her (110), to perform the false marriage between Caroline and Charles. This latest development, though, suggests that Higham may have been Caroline's admirer all along, lured into the scheme, like Charles, by hopes of saving her life. How better to cast doubt on Alicia's whole story than by hinting that she has, not once, but twice, through extraordinary imaginativeness and subterfuge, sought to appropriate her sister's lovers and thereby acquire some portion of the romantic identity she covets.

Of all of Hardy's imaginative women, Alicia is the least sympathetic, for she is the only one for whom there is no apparent social or private obstacle depriving her of the chance to become the person she wants to be. She is not, perhaps, the family favorite, but neither is she personally abused or denied the basic privileges Caroline enjoys: she has her dowry and admits (ironically, considering her present bitterness) that she has been more often away from home than Caroline. Moreover, her instant, indiscriminate infatuation with Charles suggests that her happiness does not depend necessarily upon her securing him rather than another. In short, her retreat into fantasy seems inspired by little beyond her own eccentric and rather peevish nature. In this respect, Alicia has much in common with the drifters, who lock themselves into unwanted experiences and identities by perversely neglecting opportunities they actually possess for achieving in reality the lives they desire. In fact, in her complex means of coping with life, Alicia exhibits characteristics of all three of Hardy's relatively passive character types, as she not only tries to escape her

empty existence through an imaginary love affair, but also convinces herself that she is a stoic, willing to sacrifice personal happiness for the sake of those she loves. Her actual selfish manipulation of those people, unwitting pawns of her fantasy, even links her to an extent to Hardy's most ruthlessly aggressive character types.

Her very complexity, however, keeps Alicia from eliciting any heated denunciation, or indeed, any feeling much stronger than exasperation, for the effects of her interference. As with all of his characters, except, perhaps, for such outright villains as Lord Uplandtowers, Hardy's presentation of Alicia reveals his "large tolerance for the mistakes and false steps to which instinct and human weakness lead his people" (Weygandt 212). Even his cruelest manipulators and his weakest-willed drifters and imaginative escapists demand at least the reader's objective consideration of the pressures, fears, and events that move them to act as they do. Indeed, the whole purpose behind Hardy's continual development of the same basic character types is to promote that kind of humane understanding of what he saw as the most prevalent social, environmental, and emotional dilemmas facing humanity, and of the responses those dilemmas inspire. By focusing on a few broad, familiar types of humanity, he sheds light on the universal qualities of human experience.

In the process, however, Hardy produces an astonishing array of convincing individuals within each type, all with distinctive sets of circumstances designed to set unique personalities into motion and illustrate, continually, something fresh within the general, but complex patterns of possible responses to life's challenges. The five character types discussed in this and the preceding chapter represent psychological dispositions and behavioral approaches to life that encompass almost every major character in the short stories, yet one finds among those characters no artificial replications. Certainly, there are, in each category, striking examples of characters

who bear almost no resemblance to their general counterparts, so extraordinary are their personal embodiments of their types' basic traits: figures like the eerie Mop Ollamoor, the perversely ambitious Squire Petrick, and the all but emotionless Baptista Trewthen. But, even among those who demonstrate the closest parallels in temperament or background, there are distinct, memorable differences. The same grief that kills Ella Marchmill is endured poignantly by Edith Harnham, even though Edith loses a real lover and has no children to relieve her stark life afterwards. Sam Hobson and Shadrach Jolliffe stoically endure disappointments in love, but Jolliffe alone achieves not merely resignation, but contentment as well, despite a life (and death) spent serving the greed of an uncharitable woman. And those cold daughters of privilege, Maria Icenway and the Marchioness of Stonehenge--despite their mutual prejudice, ambition, and ready abandonment of inconvenient husbands--stand distinctly separate by virtue of their startlingly grotesque schemes regarding the potential benefit or liability their first husbands represent.

What finally sets Hardy's "typical" characters apart from one another and makes them credible, unique human beings is the choices they make from day to day and, especially, in moments of crisis; for it is individual choices that determine individual experience and destiny. Like Hardy's characters, most real human beings are conditioned very early by heredity, environment, and social training to respond to most events in their lives in one basic way (stoically, imaginatively, ambitiously, etc.), which way depending largely on the perceptions they develop of their relative strength, rights, and responsibilities in the world. Those crucial self-perceptions ultimately dictate every conscious and unconscious choice people make, along with their resulting courses of action or inaction--from how they deal with the present circumstances of their environments (physical, social, familial) to how well they

anticipate and manage the effects of evolving circumstances. It is because self-perception influences confidence and judgment so strongly--affecting how willing people are to act when confronted with a choice--that Hardy's characters split so consistently into typical groups. They are merely reflecting human nature when they follow the dictates of their individual self-perceptions to become either aggressors who seize control of their circumstances or drifters who allow events to control them; stoics who accept their situations without retreating from life or escapists who resist the effort of facing choices in the real world. Hardly simplistic stereotypes, Hardy's characters continually demonstrate the real difficulties of making effective choices in a world filled with capricious forces, not the least of which are an individual's own passions, fears, and impulses. Directing one's destiny is no straightforward affair of managing a well-considered succession of corresponding options and choices; and, beneath their typical similarities, Hardy's characters consistently show that, beyond the complications caused by unforeseeable "cosmic" coincidences, even such intangible influences as "human intentions or omissions or imprudences [can] materially affect chances" and, thus, ironically redirect fate (Morrell 49). Close study of Hardy's character types suggests, naturally enough, that life is most difficult for those people who are most emotionally and intellectually sensitive to the ironies of their existence, and considerably easier for those whose natures neither require personal fulfillment through the pursuit of a dream nor allow for any significant concern for the plight of the people around them. The message in both instances, however, is the same: running constantly, implicitly, beneath the conduct of every character in his stories is Hardy's emphatic belief in the necessity of effort, of an unceasing attempt to choose and act responsibly and compassionately so that human lives may at least attain dignity, if not happiness.

CHAPTER 7

IMAGERY: IRONIC EMBLEMS AND MOTIFS

The truths of human nature and experience which Hardy develops in his short stories by means of all the major patterns of character, setting, narrative perspective, and plot discussed in the preceding chapters consistently receive an additional, powerful emphasis from his ironic use of imagery. The thematic bolstering effect of the latter device is hardly surprising since, in every genre he worked in, it was "Hardy's 'idiosyncrasy' (to use his own word) to give visible form, even if only in the mind's eye, to abstract qualities such as human emotion and human values" (Hooi 89). The effect is all the more impressive in the short stories, however, in that they are generally uncharacteristically spare in terms of both symbolic and purely pictorial imagery. With the exception of an occasional descriptive tour de force, as in the opening pages of "A Tryst at an Ancient Earthwork," Hardy tends in the stories to focus mainly on isolated, commonplace details which, though they often acquire symbolic significance, rarely carry the kind of dense symbolism one associates with many of the novels and poems. These details do not so much bear the thematic weight of Hardy's stories as provide a subtle punctuation of their salient points, simultaneously helping to delineate character, emphasize irony, unify action and structure, and reinforce theme.

Because they are not overshadowed by a mass of intricate descriptive or symbolic detail, even the most ordinary images in the stories can become, under Hardy's "idiosyncratic" management, striking emblems of the ironic chances and choices that determine his characters' lives. The very ordinariness of the images, in fact, often lends a crucial air of credibility to the extraordinary events and

coincidences of Hardy's plots, even as the contrast imbues the objects themselves with ironic significance beyond their literal value. Time and again, one finds with the characters in the stories that "common objects can assume roles of great potency when the mind and feelings are assailed by exceptional experiences."¹ Almost always, the images that have the most potent effect on the characters' psyches and linger the most impressively in the reader's mind are those which create a haunting sense of finality--of an end to the protagonists' dreams or ambitions and a bitter realization of the place to which their actions and decisions have brought them. Accordingly, most of the thematically significant images appear near the ends of their stories or at other critical points in the plots where they can best reflect the essence of the characters' personalities, the ironies of their situations, and the consequences of their choices.

The recognizable patterns in the imagery of Hardy's stories appear mainly in this habitual manner of positioning the images at climactic points and of using them to emphasize meaning, rather than in a tedious repetition of the same images from story to story. Usually, the emblematic details are isolated, single images drawn naturally from the unique context of the plot in hand, from which specific context alone they derive their more than ordinary significance. When the same basic image does appear in more than one story--as occurs with the frequent manifestation of unexpected features in a familiar face, and with the use of windows to concentrate attention on important emotional and social predicaments--it is always given a unique twist to suit the context of each new story. For the sake of dramatic effect,

¹ Page, "Hardy and 'the world of little things'" 130. Page's article discusses this effect exclusively in connection with Hardy's novels and a few of his poems, but there are clearly many occasions in the short stories as well when "an object is associated with a moment of intense feeling or a state of mind abnormally heightened" (129).

most of the images appear only once during their stories, but these two recurrent image patterns occasionally recur within stories as well, to create subtle, but powerfully symbolic and superbly individualized motifs. Indeed, Hardy's imagery creates so individual an effect wherever it appears in the stories that it hardly seems a repetitious pattern at all, and though it is less extensively used than the patterns within the other devices, it provides some of the stories' most inspired touches.

Of less thematic importance than most are the touches provided by an array of images, scattered through several stories, that capture various country superstitions and folk traditions of the sort Hardy was so fond of preserving. Though interesting and extraordinarily economical in their contextual implications, these details generally do more to convey a background atmosphere of belief appropriate to the rural settings of their stories than to reflect analytically upon the flaws or choices of the major characters. An exception to the general effect is the pivotal image in "The Withered Arm" (WT) of Conjuror Trendle's water and egg white mixture, which performs both functions. The very introduction of the man and his strange method of revealing to Gertrude Lodge the identity of her enemy quickly sketches in the essential mood of a time and place in which conjurors are "professional mediators between supernatural powers and men, practitioners of the arts of divination, folk-medicine, and magic in a way approved, though not openly countenanced, by the community in which they live" (Firor 86).² That the once-practical Gertrude deliberately seeks the assistance of such a man, however, and demonstrates sufficient faith in his magic actually to discern Rhoda Brook's face in

² In a note made in 1872, sixteen years before the first publication of "The Withered Arm," Hardy describes a real man, "called a Conjuror," who lived in Blackmoor Vale and was said to practice the very art of making one's enemy "rise in a glass of water" that Trendle uses to assist Gertrude. Thomas Hardy's Notebooks, ed. Evelyn Hardy (New York: St. Martin's, 1955) 40.

the cloudy egg white marks a crucial stage in the evolution of her character and destiny. Driven to desperation by her husband's disgust at her marred beauty, Gertrude has gradually come to share the superstitious views of the local villagers; and this first credulous visit to Trendle's marks the beginning of nothing less than the complete surrender of her independent self to the shallow notions others have of her identity--a surrender which leads inexorably to her death after her wild attempt in the Casterbridge jail to fulfill those expectations.

Most of the images of rural superstitions do not afford such specific insights into characters' lives, but rather, focus significantly on their general attitudes toward death. As the inevitable fate of all human beings and the one chance event over which (short of suicide) they can exert no control, death is the ultimate mystery of experience after the question of existence itself; and it is naturally the source of innumerable cultural rituals and superstitions. Moreover, in such a world as Hardy shows being driven by random forces, the "supernatural detail, the rural superstition and folk belief, stand in for the missing Providential direction. Without Providence, everything contributes to the longing for significance" (Brooks 17). Hardy illustrates this basic human need most clearly in the brief sketch narrated by the seedsman's father in A Few Crusted Characters. "The Superstitious Man's Story" is by far Hardy's most concentrated presentation of superstitious folklore and imagery in the short stories; indeed, it is little more than a carefully arranged series of omens, rituals, and uncanny events. But while the story of William Privett's death does, in itself, seem "negligible," the tale's interest does not lie entirely--or even primarily--as some critics contend, in the various superstitions recorded (Quinn 75), but rather, in "the manner in which they are believed" (Brady 145). As the title suggests, the narrator's own character and beliefs are the real focal points of the

sketch. Though he seems to be regarded with mere kindly tolerance by the other passengers in Burthen's van, who simply let him have his say and then go on without comment, the old man "is a spokesman for a particular rural attitude, eager to see a pattern in the mystifying course of life and to replace an instinctive fear of death by a fascination with its inevitable but always startling suddenness" (Brady 145-46).

The story of Privett's death, one must remember, is the old man's contribution to the nostalgic conversation in the van; the careful arrangement of its details and interpretation of its omens and eye-witness accounts are the products not of omniscient narration, but of his own superstitious need to impose order and significance on the least predictable of human experiences.

Every detail of the events surrounding William's death is thus marshalled into a pattern of imagery that creates a sense of reassuring closure as it traces the crossing of William's being from the corporeal into the spiritual world. From the various omens that hint at his impending death to the "visible" departure of his soul from his body and its apparent reunion with the soul of his dead son, the tale's imagery speaks emphatically of the human desire to know human life and its struggles to be part of a larger, ultimately discernible design. The universality of that desire is captured neatly in the merging of pagan and Christian rituals and images throughout the story. It is a church bell that ostensibly foretells "a death in the parish" by "going heavy" in the sexton's hands the Sunday before William's passing (216). And the church is again the focal point when, on "Old Midsummer Eve," a susceptible group of young people gather to watch "the faint shapes of all the folk in the parish who are going to be at death's door within the year" enter there and either come out again if they are destined to recover or remain within if they are doomed to die (218). The readiness of these young folk to see something on that

significant night, and of Betty Privett herself to believe William's spirit one of the "faint shapes" witnessed at the church after his apparent ghostly departure from their house, clearly informs the narrator's own superstitious attitude toward the remaining events attached to William's death. The twin images of the "great white millers' soul" moth that flutters away from William's open mouth in the mead³ and of the supposedly simultaneous sighting of William himself, "looking very pale and odd," at the spring where his only child had drowned (219) are connected with obvious conviction in the narrator's mind with the flight of the man's soul at the precise moment of his death. The implicit symbolism of the two events is irresistible to him, especially that of the latter, which suggests--through the soul's final earthly appearance in the very spot William most shunned in life--confirmation of a realm beyond the physical in which the sorrows and hardships of earthly existence are set right and made meaningful.

It is interesting that Hardy does not make more of this longing for proof of an afterlife in this and other stories which include images of death and superstition. Instead, most of those images partake largely of the same non-religious mood of morbid enthusiasm exhibited by the youthful watchers on Old Midsummer Eve, who are half-fearful and half-titillated at the prospect of seeing a doomed spirit. In this respect at least, in his tales of superstition, Hardy drew not only upon the rural folk of his childhood memories and adult observations, but upon a part of his own character as well, the part which once told William Archer that he would "cheerfully have given ten years of [his] life to see a ghost--an authentic, indubitable spectre"

³ In 1894, Hardy referred to this image (and to his use of such details in general) in a letter to Edward Clodd: "Certainly, all that about the 'miller's-soul' is, or was till lately, an actual belief down here. It was told me years ago by an old woman. I may say, once for all, that every superstition, custom, &c., described in my novels may be depended on as true records of the same (whatever merit in folklorists' eyes they may have as such)--& not inventions of mine" (CL 2: 54).

(Real Conversations 37). There is ultimately more of the pagan than of the Christian behind the cultural superstitions Hardy works into his stories, especially in the case of such memorably gruesome details as the unconscious summoning of Rhoda Brook's incubus; the chilling oath sworn over the murdered man's body at the Devil's Door; and the staking of the suicide's corpse in an unmarked grave at the crossroad between Sidlinch and Chalk-Newton.

Not all the telling images of superstition are this grisly and melodramatic, of course. In "Interlopers at the Knap" (WT), one finds what Ruth Firor calls "the most beautiful custom connected with death": "Telling the bees" (67). On the night of her wayward son's death within hours of his return home, Mrs. Hall goes into her garden to tap at each beehive to "tell" the bees of the death in her household, "under the belief that if this were not done the bees themselves would pine away and perish during the ensuing year" (WT 199). Firor traces this belief to a Germanic superstition that the bees would "die of a broken heart, refuse to make honey, or fly away" if not wakened and told of the death (67), and mentions variations on the custom, common throughout Scotland and England, in which funeral cake was fed to the bees and the hives themselves hooded with crape and lifted as the body was taken away for burial (68). Charles Darton's instant recognition of and unobtrusive respect for Mrs. Hall's gesture helps to demonstrate how deeply rooted such customs were in the "Wessex" countryside, but the real impact Hardy achieves through this image which signifies the end of Philip Hall's life is its subtle, ironic reflection of yet another death in the household--the death of Sally Hall's dreams, as she faces unexpected romantic competition with her now widowed sister-in-law. Though not intensely symbolic, the detail lends to its story, as the preceding examples of superstition do to theirs, something more than mere local color.

On a few rare occasions, Hardy includes an image which portrays with perfect accuracy some common superstition, but which fails to produce any effective atmospheric or thematic impact at all, simply because its symbolism is so blatant as to make it a cliché. Such is the case with the grandfather clock which supposedly foretells James Bellston's death when it falls for no apparent reason and stops on the eve of Nicholas and Christine's wedding in "The Waiting Supper" (CM). As with the sarcastic whisper of the waterfall over the exact spot where the dead man lies in the Sallows, near where Nic and Christine meet almost daily for the next seventeen years, the irony is too overt. Far more effective than either of these images is the understated, "ominous arrival of Bellston's portmanteau," which--in a masterstroke of inspiration--Hardy "substituted for the appearance of the man himself and his talk with Christine" when he revised the story for collection into A Changed Man (Purdy, Bibliog. Study 152). This emblem of Bellston's presence and awareness of the wedding plans increases suspense for the reader and dread for Christine to an extent which the falling clock cannot possibly match, just as the long unexplained failure of the man to follow in the wake of his luggage increases the irony of the lovers' wasted years far beyond the power of the waterfall's hissing mockery.

The contrasting effectiveness of these images in "The Waiting Supper" points to a significant characteristic of Hardy's short stories in general: even when those stories include his most charming or intriguing reflections of rural superstitions about death, Hardy's imagery shows him to have been far more interested artistically in the workings of chance and individual choice during a person's life than in the final random event of death itself and whatever mysteries might lie beyond it. His most thematically powerful images focus attention not on strange omens and rituals, but on the more immediately tangible and intimate relationship

between an individual and the ordinary "objects that surround him: a relationship not fixed and stable but apt to be modified by present experience as surely as it involves a past that is also continuously present" (Page, "little things" 134).

Intricately associated with Bellston's luggage, for example, arriving as it does at so critical a juncture, are the simultaneous recollections of his past intrusion between Nic and Christine, of their own fateful indecisiveness, and of Bellston's cruelty as a husband, as well as tense expectations of future malice and blasted hopes. In the same way, by silently announcing the unwelcome presence of a figure from the past, another commonplace object, quite harmless in itself, acquires an ominous associative significance in "A Mere Interlude" (CM) and contributes grotesquely to Baptista Trewthen's nervous torment at the start of her marriage to David Heddegan. The sight of Charles Stow's hat hanging behind the door of the hotel room she and Heddegan have secured in Pen-zephyr tells the horrified girl all too clearly that the "gentleman" who has obligingly removed to the next room to leave free for the honeymooning couple the more desirable one with a view is none other than the drowned corpse of her secret first husband (287). As a visible reminder of Baptista's rashness in marrying both her husbands and of her own responsibility--through the apathetic submission of her will to theirs--for the gruesome circumstances in which she spends her wedding night between them, the detail points toward those ironic emblems which Hardy uses so superbly in many other stories to stress the "power of actions which do not remain passive in the past, but start up to drive the process to its appointed end" (Brooks 147).

Though generally presented with the matter-of-fact brevity of understatement, these images provide a powerful commentary on the ironic influence of past actions and choices on the present lives and probable futures of the characters

involved. In most cases, they focus attention on some bitterly oppressive loss or failure brought on by the characters' own basic approaches to life. But they do so in ways both unexpected and quite moving. Occasionally, when a story begins in medias res, such an image appears very early so as to emphasize from the outset the essential attitudes and circumstances that drive a character toward disappointment or failure. In "The Son's Veto" (LLJ), for example, one is introduced to Sophy Twycott's character by means of the startling opening description from behind of her luxuriant "nut-brown hair"--its long locks, wondrously "braided and twisted and coiled like the rushes of a basket, compos[ing] a rare, if somewhat barbaric, example of ingenious art." Before one ever sees Sophy's face or learns anything of her lonely situation, one receives a hint, through the narrator's lament over the daily "reckless waste of [this] successful fabrication" (35), of the larger, corresponding waste of Sophy's life in London. Managing the intricate arrangement of her hair is Sophy's own accomplishment; but, as the reader soon discovers, it is her only one--both the sole, sad occupation of her time in a life given over to a husband and son who neither need nor respect her, and her only claim to the ladylike elegance expected of one in her social position. Worse yet, in its "somewhat barbaric" ornateness, the coiffure actually falls something short of genuine elegance and thus betrays ironically the gentle village girl's fundamental unsuitability for the role into which her own too docile nature has unhappily cast her.

Similarly, the early image in "Enter a Dragoon" (CM) of Selina Paddock's mummified wedding cake testifies to the pitiable stagnation of another life tyrannized by external expectations which it can satisfy only in the most superficial ways. Although Selina has "religiously and lovingly preserved" the cake "as a testimony to her intentional respectability," her continued, unquestioning devotion

to a faithless man for the sake of that respectability succeeds only in suspending her whole life sterilely in the same ambiguous--ultimately meaningless--moment recorded by the revered object itself. It is significant that the latter is presented in decidedly unromantic terms denoting death and an essential non-relevance to present time and experience: the symbolic treasure is

a great plum-cake guarded as if it were a curiosity by a glass shade of the kind seen in museums--square, with a wooden back like those enclosing stuffed specimens of rare feather or fur. . . . This relic was now as dry as a brick, and seemed to belong to a pre-existent civilization. Till quite recently, Selina had been in the habit of pausing before it daily, and recalling the accident whose consequences had thrown a shadow over her life. . . . (149)

Because she accepts the community's right to judge her situation (and Sergeant-Major Clark's to prolong it), Selina never truly escapes the oppressiveness of that shadow. The object she sets up as a shrine is not worthy even symbolically of her devotions. Like the man to whom it links her, it offers no real hope of a dignified, fulfilling life, but merely the temporary relief of self-delusion. Its early suggestion of personal stagnation is insistently borne out by the remainder of the story and reflected especially poignantly by the closing image of Selina's carefully tended ivy being casually uprooted by Clark's legitimate widow--an image which brings home to the heroine at last the mortifying waste entailed in her pretended claim to a man and to a state of social grace unavailable to her almost from the outset.

Not surprisingly, the majority of Hardy's most potent emblematic images appear, like the ivy scene in "Enter a Dragoon," in the final pages of their stories, rather than near the beginning. One is naturally better able to appreciate the ironic implications of surrounding objects after having seen the characters themselves in action for some time. But what is most significant about Hardy's placement of these late images is that he does not introduce them, as one might expect, at the instant of

a plot's climax, but rather, after a brief interval, during which reflection has set in for both reader and characters. The critical choices have by then already been made, so that the appearance of the emblematic objects merely emphasizes the ironic effects of those choices and leads the central characters inexorably toward bitter self-recognition. In many of the best stories, in fact, such objects become the very medium of that recognition, presenting painful reminders of all the mistakes the characters have made, from their too-hasty actions and errors in judgment to the viable opportunities they have overlooked and lost.

Probably the best-known and most frequently cited image in this group is the small silver-poplar that shimmers in the breeze at the end of "A Tragedy of Two Ambitions" (LLI). Grown from their father's walking-stick at the river's edge near where he drowned, the little tree is a living reminder to Joshua and Cornelius Halborough of the guilty part they played in their parent's death. Unremarkable in itself, the sapling rises from the scene of their crime to symbolize for them the "active power of what is absent" (Brooks 146-47). The brothers have rid themselves of the humiliating presence and malicious machinations of their father, but not of the oppressive influence he wields over their lives. The desperate shame and resentment he provoked in them while he lived are merely transmuted after his death into an even more absolute, grinding state of misery by their guilt over having allowed him to drown. They can enjoy neither their long awaited freedom nor the personal advancement it makes possible, because the way in which they have attained both--forever kept visibly before them in the shape of the little poplar at Narrobourne--has made them wretchedly conscious of their own failings.

Ironically, however, the brother who should feel the significance of the image most powerfully is actually the one who sees it and himself the least clearly. Having

had the presence of mind to plant the walking-stick in the sedge in the first place to hide it after the drowning, Joshua is, throughout the ordeal, both the one most active in the crime and subsequent deception and the one least moved by their moral implications. Without his interference, Cornelius would have acted upon his own natural impulse, and their father would have been saved. And though Joshua certainly officiates with some horror at the funeral service when the millwright's unidentifiable remains are finally discovered, it is Cornelius who recognizes the depth both of their guilt in the death of their father and of their hypocrisy in pursuing careers in the Church while harboring such corrosive resentment in their hearts. For Cornelius, the silver-poplar represents real enlightenment, an excruciating awareness that they "read [their] Hebrews to little account" during their early studies and that, as Christians and priests, they should have "endured the cross, despising the shame" their father brought upon them in the eyes of the world (105).⁴

Joshua never quite gets beyond his own pride to perceive his past errors in this light. His conscience is disturbed by memories of their crime; but, unlike Cornelius, he owes his gloomy thoughts of self-annihilation at the end of the story not to shame and dissatisfaction with his own character but to bitter disillusionment with the efficacy of his chosen means of social advancement. At best, the Church and its values have never claimed more than an intellectual endorsement from

⁴ Cornelius's association here of the poplar with the biblical text he and Joshua had painstakingly translated in the opening scene not only unifies the story superbly but, as Brady explains, also "serves to assimilate a whole range of [biblical] allusions." The Epistle to the Hebrews "distinguishes between the priesthoods of the old and new covenants, and refers to 'Aaron's rod that budded' (9: 4), the symbol of the House of Levi, the tribe chosen by God to assist the Jewish priests (Num. 17)." Cornelius recognizes the symbolism and thinks chastenedly of the "New Testament priest who must distinguish himself, like Christ," with endurance and humility; but Joshua--"whose name is that of the successor of Moses and Aaron who led the Israelites into the Promised Land"--remains ironically oblivious to the fact that he has "failed in his priestly vocation" (118).

Joshua, but the social hierarchy, with all its prejudices and inequities, ironically commands his allegiance to the end. Though momentarily shaken by his recognition of the flowering tree, Joshua gives no sign of abandoning his lifelong determination to protect the social reputations of his siblings and himself. In fact, to preserve, above all, his sister's dignity as the foremost lady in Narrobourne--the only truly satisfying achievement of all his ambitions--he makes of his heart an "iron-cased safe" in which to lock away forever the secret mutely recorded by the tree beside the weir (104). Hardy's typical use of this tiny emblem to emphasize the point at which his characters' lives slip, in their own estimation, utterly from the realm of possibility and hope to that of resignation and despair is particularly interesting in that it originally had no place in the story. As Purdy notes, the image of the walking-stick grown to a sapling was "an afterthought" which did not appear in the serial form of "A Tragedy of Two Ambitions" prior to the story's collection into Life's Little Ironies (Bibliog. Study 81). Its ultimate inclusion, however, pointedly illustrates Hardy's keen sense of the emotional and artistic power even the most commonplace details could assume when strategically placed.

Less frequently discussed than the silver-poplar, but equally effective in its placement, for example, is the image of the silver-framed looking-glass Humphrey Gould presents to Phyllis Grove near the end of "The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion" (WT). Positioned between the twin crises of Gould's unpropitious return and Matthäus Tina's execution, the mirror takes on a two-fold significance for the heroine. On the most immediate level, it is "an emblem of Gould's falseness to Phyllis," a "sop" and a "bribe" offered (Brady 20), without the least apology for his faithlessness, in hopes of enlisting her aid in reconciling his father to the secret bride for whom he has jilted Phyllis herself. On a subtler level, however, the very nature

of the object itself, with its uncompromising reflective powers, emphasizes symbolically the transformation occurring at this moment within Phyllis's perception of her life. Having nobly chosen honor over happiness the night before, she now finds her sacrifice cruelly unnecessary and her trust in Gould grossly unjustified; she who once had her choice between two suitors is left with none, and the mirror reflects the truth of her situation with appalling clarity. Even before the shock of Tina's needless death forces her to confront the harshest truth of all, the looking-glass initiates in Phyllis an introspective habit that characterizes her for the rest of her life and gives her the strength and wisdom to endure her lonely fate. Just as the mirror shows her the outward effects of her grief when she looks into it, so does the crass, disillusioning motive behind the gift open her eyes to the role her own naive, escapist nature has played in creating the occasion for grief. When Humphrey Gould turns out to be less than the "gentlemanly fellow" she has believed him in her secluded world (48), Phyllis begins to regard her affair with Matthäus Tina in a somewhat more realistic light as well. She spends her quiet hours only "half regretting that she had not gone away" with him and realizes that, if he were successful in returning to his own country and curing his homesickness "amongst his own countrywomen, he would possibly soon forget her" (63). Though her devotion to the radiant soldier's memory never falters, Phyllis does gradually stop seeking to escape her loneliness through romantic illusions. She bravely faces the realities which the symbolic mirror reflects back at her and becomes, in time, the independent, dignified woman the narrator has known and respected--a woman who has analyzed her misfortunes and derived from the effort neither the despair and bitterness of the Halborough brothers nor the shame the gossiping townspeople might wish upon her, but simply the modest resignation of one who accepts

responsibility for her past choices without indignantly demanding the same of those who have contributed to her suffering.

Such nobility of spirit is not at all the response to misfortune one sees in another of Hardy's dreamers, Joanna Jolliffe of "To Please His Wife" (LLI); nevertheless, the latter does experience a harrowing moment of self-recognition when she, too, is confronted unexpectedly with sobering, physical evidence of the effects her own choices and unrealistic desires have on those she loves. The chalked words of farewell which her husband and sons leave "upon the sloping face of the bureau," to avoid causing her the greater pain of an emotional leave-taking, illustrate Hardy's use of emblematic imagery at its subtle best. Utterly commonplace and credible in their literal plot function, the scrawled words carry such a profound emotional value for Joanna--especially her sons' innocent "Good-bye, mother!" (156)--that they become precious symbols of those she has selfishly put at risk and, as such, help to cast an increasingly oppressive shadow over the last pages of the story. From her first glimpse of the chalked message, Joanna is achingly conscious of her "sin" in having made her family "the slaves of her ambition" (159), and to preserve this last visible link with them, which she cannot bear to rub out, she penitently turns the inscribed bureau to face the wall. Without a trace of such overt symbolism as describes the "shrine" Selina Paddock maintains for her lost one, Hardy makes this simple act of Joanna's effortlessly express the complex mixture of guilt, love, fear, and hope that grips her from the moment of her loved ones' departure.

As the time reasonably allowed for the voyage wears on and finally expires, however, the torment Joanna suffers is made all the more severe in that she lacks the strength of character to face her guilt without flinching. As always, recognition of and willful blindness toward her own faults work in her almost simultaneously;

she is caught in an endless, wretched oscillation between heartrending self-incrimination and self-protective optimism and denial. At first, the jealous ambition which persuaded her to risk her boys on a second voyage sustains her through her fear. Anticipated triumph over her imagined competitor, Emily Lester, reconciles her to current hardship and loneliness. Then, as it grows ever less likely that the voyagers will return, Joanna transfers to Emily more and more of the blame she cannot bear to acknowledge as fully her own, until hatred and grief push her to the very edge of madness. Like her gesture in turning the bureau to protect the chalked farewell, however, Joanna's frantic search for her family through the wintry streets of the final scene attests to her ultimately inescapable, crippling sense not only of her culpability in their deaths, but also of the bitter irony that she has sacrificed in them far greater riches than a successful voyage could ever have brought her.

Recognition too late of the value of things lost or recklessly cast aside is one of the most insistent thematic patterns running through Hardy's fiction. And it is, in large part, subtle individual images like those discussed above which, in the short stories especially, make one register the truth of that human experience--always painfully surprising to its victims--before any awareness of artistic repetition by Hardy. The same effect holds true, however, even in those instances when Hardy uses the same basic image in more than one story, or even several times within the same story. The repetitions are plain enough; but, because Hardy gives his images a unique symbolic resonance each time he takes them up, the reader is always guided foremost to an appreciation of the specific ironies of circumstance and character thus emphasized in any tale.

Even the most conspicuous image pattern in the stories assumes a fresh, intriguing significance with each appearance: Hardy's overt use of human faces as a

symbolic "index of both character and blood" highlights some of his most original and unusual tales (Guerard 106). Many of these stories turn on the ironic recognition in a pair of faces of some unexpected blood-relationship. Sometimes, as with the other emblematic images, this discovery leads to a particular character's recognition of his or her own inner shortcomings; but more often, it provides ironic elucidation for the reader alone of the affectations, prejudices, ambitions, or other driving forces within various characters' personalities. In "For Conscience' Sake" (LLI), for example, the revelation in their sea-sickness of a strong family likeness between Frances Millborne and her supposed step-father leads eventually to Mr. Millborne's belated realization that he has intruded unadvisedly into the lives of his wife and daughter. But the scene itself reveals far more about the unappealing values of Frances and her snobbish, convention-bound suitor:

as the middle-aged father and his child grew each grey-faced, as the pretty blush of Frances disintegrated into spotty stains, and the soft rotundities of her features diverged from their familiar and reposeful beauty into elemental lines, Cope was gradually struck with the resemblance between a pair in their discomfort who in their ease presented nothing to the eye in common. Mr. Millborne and Frances in their indisposition were strangely, startlingly alike. (68)

So startling is the effect of this "strange pantomime of the past" on Cope that he "forgets" during the sail homeward "to smile at Frances" or pay her the little attentions expected of a man all but betrothed to her (68). And, after contemplating the unwelcome moral implications of the scene, he withdraws his suit entirely, for Frances's "past had apparently contained mysteries, and it did not coincide with his judgment to marry into a family whose mystery was of the sort suggested" (69).

Thus deserted by a shallow, selfish man on grounds that take no account of her character, Frances nevertheless inspires very little sympathy in the reader, for she is driven throughout the story by precisely the same qualities that govern

Percival Cope. From the start, she has pursued him, likewise, not out of love or appreciation of his character, but rather, out of the ambitious, thoroughly unsentimental desire to marry the most socially and professionally successful man within her reach. The scene aboard the yacht merely emphasizes ironically what has already been hinted at in her character. Just as her physical resemblance to Millborne is obscured at first by "a stereotyped expression and mien," so have her ambitious resolve and imperious nature been masked behind her youthful beauty and calculated efforts to appear pleasantly accommodating in Cope's presence. And just as the evidence of her lineage becomes apparent when the "commonplace differences of sex and age" give way before the ravages of nausea (68), so does her harsh personality reveal itself ever more emphatically under the stress of Cope's subsequent coolness toward her. As Mrs. Millborne observes to her dismay, the mask slips with alarming frequency in both respects as Frances vents her frustration in petulant criticism of her parents' role in her disappointment: by indulging her bad temper, she unwittingly increases the despised physical resemblance to her father more each day. So unpleasant does Frances paint herself, in fact, that one cannot pity her even at the end when Cope takes her up again purely on the obvious, insulting basis of the comfortable estate her now absent father has settled upon her. The couple are well enough matched, after all, in their mutual hypocrisy and mercenary tendencies. Neither one cares particularly about the other's motives or even about the fact of the irregular family history recorded in Frances's unguarded features--just so long as Millborne's departure leaves them both unmolested by any public recognition of that history and thus free to enjoy the coveted social and material advantages of their union.

Ironically, in the context of a different story, public recognition of a child's irregular birth becomes a consequence, in the central character's view, almost to be wished for rather than dreaded. Gradually losing sight of the implicit insult to his own dignity and of the social repercussions that would inevitably follow disclosure of his late wife's account of his son's paternity, Timothy Petrick, of "Squire Petrick's Lady" (GND), longs only to discern in young Rupert's face the refined air and "historic lineaments" of the gifted aristocrat he believes to be the boy's natural father (161). The recurring emphasis on the child's face becomes a symbolic barometer of Timothy's changing view of his situation and a means of exploring the intriguing perversity of his psychological identity. At first, when he can detect in that face nothing but soft echoes of his wife's countenance and the endearing innocence of childhood, the natural sympathies of Timothy's heart dominate his response to the boy, in spite of his wounded ego. Even then, however, he strives to subdue this best part of his character to the shallow notions of social propriety, ambition, and hierarchy which he has been taught to revere. He feels compelled to manufacture "logical" reasons to justify his love for an intruder whom personal and family pride urges him to ignore. But it is the peculiar nature of his logic that most clearly moves the squire beyond the ordinary reactions and understandable ambivalence of a man in his parental situation: like all the Petricks before him, he harbors secret feelings of social inferiority and at once adores and envies the aristocratic class above him. For the private pleasure of believing himself linked, however indirectly, to "a higher stratum of society" than his own, of anticipating the improvement of the common "blood and breed of the Petrick family" through the infusion of Rupert's "blue stock," Timothy is prepared to view misfortune as blessing and to commit forgery to pass on his family's estate to another man's son (158).

Nowhere in his short stories does Hardy evoke more powerfully or imaginatively the distorted values created by class prejudice than in "Squire Petrick's Lady." And nowhere in that story does he demonstrate the consequent hollowness and injustice of those values more vividly than in the passage in which Timothy watches with bitter disappointment, rather than warm fatherly pride, as proof of his direct relation to his son unfolds by degrees in Rupert's face. So little have his social environment and upbringing prepared him to value his worth as an individual, irrespective of class, that he utterly discounts his greatest personal assets--the love he has felt for Rupert and the joys and responsibilities of legitimate parenthood. Held fast by traditional social dogma, he can envision no trace of inward nobility springing from his own "plebeian blood" (162). Once the "glory and halo he believed [Rupert] to have inherited from the ages" are gone (162), taking with them his shallow dream of outshining the minor aristocratic connections of his brother's children, Timothy can see in his innocent son's familiar features only reminders of the worst "ugly, idle, hard-drinking scamps" among his own relations (158):

Instead of the elegant knife-edged nose, so typical of the Dukes of Southwesterland, there began to appear on his face the broad nostril and hollow bridge of his grandfather Timothy. No illustrious line of politicians was promised a continuator in that greying blue eye, for it was acquiring the expression of the orb of a particularly objectionable cousin of his own; and, instead of the mouth-curves which had thrilled Parliamentary audiences in speeches now bound in calf in every well-ordered library, there was the bull-lip of that very uncle of his who had had the misfortune with the signature of a gentleman's will, and had been transported for life in consequence. (162-63)

As the narrator explains early in the story, Timothy is by far the best and most generous of his line, but he too is infected by his society's superficial formula for evaluating the worth of its citizens and is at last so strangely warped by it that he rejects his own son, feeling less "unmanned" by his initial chagrin at the thought of

being cuckolded than by his disappointment at failing to rise, by association, above his despised status as "a commoner to the bone" (161, 158).

Despite a number of parallels to Squire Petrick's experience, no such self-demeaning attitude dictates the final parental response of William Marchmill in "An Imaginative Woman" (LLI), the best known of Hardy's stories which turn upon the image of a child's face. Like Petrick, William is a financially successful but rather commonplace man of middle-class origins and relatively unrefined tastes and intellect. But, in terms of self-perception, the thriving gunmaker is "supremely satisfied" with his character (5), his professional status and, indeed, every aspect of his life until he feels his dignity threatened at the end by his chance discovery of the resemblance between his fourth child and the picture of the poet Trewe which he finds among his late wife's possessions. Although he too rejects his own son in this final scene, he does so under the absolute conviction that he is not the boy's biological father. His response is no less cruel in regard to the guiltless, helpless child, but it has its source at least in an understandable resentment of his wife's apparent adulterous betrayal of his trust, rather than in some perverse dissatisfaction with his own genetic heritage.

In psychological terms, it is Ella Marchmill who has the most in common with Timothy Petrick. It is she who finds her children's lineage objectionable, in that it is insufficiently refined for her taste; and it is upon her character and unusual psychology that the final image of her youngest child's face comments most significantly. Like the oddly ambitious squire, she too longs for some loftier, more sensitive and cultured relationship in her life--not, however, for reasons of mere social validation, but to fill a deep emotional void in her day-to-day existence. In many ways, both characters strike the reader as faintly ridiculous, with their absurd

romantic and idealistic perceptions of certain people outside their immediate spheres; but, in both cases, one ultimately recognizes those unrealistic notions as being symptomatic of serious, far-reaching problems of identity. If Petrick is unmanned by the distorted social values of his day, Ella is in a sense "unwomaned" by those that govern and restrict her own experience. In her comfortable, but dull, middle-class Victorian life, there are virtually no acceptable outlets for her talents or energies beyond the conventional roles of wife and mother. Thus, however foolish her ethereal daydreams may seem--considering their preoccupation with a man she has never met--they signify by their very intensity an appalling deficiency in her real life. As she explains to William on her deathbed, she has long "wanted a fuller appreciator" (30), a husband-lover who could see beyond her stereotypical public identity to the thinking, feeling individual who requires more from her marriage after all than a dehumanizing "life-lease" (4). That she somehow manages to transmit to her last child the features of the stranger whom, in desperation, she has fashioned into an imaginary soul-mate merely reinforces symbolically how unbearably oppressive Ella has found the realities of her life that she should require so complete and fantastic an escape from them.

The image itself of the child's face must be read primarily in this symbolic light, for even Hardy seems to have felt uneasy with a literal, "psychosomatic,"⁵ interpretation, as his vague, intrusive reference to "a known but inexplicable trick of Nature" suggests (31). Even his additional attempt to increase plausibility by referring to the phenomenon in his "Prefatory Note" to Life's Little Ironies as "a physical possibility that may attach to a wife of vivid imaginings, as is well known to

⁵ Guerard 106. Guerard applies this term also to Annetta Petrick's "delicate ideal dream" of her aristocratic lover (GND 162), in his brief discussion of "Squire Petrick's Lady" and "An Imaginative Woman" as two of "the most preposterous" and yet "also very impressive" of Hardy's short stories (107).

medical practitioners and other observers of such manifestations," leaves the detail essentially unconvincing on a literal level.⁶ But because he does not dwell at length in the story upon the literalness of its final plot turn, Hardy enables the child's uncanny resemblance to its mother's phantom lover to function effectively on a thematic level, as a final incisive emblem of Ella's absolute surrender to her dream world. On the night when this child was apparently conceived at Solentsea, Ella certainly took Robert Trewe to her bed in all but the most literal, physical sense. Her sensuous, even erotic, preparations before viewing the poet's photograph for the first time on that night are described in terms suggesting the most intimate of encounters; and, while she was forced hurriedly to slip the picture beneath her pillow to accommodate her husband's unexpected return and physical desire, her mind must surely have gone on clinging to the almost ethereal attractions of Trewe rather than refocus on the robust, somewhat gross image of William Marchmill just back from "a good feed" (18).

If ever a passage could prepare one to accept Hardy's psychosomatic "trick of Nature," this surely is it. That night, after all, marks the beginning of Ella's actual--and increasingly reckless--substitutions of her fantasies for the realities of her life. It is with fitting irony, therefore, that the child upon whose face her imagination ostensibly leaves its mark should also be the means of her death, of her absolute

⁶ One is reminded by this psychosomatic phenomenon of another, more gruesome, but related effect of a mother's unwitting imaginative legacy to her child. In the uncollected tale "The Doctor's Legend" (OMC), it is not the physical features of an imaginary lover that the squire's wife passes on to her child, but rather the terrifying memory of a face glimpsed months before that child's birth--the skull-like visage of the little village girl, now known pathetically as "Death's-Head," whose health and sanity has earlier been destroyed by the squire's cruelty. Years later, when the squire's son is grown, he is driven to suicide by his terror at the sight of a skull he feels, inexplicably, that he has seen before. The story itself is far inferior to "An Imaginative Woman," but the melodramatic image of the child's face and the psychosomatic aspect of the plot twist both benefit from Hardy's decision not to offer an intrusive defense of the latter phenomenon, pseudo-scientific or otherwise.

escape from those realities. That she does not live to see her beloved Trewe's features develop on her own child's face, and thus to connect with him at last in some tangible way, is Hardy's tersest comment on the weakness and wastefulness inherent in Ella's escapism. Her life and marriage are certainly not all that she could wish them to be, but she turns her back even on the positive things rather than work to build upon them and improve the rest. Her children love her and need her and could, with her help, most likely rise above their outward "commonplaceness"; and even Will is generally kind to her and tolerant, if not especially supportive, of her writing ambitions. Her situation clearly could be much worse, even in terms of Victorian repression; it is Ella's peculiar temperament alone, her "palpitating" and romantic response to that situation, that leads to her willful self-destruction and the consequent abandonment of an innocent child by both its parents (4). Mourning the dream is simply easier for her than coping with or improving the reality.

A similarly shallow, but even more extreme, neurotic response characterizes the heroine of yet another story which centers on the extraordinary, active influences of remembered physiognomies on the imagination--"Barbara of the House of Grebe" (GND). This time, the image pattern does not focus upon a child's face, but expands to create a whole motif of appearance-related images which, by virtue of their dramatic effects, help fundamentally to elucidate character.⁷ As primarily a psychological study of young Barbara Grebe--later Mrs. Edmond Willowes and, finally, Lady Uplandtowers--the story derives both its direction and

⁷ Morrell examines this same motif in terms of theme: "The whole structure of the story is built on the theme of reality, of truth; truth and reality being defined by contrast to all kinds of appearances: titles, masks, pretences, romance, and sentimental remorse" (117). In addition, both Morrell and J. R. Brooks discuss briefly the sub-pattern of images taken from the world of theater and art, in particular, Edmond's mask and Uplandtowers's stage-management before a captive audience (Morrell 117; Brooks 145-46).

momentum from the fact that Barbara is, throughout her life, a "slave to mere eyesight" (76). A shallow, weak-willed creature in her own right, she has only the most limited understanding of the actual substance, good or bad, in anyone else's character. Appearances are everything to her, and what she sees or does not see at the critical junctures of her life has an enormous impact on her choices and her fate. The most striking image which thus profoundly affects her destiny, of course, is that of the mutilated statue Lord Uplandtowers sets nightly before his wife to terrorize her out of her renewed emotional attachment to her first husband. But the motif begins far in advance of that melodramatic, culminating image. Long before Uplandtowers's "ferocious correctives" (88), one realizes that Barbara, like Ella Marchmill, is emotionally unequal to the realities of her life and far prefers the romantic, ideal experiences she can contrive in a "mental world of her own" (90).

Unlike Ella, however, Barbara cannot long sustain her devotion to an ideal lover if his perfections are not in some way physically present. For her entire family, Edmond Willowes's exceptional good looks provide virtually the only justification for Barbara's socially disadvantageous marriage, but for Barbara herself, even those valued personal attractions are insufficient to hold her heart unless she can see them. When, after only a few weeks of marriage, Edmond leaves for his educational tour of the Continent, the young bride finds her ardor unexpectedly cooling, "her husband being no longer in evidence to fortify her in her choice of him"; and, in desperation, "pray[ing] for a warmer heart," she begs him to "send her his portrait, ever so small, that she might look at it all day and every day, and never for a moment forget his features" (65). To do her justice, Barbara does periodically recognize the shallowness of this emotional dependence on appearances; and, after Edmond's terrible disfigurement, she makes what is for her quite a valiant effort to

resist her horror and disappointment for the sake of love and appreciation of her husband's heroic sacrifice. What Barbara appreciates intellectually, however, and what she feels in her heart are two very different things. The reality of Edmond's heroism in the burning theater might well have enhanced her initial infatuation with his perfect, stereotypically heroic features had the latter been spared, but with the external, ideal semblance of heroism horribly destroyed, the reality alone can sustain neither her love nor her intellectual admiration. When Edmond removes the flesh-colored mask, which only partially prolongs the illusion of his former appearance, Barbara can see nothing but a repulsive "human remnant":

All her natural sentiments of affection and pity were driven clean out of her by a sort of panic. . . . She could nohow fancy this to be her chosen one--the man she had loved; he was metamorphosed to a specimen of another species. (74)

Certainly, one could not expect any sensitive person to face so ghastly a transformation without some measure of horror. But Barbara is overcome by a child's terror of a monster, and all her compassion for her husband's agony is ousted by that fear. Again, that which is present and visible governs her emotional response, and it is only by closing her eyes and running away that she is in the least able to adjust her feelings at the urgings of a timid conscience. That she must consciously "try," however, to "regain [her] old feeling" for Edmond (74)--just as she needed to work at retaining it earlier with the aid of his image reproduced in miniature--merely emphasizes how little her attraction has ever been based on knowledge of or respect for the man himself. As Morrell astutely points out, "what happened to Willowes--the loss of his looks--was what Time would have caused eventually in any case. Hardy has merely contrived incidents to represent and speed up the natural process, and to bring home to us with startling clarity the weakness of Barbara's love" (117). Worst of all, though, for all her belated remorse for

responding to Edmond's looks instead of to his character, and for thus cruelly driving him away, Barbara learns nothing from the experience. She allows the severe Lord Uplandtowers gradually to eclipse her worthy husband's memory and to gain her trust in spite of what she has heard of his character--all simply because he is shrewd enough to put "himself frequently under her eyes" (78).

Although Barbara marries Uplandtowers for the old reason that he provides a present, forceful image for her to cling to, his unkindness soon renders his presence almost as fearsomely oppressive as that of her grotesquely scarred first husband. Had it been otherwise, she might never have turned with such desperate need to the mere stone replica of Edmond's former perfections. She is no more drawn to the statue now for its suggestion of inward nobility than she was to the man himself while he lived, but the visible recreation of the features she once loved serves simultaneously to erase the memory of their later mutilation and to give her a much-needed sanctuary for her lonely, love-starved heart. Only because he understands so well Barbara's absolute susceptibility to appearances--her dependence upon a visual perception of her world--is the earl able to force his wife to reject his hated rival a second time and transfer her devotion unconditionally to himself. By duplicating in the statue the very wounds suffered by Edmond years before and then forcing Barbara to view the horror nightly, the brutal man effectively destroys her last refuge and reduces the matter of her emotional survival to a choice between the two present images of the maimed statue and his own inflexible self--a situation in which her tortured mind can do no other than choose the only option that does not visually horrify her enslaved eye.

The real horror of the story is, in fact, Barbara's failure ever to move beyond the superficial dictates of her eye in conducting her personal relationships. Despite

Uplandtowers's cruelty, she succumbs completely to his control, almost the last description we have of her being, significantly, that "her eyes were well-nigh always fixed upon him" (90). As J. Hillis Miller observes, once "Barbara's infatuation with a face" is cured by the earl's merciless scheme, she descends into a kind of madness which does not end, but perversely perpetuates her earlier errors in judgment: she "shifts immediately to an infatuation with a displaced substitute for the substitute, that is, with her second husband, who replaces the statue of her first husband, that replaces the first husband himself," with whom the escapist infatuation began ("Prosopopoeia" 114). Ironically, Barbara ends, figuratively, by loving a statue after all, in that the facial images used to describe Uplandtowers throughout the story create an impression of cold stone, the "sculptural repose" of his stern profile being likened to the grim "figures on his family monument" (56, 78). By accepting such a substitute as the object of her affections, Barbara wills her own misery and death as surely as Ella Marchmill does hers; the only difference is that, by misgauging the realities of her early situation, Barbara throws away an even more valuable opportunity than Ella ever possessed for a happy, productive life with a worthy man.

No theme is more basic to Hardy's fiction than precisely this notion, illustrated by Barbara's error, of how human beings perceive and act upon the opportunities life puts in their way. Though emphasized stylistically in many ways throughout the short stories, that theme and those opportunities--be they lost, seized, wasted, overlooked, or knowingly sacrificed--are the particular province of the last image pattern to be discussed in this chapter: Hardy's use of windows to focus attention on the life-determining choices made by his characters. In a brief study of Hardy's novels and poems, Jacqueline Hooi observes that some of his "most memorable scenes make use of the window as a visual metaphor for the interaction

between the individual mind and the world outside it" (89).⁸ Though she does not mention them, her point can be applied just as legitimately to the short stories. In almost every instance in which a window is introduced specifically into a plot or scene--in however overt or understated a manner--one becomes immediately and keenly aware of some character's relationship to the realm of experience on the other side of that window. For many, the world seen through the window represents an opportunity they dare not seize for fear of social or emotional repercussions, and the physical barrier of the window itself becomes the symbolic, outermost boundary of a self-imposed prison. For others, the view becomes a source of vicarious experience in an otherwise dully oppressive existence. And for a few, either the structure itself or the call from the world beyond it supplies the necessary means or motivation for actively wresting opportunity from unpromising circumstances. Regardless of the situation, the image always manages to reflect--in the most succinctly symbolic fashion--the very essence of the character involved.

Of all the windows mentioned in the short stories, the one emphasized most overtly is the oriel window which provides a vantage point for the invalid gentleman who narrates "A Changed Man" (CM). Because the narrator himself never quite achieves the legitimacy of a distinct personality, however, the window becomes symbolically significant only once in the story, when the view it affords is taken in at a climactic moment by Laura Maumbry as well. Observing from its position above the High Street the painful juxtaposition of her shabbily dressed clerical husband and the flamboyantly attired departing soldiers of his former regiment, Laura is overcome by bitter frustration at the virtual theft of the destiny she had believed

⁸ Hooi's article, unlike most of my discussion here, focuses specifically on the visual, "framing" effect of the images she cites, and thus takes into account other physical devices such as "doorways, archways, [and] mirrors" as well as windows, "as emblems or symbols of significant human actions" (89).

herself already to have secured. A rather frivolous and "rackety" sort of person (11), she had at least sensibly chosen as her mate a man who shared her love of fun and excitement, and certainly one "who she presumed would remain essentially a social and worldly being like herself" throughout their married life (Brady 192). Thus, when the utterly unexpected reversal in Captain Maumbry's personality turns her from a vivacious soldier's bride into a poor parson's wife, doomed to a life of near squallor among the town's most impoverished cottagers, Laura cannot help but feel cheated of an opportunity lost through no choice or action of her own. And, by reducing the qualities of both her former and present lifestyles to the simply, but potently contrasted images visible through the oriel window on the day of the Hussars' departure, Hardy enables the reader to feel sympathetically with Laura the outrageous injustice perpetrated against her. Bound by her marriage vows to stay with her strangely altered husband when every fiber of her own personality urges her to be wending her way toward London with the "dusty line of Hussars" (15), Laura at the very least elicits one's understanding when she falters in her duty:

Her adulterous relationship with Vannicock is an infidelity, not to the man whom she married, but to the incompatible person into which he suddenly was transformed. This does not justify Laura's taking a lover, but explains in compelling terms her emotional state when doing so. (Brady 192)

Her legitimate opportunity for the life she desires has, after all, been taken from her without the least consideration for the fidelity in partnership owed to her.

In contrast, most of the characters connected with window imagery have had control of their most valuable opportunities well within their reach and yet owe their current, onerous situations to their own ineffectual management of those options. Not all of Hardy's characters muddle their chances, of course. One recalls the spunky heroine of "Netty Sargent's Copyhold" (ECC), whose natural shrewdness and

courage enable her to retain possession of the property she might otherwise have lost through her uncle's stubborn procrastination and untimely death. Unlike many of Hardy's characters, Netty knows very early on exactly what she wants in life and is prepared to fight for it. She takes control of a seemingly irreversible misfortune and creates from it her own opportunity. Rather than helplessly watch the world pass her by, Netty forces the world (in the shape of the squire's land agent, peering through her cottage window from the outside) to accept as fact the illusion she concocts regarding her uncle's signature on the deed, and thus to grant her the reality she wants for herself. Such courageous, clear-sighted determination, however, is rare among Hardy's characters; and, if windows can sometimes "provide the possibility of creative interaction between an individual and the world outside," they act far more often in Hardy's short stories as "a barrier to exclude" (Hooi 93). In "The Waiting Supper" (CM), for example, the opening image is that of Nicholas Long standing in the shadows outside Froom-Everard manor-house and looking through a "large five-light window" at the dining room to which his inferior social class alone forbids him entry as the accepted suitor of the squire's daughter (27). Even though Nic's farmer-uncle impressively surpasses Squire Everard in personal wealth, and Nic himself is a talented, respectable young man, his inability to provide an equally impressive pedigree excludes him from the start. Another detail related to that window scene, however, suggests that there is something in Nic's character as well that contributes to his identity as an outsider: he has stood outside this window thus, awaiting secret meetings in a "dead-locked" relationship with Christine (30), for almost three years. Though unhappy, he has allowed himself and Christine to drift rather than challenge the social conventions of their day; and so they continue drifting until time and chance obscure their opportunities and erode their well-

founded impulse to build a life together as husband and wife. Besides merely establishing the social disparity between the lovers, therefore, the early image of the physically divisive window also points symbolically toward the chronic procrastination that dominates their personalities and determines their fate.

A similar hesitancy and clouded perception of what they want from life play an even more profound role in the destinies of Hardy's most "modern" characters, those from the almost exclusively contemporary stories of Life's Little Ironies. Of those characters, the individuals most wretchedly disappointed in the results of their choices are, significantly, three women whose failure to recognize or act upon their best opportunities in time is emphasized in some ironic way by the image of a window. While Nic and Christine at least live out their lives in devoted (if platonic) companionship, these women are so emotionally isolated that they can feel only a keen "sense of entrapment behind a window-frame" (Hooi 97). All three become virtual prisoners in the homes they acquire through foolishly unconsidered marriage choices. A drifter like Nic and Christine, Sophy Twycott, of "The Son's Veto," essentially banishes herself to a dusty London suburb, simply because she dares not give offense by refusing "a personage so . . . august in her eyes" as the Reverend Mr. Twycott (40). In "On the Western Circuit," Edith Harnham, like so many young but aging "spinsters" of her day, has unresistingly allowed conventional parental advice to propel her into a bad marriage, at the cost of "free womanhood with its interests, dignity, and leisure" (125). And in "To Please His Wife," Joanna Jolliffe perversely allows mere envy and a wounded ego to make her cling to a suitor she does not really want to marry. In each case, the personality which informs the woman's initial choice ultimately reduces her to watching helplessly at her window as the world of possibilities she once abandoned bustles heedlessly past.

The window imagery is especially poignant in connection with Sophy because she is so completely out of her natural element in London. Her woefully exaggerated sense of her husband's social and personal superiority and her consequent attitude of self-abasement in regard to him and then to her son only grow worse in the city, where no detail of her former identity exists to give her confidence. The closest she ever comes again to her old self is when she looks wistfully from her window, while the rest of the world sleeps, at the procession of vegetable wagons moving toward Covent Garden market. But even her few exhilarating escapes into that procession with Sam, the former sweetheart whose acquaintance she renews across her windowsill, only increase her misery, for she continues to respect her late husband's memory and her insupportably selfish son's demands above her own right to happiness. Ironically, both Randolph and Sam are associated with and fully immersed in social realms characterized by activity and confidence: Randolph with his public school connections, urban attitudes, and preoccupation with impressing England's wealthiest citizens; and Sam with his ties to the life-giving countryside, rural practicality, and robust efforts to create his own success. But Sophy, tortured by her love for them both, is caught in a terrible suffocating limbo between their two worlds--a part of neither, and thus apart from life itself. At any moment, she could still seize her once wasted opportunity to marry the man to whom she is ideally suited and return to her beloved country home; but, unfortunately, her character has not changed, and she possesses no more strength now than then to resist the contrary wishes of those she deems her superiors. Thus, in deference to the son who does not deserve her loyalty, Sophy descends ever deeper into her death-in-life existence, trapped by her increasing lameness and insurmountable timidity behind her lonely window, the prison bar-like railings just

beyond, and the haze of "sooty trees . . . and drab house-facades" which compose the furthest reaches of her depressing vista (42).

Much the same imprisoning effect is created by the window image in "On the Western Circuit," where that image emphasizes at the outset Edith Harnham's isolation from the currents of meaningful human interaction. The very first time one sees her, she is sitting at her drawing-room window on the night of the Melchester fair, "absently surveying the weird scene without, her cheek resting on her hand." Though quite brief, the description perfectly captures the lady's languid dissociation from the vibrant activity going on beyond her windowpane. The "glare from the market-place" shines through enough to illuminate her sensitive face in the otherwise darkened room, but the mood within is entirely without energy and direction (114). This contrast is all the more striking in that the scene is juxtaposed immediately with the long preceding description of the tumultuous fair itself and of the lively flirtation between Charles Raye and Edith's maid, Anna. The excitement and undercurrent of sensuality experienced by that young pair could not be more foreign to the relationship Edith shares with her elderly husband, a relationship which Hardy deftly sketches in--in all its dreary, businesslike conventionality--by having Mr. Harnham make what he evidently considers a sufficient show of affection and respect for his wife by merely gazing from the window with her for a moment, "for politeness' sake" (115), before leaving her again to her own devices. Unlike Sophy Twycott, Edith has consented to a marriage without love strictly for the sake of security, and thus has not even the compensation for her loneliness that Sophy has of at least respecting the man she has wed. Neither is she granted the alternative opportunities Sophy is offered for generating meaning in her life through motherhood and a more appropriate second marriage. Edith's imprisonment behind

her window is absolute from the moment she forfeits her autonomy and her chance to await a union capable of stirring and nurturing her "deeper nature" (125).

That her woman's nature has not yet been stirred is strongly suggested in this early passage by Edith's passivity in watching the world go by outside her window; but, in the very next scene, the accompanying window image points to an additional, consequent, dimension of Edith's character--her tendency to seek respite from the limitations of her own life through a vicarious escape into other people's experience. Stepping out into the midst of the fair--not to participate in its holiday diversions, but merely to relieve her boredom and fetch the young girl for whom, to give her life some interest, she has made herself responsible--Edith feels her deeper emotional nature triggered at last when she discovers Anna in the company of a sophisticated, mildly "wicked" young man. In a telling response to her awakening, however, she stations herself secretly behind "a screened nook" to spy upon the couple in their romantic parting (116). This characteristic gesture neatly foreshadows all that is to come in the deception-filled triangular relationship between these characters and prepares the reader especially for Edith's vicarious assumption of her maid's identity in the lovers' correspondence with Raye. Drawn into the deception at first by her unexpected thrill at the young man's accidental touch, Edith is soon unreservedly committed to the illusion of her "affair," overwhelmed as she is by its provision of the sensual, emotional, and intellectual stimulation and compatibility so completely lacking in her own marriage. Her most urgent desire is to be able to replace Anna in very fact so that she, instead, might marry Raye and bear his child.

For all the intensity of feeling inspired on both sides, however, by the heady correspondence, Edith is still essentially spying on others from a screened nook. The one moment in which she has her own direct romantic exchange with Raye,

when the deception is revealed, only emphasizes agonizingly the impossibility of prolonging that moment to pursue a real relationship. Edith has long since closed off her options--as has Raye now, in large part thanks to her interference. And she can only return in despair to the obtuse husband whose very existence she has momentarily forgotten. The reader's last glimpse of her ironically places Edith in the same darkened drawing-room in which she first appeared. Her husband again intrudes briefly with a commonplace, mechanical greeting to re-emphasize the stultifying nature of her prison; but this time, there is no relief from her situation, as is appallingly evident from the conspicuous absence of any reference to a window. The room is the same, but Edith is not. Having felt at last the emotions she forfeited with her matrimonial decision, Edith can return neither to her former desultory pastime of gazing out her window at the world beyond nor to her most recent stratagem of escaping imaginatively into a vicarious identity. Her experience with that "impassioned dream" has left her so much more acutely aware of her empty life than before that she is almost crushed by her sense of the vacuum (136). No image could more hauntingly capture Edith's ultimate reality than that of her crouching in despair upon the floor--illuminated by not so much as the weakest glimmer of a streetlamp through the window.

In contrast, it is the most vivid of lights shining through her window, along with the particular view the latter affords, that both generates and symbolizes Joanna Jolliffe's most unbearable sense of entrapment. Destined by her own envious, unconsidered actions to occupy a small grocer's shop across the High Street from her unexpectedly fortunate former rival's luxurious home, Joanna finds the ironic outcome of her manipulations all the more galling in that she must not only live continually within sight of Emily Lester's success, but in summer, must also

endure the oppressive light and heat of the sun reflected into her shop by "the big brick house opposite" (150). Nothing, however, plagues her more than having to look at the great house through a humble "screen of bottled pickles" while, as she mistakenly believes, Emily watches, with condescending amusement from "her large drawing-room over the way, . . . [Joanna's] own dancings up and down behind the counter at the beck and call of wretched twopenny customers" (151, 150). All that Joanna thinks she should have is now entirely Emily's, while the only thing she possesses that Emily ever wanted (and with which, excluding all other riches, the latter would have been perfectly content) is her marriage to Shadrach, a thing in itself almost without value to Joanna. It was, ironically, Joanna's envious observation of Emily's success with Shadrach--seen through yet another window, the glass partition in Emily's old shop, before the ensuing reversal in fortunes--that urged Joanna to risk her personal ambitions and happiness in the first place, just to satisfy a perverse need to "outdo" her friend. If these first two window images present Joanna as a self-sentenced prisoner, a victim of her own ego and shallow materialism, the last one emphasizes the merciless final judgment she imposes on herself for those flaws. She becomes a virtual outcast, too poor to maintain her own home and too proud and resentful still to accept Emily's emotional support along with the physical shelter she cannot afford to refuse. The last scene of the story finds her outside her old shop, desperately seeking the family she sacrificed for her selfish ambition, only to find a stranger behind the window that once was hers.

Another of Hardy's characters who makes himself an outcast from places where he once belonged is George Barnet of "Fellow-Townsmen" (WT), one of the two last stories to be discussed here, in both of which Hardy incorporates a motif of window imagery so pervasive and character-revealing that it creates a kind of sub-

structure for the work. In "Fellow-Townsmen," that motif focuses on the way Barnet perceives the things he observes through a window-frame. He tends to view most of those things as static--the negative ones as irremediable and the positive, especially those which he longs to attain, as ideal pictures rather than mutable realities that must be planned for and assiduously maintained. Only once does he attempt to alter one of these seemingly static situations (in his ironically successful resuscitation of his wife); usually, he simply waits for external adjustments to the scheme of his life to carry him through unpleasantness or bring to him whole and perfect the happier experiences he desires. Moreover, as each hoped for--but not actually worked for--change inevitably eludes him, Barnet withdraws further and further into himself until, at last, he literally banishes himself in disillusionment from his home, his friends, his family heritage, and his country.

The window motif begins immediately to illuminate this somber passivity in Barnet's nature with the early key image of his friend Downe's family watching intently at their window for the young lawyer's return:

the faces of three little girls could be discerned close to the panes of a lighted window a few yards ahead, surmounted by that of a young matron, the gaze of all four being directed eagerly up the empty street.
(114)

Measuring the scene against his own bitterly unhappy home life, Barnet sees only the immediate perfection of this "framed" portrait of familial bliss. He does not genuinely consider the effort and cooperation essential for achieving such harmony, even for a couple as mutually kind-spirited as the Downes. In his own home, he seeks only to "preserve peace" by giving in to his wife's whims and demands (114), rather than to establish true harmony by working toward a compromise with her. Mrs. Barnet's personality is so abrasive, of course, that compromise might well be impossible, but Barnet does not even try to assert his own legitimate expectations

regarding their marriage. This essential contrast between Barnet and Downe in both the quality of and their personal approaches to their family relationships is stressed even more dramatically in the next "window scene," in which both men catch sight of their wives from the windows of the town-council room. Gazing idly at the street below for lack of interest in the business at hand, Barnet turns away the instant he recognizes his wife--oppressed by the intrusive reminder of their differences.

Downe, on the other hand, moves to the window expressly to look for his family, whose morning expedition he knows may bring them within view. Deeply interested in all they do, he looks out upon them with affection and pleasure when they appear; but, when he tries to console Barnet and encourage him to view his own marriage's potential more positively, Barnet responds with typical hopelessness: "No Downe," he replies, "we must look the thing in the face. Not poppy nor mandragora" (127).

While, on the surface, Barnet's remark strikes one as stoicism, it actually reflects his static vision and dependence on external influences alone to improve his situation. In this instance, hope enters his framed view of his "tall commanding" wife only with the intercessive figure of Mrs. Downe, whose conciliatory efforts with his wife are promised by Downe as both ladies pass from view (127). Rather than confront his wife directly, Barnet waits for someone else to do the hard work of mending his marriage for him. The next scene thus finds him, appropriately, at yet another window, this time standing "within a window-niche" at the unfinished Château Ringdale, watching with mild hope as the two women drive past him toward the shore, the face of his stern wife already tinged promisingly with a faint version of the same "pleasing light" visible in Mrs. Downe's countenance. He accepts the possibility of change initiated by another but, for his own part, "resolve[s] not to interfere, or do anything to hazard the promise of the day" (130).

Paradoxically, this same passive resolve also underlies the only action Barnet ever takes upon himself in regard to his marriage: his extraordinary efforts to revive his shrewish wife after her apparent drowning. Those efforts seem at first perversely contrary to both his passive nature and his longing for a warm, peaceful home such as he could almost certainly find with Lucy Savile simply by taking no restorative pains with Mrs. Barnet, a woman already pronounced dead. His behavior is, however, absolutely in keeping with his way of viewing and responding to the options in his life: he does not, at bottom, truly regard them as options, but rather, as fixed situations between which he is powerless to move. Thus, he chooses and acts in ways that fulfill his expectations and relieve him of the necessity of making real, life-changing exertions. It is simply easier to hold on to the life he already has, however unpleasant, than to make the effort to seize a new one, however appealing, when it seems set at too great a distance from him.

This self-defeating mind-set is captured symbolically in an ironic trio of window scenes through which Hardy traces the process of Barnet's decision to maintain his status quo. At first, sincerely believing his wife to be dead, he glances through the window of his dressing-room toward the harbor where she met her fate; but his eye settles instead on objects he has long associated with his dream:

Far down the road . . . 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. He had often seen such a sight before. In that house lived Lucy Savile; and the smoke was from the fire which was regularly lighted at this time to make her tea. (136)

Despite his obvious longing for the woman and the life those images represent, Barnet ignores the clear path to his dream which his apparent widower's freedom opens up to him and, retreating to his wife's bedroom, deliberately seeks to retain the life he knows. His efforts to save his wife are, of course, undeniably noble and

moral. But he does not act primarily from a sense of morality. There are no real indications of lingering life to make him "wonder if all has been done," only his "fancied" perception of "the remnant of what had once been a flush"--a straw one might expect a grieving man, but not a persecuted one like Barnet, to grasp at in desperation. And even that doubtful sign is all but explained away by the imagery:

Long orange rays of evening sun stole in through chinks in the blind, striking on the large mirror, and being thence reflected upon the crimson hangings and woodwork of the heavy bedstead, so that the general tone of light was remarkably warm; and it was probable that something might be due to this circumstance. (137)

Barnet's inclination to resume exertions on his wife's behalf proves sound in the end, but the inclination itself is based less on persuasive physical criteria than on his need to justify his own stagnation.

It is the third window reference, however, that both resolves this long scene thematically and clarifies the implications regarding Barnet's character. Pulling up the blind to admit more light for his exertions, he also places himself in a symbolic spotlight as he gazes once more upon his dream:

There he saw that red chimney still smoking cheerily, and that roof, and through the roof that somebody. His mechanical movements stopped, his hand remained on the blind-cord, and he seemed to become breathless, as if he had suddenly found himself treading a high rope.

While he stood a sparrow lighted on the window-sill, saw him, and flew away. Next a man and a dog walked over one of the green hills which bulged above the roofs of the town. But Barnet took no notice. (138)

Most obviously, this passage captures the magnitude of the choice Barnet must make and the intensity of his reflection on the possibilities. But, more fundamentally, the contrast between himself and what appears outside the window graphically defines his character. Everything without is movement, life, and seeming purpose; Barnet is frozen, breathless, and unconscious of the realities before his eyes. He is almost as

near to death in many ways as the woman lying in the room behind him, toward whom he turns, incredibly, in preference to the attractive scene beyond the glass. It is the position of Barnet's options relative to the window frame that ultimately determines his choice. Inside the room lies the tangible, three-dimensional realm of the life he knows; outside, in the distance, lies a world made almost artificial to his perception, like a two-dimensional painting, by the "framing" effect of the window structure and by his interpretation of that world as an ideal. His own experience has been so distinctly imperfect that he never genuinely believes the cherished ideal could be within his reach.

The inaccuracy of Barnet's vision extends to both sides of the windowpanes, and that explains not only his forfeiture of this legitimate chance to realize his dream, but also his heedless waste of the remainder of his life. Soon deserted but not divorced by the wife he saves, he never expects another chance to marry Lucy; but precisely because no effort is now required of him in either relationship, Barnet enters strangely into one of the most emotionally satisfying yet purposeless phases of his life--one in which he is free of his wife's abrasive presence and free to wallow in pleasant melancholy daydreams of what might have been with Lucy. Significantly, those daydreams are still filtered through the (for him) unrealistic medium of window-frames--now the unfinished ones at Château Ringdale. He characteristically fails to see the vital, changing circumstances in Lucy's life, as she moves toward an alliance with Downe; and, when the news of Mrs. Barnet's death leads him to an exact repetition of his earlier romantic perusal of Lucy's cottage through his own window, one has no doubt that the realization of Barnet's dream is as unlikely as ever, despite the man's own excitement. Even if Lucy were not wedding herself to Downe at that very moment, one cannot feel that a man whose

perception of his beloved has admitted no iota of change in a year's time is prepared to forge a relationship with the living, breathing person she really is. When he discovers, to his utter shock and dismay, that someone else has done just that, Barnet casts himself dramatically adrift from the place of his dreams. His perfect picture has been spoiled by the friend who has ironically won to himself a second fine wife by his willingness actively to pursue and develop a vital, realistic relationship. Worst of all, Barnet's twenty-one years of exile bring him neither wisdom nor peace of mind: his attempt finally to form an actual link between Lucy and himself is simply a repetitious postscript to his previous attitudes and behavior. Still viewing Lucy as a static ideal and still unprepared to pursue doggedly a dream which he expects to come whole and perfectly or not at all, Barnet sacrifices his last opportunity to win his love, all because he cannot see the real woman's need for one more day to adjust to his sudden return.

The passivity and impracticality of Barnet's approach to life meet their exact opposites in the Halborough brothers of "A Tragedy of Two Ambitions" (LLI). These determined young men pursue their opportunities and seek to overcome their private hardships with every ounce of energy and deliberate effort they can muster. Yet they are essentially as unsuccessful as Barnet in creating a fulfilling life for themselves, because the goal toward which they direct their efforts has been chosen merely for its capacity to advance them socially rather than because it satisfies any deep personal interest. Barnet makes no effort to enter into life to achieve the happiness he dreams of, but the Halboroughs cut themselves off from life just as certainly through their dogged, joyless pursuit of strategic careers in the Church. Once again, this mental and emotional distance between the characters and the vital world around them is established early and emphasized throughout by a motif of

symbolic window images. The story opens, in fact, with a compelling window scene which starkly contrasts the cheerful interaction of the people outside with the oppressive atmosphere in which the brothers have isolated themselves indoors:

The shouts of the village boys came in at the window, accompanied by broken laughter from loungers at the inn-door; but the brothers Halborough worked on.

They were sitting in a bedroom of the master-millwright's house, engaged in the untutored reading of Greek and Latin. It was no tale of Homeric blows and knocks, Argonautic voyaging, or Theban family woe that inflamed their imaginations and spurred them onward. They were plodding away at the Greek Testament, immersed in a chapter of the idiomatic and difficult Epistle to the Hebrews.

The Dog-day sun in its decline reached the low ceiling with slanting sides, and the shadows of the great goat's-willow swayed and interchanged upon the walls like a spectral army manoeuvring. (77)

The sounds that come to Joshua and Cornelius through the open casement of their claustrophobic chamber make no impression on them as they apply themselves mercilessly to the work they hope will someday help them rise in the world, the very world from sight of which they have, for now, barricaded themselves behind their high, angular window. Not even their sister's pleas can make them show more than "the tops of [their] heads" to that world at the expense of their plodding progress (77). Neither is at all moved to rise and look out the window until the sound of their drunken father's unsteady footsteps reminds them infuriatingly of the reason behind their tedious self-education.

However misguided their choice of the Church for furthering their social ambitions, the brothers cannot be blamed entirely for their single-minded interest in their futures. The nine hundred pounds for a university education that might have led them into more appropriate careers has been heedlessly squandered by their father. His vulgar, vindictive behavior is the bane of their lives, and the image of his reeling figure glimpsed outside this first window initiates a motif that underlies the story's entire structure. In every phase of their social progress, traced through the

numbered sections of the story, Joshua and Cornelius perceive each new threat in the continuing problem of their father's interference either materially through or in some other relation to a window. When, in the next section, Joshua visits his younger brother at the National School where Cornelius is schoolmaster, their frustrated discussion of their lost chances at university degrees, prestigious bishoprics, and a faster means up the social scale culminates in Cornelius's pained reference to the old man's recent money-seeking visit. At that moment, the dejected pair are gazing almost unconsciously through the "dusty panes" of the schoolroom window, "so high up that only the sky was visible" (84). In that context, the view reflects both the distance the brothers still essentially maintain from the world at large and the even greater distance between them and their loftiest dreams, which their father's conduct has rendered unattainable.

Back at the Fountall Theological College in the following scene, Joshua is further distracted, by his dread of the paternal visit promised next to himself, from the satisfaction he should legitimately feel regarding the considerable success he has met with at the seminary. Two window images appear here, to reflect both the young man's mood and his character. First, unable to appreciate, through recollection of his trouble, "the purple splendour thrown . . . upon the floor" by the stained-glass Cathedral windows, Joshua can see only the "squalid spot" that "ineradicable trouble" creates to stain "the expanse of his life" (84). Then, only hours later, he watches with shame through the large library window as his disreputable father, with an unexpected and appalling gipsy wife in tow, familiarly accosts on the cathedral-green the sub-dean whom Joshua respects above all others at the college. The quality of Joshua's shame, however, is the most notable aspect of the scene: he breaks into "a cold sweat" at the sight of the confrontation not simply

because of the humiliation he feels, but more particularly because he fears losing the material advantage of his mentor's good opinion (85). It is because he dares not risk another such meeting, if he is to secure the sub-dean's recommendation to a desirable post, that Joshua bribes the "disgraceful" couple to emigrate to Canada.

That same hypocrisy, mingled with justifiable bitterness, follows Joshua even to his comfortable post at Narrobourne, though, where at least one real social triumph seems virtually within his grasp. Ready to help his sister rise socially by manipulating the class system he resents (just as he has striven to raise himself by entering a profession for which he feels no deep calling), Joshua has all but secured Rosa's engagement to the local squire. At that greatest moment, however, on the very "eve of victory" (95), the old "chronic trouble" gallingly reasserts itself (92), not merely in the elder Halborough's return to England, but in the additional shame he inflicts on his children by getting himself thrown in jail almost upon arrival--ironically, for "breaking windows" (94). Bent on presenting himself to Squire Fellmer upon his release and giving Rosa away in marriage, he threatens to shatter his children's dreams as well. It is the impotent rage and despair Joshua and Cornelius both feel at this malevolent intrusion, timed to undermine all their hard work and finest opportunities at the last moment, that make them feel so powerfully the urge to accept the grotesque, unexpected opportunity to salvage their dreams by letting their father drown on the night of his release from jail.

The window imagery that punctuates this scene reflects symbolically every shift and nuance in the brothers' emotional response to their situation. From the moment they meet their father on the road until they finally move, too late, to his aid, the lights from the conservatory window at Narrobourne House are mentioned no fewer than four times. At first, they merely form an ironic backdrop for the old

man's figure when his sons first come upon him and again as he lurches off, after taunting them, to carry out his vindictive plan. The knowledge that "Albert Fellmer might possibly be sitting with Rosa at that moment, holding her hand, and asking her to share his home" is almost more than the young men can bear (99), as their rage gives way to helpless, numbing defeat. When they hear Halborough fall into the weir, however, their every nerve is electrified: suddenly conscious of new possibilities, they hesitate critically as the now "hopeful lights" from the conservatory wink through the swaying branches of the trees (99-100). Horrified, but tempted beyond their strength, they delay their rescue efforts until the mead grows conspicuously silent, at which point they fancy that they can see beyond it "figures moving in the conservatory. The air up there seemed to emit gentle kisses" (100). Only for the innocent Rosa, though, does this last romantic interpretation of the window image come true. For her brothers, satisfaction in the object gained is instantly devoured by their guilt, as are the pleasure and pride they might otherwise have taken in their own subsequent measure of social success. Though they achieve every goal they mapped out originally back in their old claustrophobic room, the victory is insignificant and bitter-tasting to them and leaves them as isolated as ever from the vital world they thought one day to savor. The final, implicit irony of their story is the painful, but fitting realization that the living emblem of their crime--the little flowering poplar--is visible from the very window which, through its associations, urged them to transgress.

Single emblematic images like old Halborough's walking stick, grown to a sapling at the site of his "murder," and structural images like the symbolic windows subtly emphasized through so many of the short stories are the two most consistently and artistically effective of all the image patterns Hardy uses to reflect his themes.

Drawn from the everyday physical surroundings or personal habits of his characters, they carry substantial symbolic weight without seeming in the least out of keeping with the natural course of the plots and settings in which they appear. Occasionally, a startling image such as the mutilated statue in "Barbara of the House of Grebe," the psychically transmitted features of the child in "An Imaginative Woman," or even Selina Paddock's mummified wedding cake in "Enter a Dragoon" draws attention to itself, by its very strangeness, as an obvious symbol. But even the rare images of this kind are worked intrinsically into the contexts either of such familiar human predicaments or of such compelling psychological analyses that they quite justify their blatant presence. The general absence, however, of such obtrusive symbolism in the stories--as well as of long, purely descriptive passages--is what lends to the scattered emblematic images that do appear a special, seemingly effortless, thematic potency which is well suited to the straightforward narrative style that distinguishes the tales fundamentally from Hardy's more complex and densely packed longer fiction. Even the image motifs that help to structure the entire action of some stories function primarily as rather low-key visual reinforcements of Hardy's main ideas. His climactic placement of them, as well as of his more numerous single images, in relation to critical moments in his characters' lives enables him visually to reflect, embody, or otherwise emphasize the ironies of circumstance and particular qualities of personality that move those characters through each critical point to their ultimate destinies. Above all, Hardy's emblematic images serve to highlight for the reader (and sometimes for the characters themselves) the way in which those characters' essential values, fears, self-perceptions, and attitudes toward the world around them govern every choice they make and, thereby, determine in large part the degree of happiness or fulfillment they derive from the destinies they forge.

CHAPTER 8

THEME: THE HARDYAN VIEW

As the overarching theme that directs every aspect of his short stories, Hardy's view of the human condition has necessarily been discussed extensively throughout this study of the various patterns of technique, subject matter, and characterization which he uses to present that view. Theme is, after all, the fundamental pattern that informs all the others, from the most blatantly recurrent plot situations, narrative strategies, and character types to the subtlest details of setting and imagery. Its effective expression is at once the major reason for and the most significant result of Hardy's conspicuous reliance on those repetitious devices. Thus, this chapter is offered more by way of conclusion to the preceding argument than by way of introducing any substantial new observations regarding theme. It is certainly not intended to retrace in detail philosophical ground long since mapped out by a century of scholarly debate over Hardy's intellectual position as fatalist, determinist, or meliorist. I am concerned with that debate only in so far as it seems largely to have by-passed the short stories, and thus to have overlooked almost entirely their continual emphasis on the role of individual choice in determining human destiny. The dominant thematic interpretation of Hardy's major fiction has for so long detected a pessimistic vision of life as "a caprice that irrationally maims or overwhelms helpless mortals" (Knight 235) that the few scholars who have turned a serious eye to the short stories have tended to apply the same interpretation automatically to them. But while it is true that one finds in the stories all the familiar suggestions of a chaotic universe driven by impercipient forces--with Hardy's typical emphases on inexplicable accidents, ironic coincidences, and the

often tragic mistiming of events--there is, mingled inextricably with those suggestions, in virtually every story, even more insistent evidence that his characters (and by implication all human beings) undoubtedly assist "fate" in creating their own happiness or misery by responding as they do to the unexpected misfortunes and opportunities that befall them.

The same implicit idea runs through Hardy's novels as well, but, perhaps owing to the almost total absence in the short stories of somber philosophical digressions, this aspect of the Hardyan view of life more readily draws attention to itself in the latter genre. There, where the limitations of space force the artist to let events and his characters' responses speak for themselves, one can perceive more directly the two-fold nature of Hardy's outlook: his belief that "the lives of men are controlled from both within and without, by understandable and predictable urges as well as by incomprehensible and unpredictable forces which come like a god from a machine" (Webster 133). While several scholars have in the last few decades given a nod to this thematic duality,¹ Roy Morrell stands virtually alone in having traced it vigorously and systematically through the bulk of Hardy's major fiction. Although he devotes very little space to the short stories, the few he does mention make it clear that in them, as in the novels, "Hardy's plots are woven of possibilities as well as actualities" (144), so that even "when things do happen 'just too late' apparently by accident, . . . we are usually well enough aware that they could have been made to happen in time, if people had been quick to realize the contingencies" (113). For

¹ Stressing the influential power of such "basic and abiding factors of character and environment," John Holloway insists that it "is a mistake to think that Hardy's novels move through arbitrary accidents to a sad end. . . . The potentialities of change are in the people" (250). And Jean R. Brooks broadens her study to include at least a few brief references to the short stories when she argues that, "while it is true that Hardy's poetic pattern stresses the action of fate, it does so to stress too the human responsibility to deflect fate from its path before it is too late" (18-19).

those human beings who foresee the possibilities within their circumstances and, while accepting the unalterable realities, act to capitalize on the "loopholes" of their condition, fate is at least partially under their control. It is only by their "shrinking from circumstances [that people] do in fact become powerless against those circumstances" (171).

Ironically, then, for all the scholarly emphasis on mankind's absolute vulnerability to a cruelly capricious universe, the widespread human misery Hardy portrays in his fiction owes as much to ineffective human choices and actions (or lack of action) as to "Crass Casualty." In its most basic sense, "Circumstance" itself "usually means Man"; for the "indifferent power that rules the world" uses "as its instruments the passions, or stupidity, or timidity, of human beings" (Child 52-53). And nowhere is that theme more consistently evident than in the short stories, the limited scope of which forces Hardy to focus primarily on developing the passions, personalities, and motives of his characters to the near exclusion of such emphases on moody pictorial description and narrative analysis as typify his more expansive novels. The plots of the stories are just as filled with strange, pitiful, unjust, and always ironic chance events as his other works, but the absence of those other elements, which seem especially to reinforce the notion of fate in the novels, here helps immediately to suggest that those events need not necessarily cause the utter destruction of people's lives. A mature, courageous awareness of and approach to the challenges of life, Hardy implies, can go a long way toward averting disaster in many cases. And even the most fundamental, unself-pitying attempt to rebound productively from unmerited suffering and disappointment can create meaning in an otherwise thwarted life, even when actual happiness is impossible. Whatever the specifics of their environments, heredity, or personal encounters with cosmic

caprice, how human beings respond to the crises of their lives matters intensely. Yet, too often, as the characters in Hardy's short stories demonstrate, people respond either by shrinking from the necessity of grappling with external events and their own desires or else by pursuing their goals too aggressively and impulsively, the usual result of both choices being, of course, an ironic compounding of the ill effects of chance in their own and, often, other people's lives.

The tendency of many scholars to overlook this element of cooperativeness between the individual and fate in Hardy's fiction is part of the same single-minded critical approach that has limited appreciation of his work in general, submerging the full range of his artistic achievements "under a great deal of sombre theorizing about his philosophy," so that "Hardy the thinker has overwhelmed Hardy the teller of tales" (Guerard 7). Hardy himself felt keenly the frustrating imbalance of this response by his critical audience to his apparent pessimism and tried repeatedly to convince those readers that he had neither intended nor attempted to propound in any of his works "a coherent scientific theory of the universe." Insisting in his "General Preface" to the Wessex Edition of his "work of forty years" that "[p]ositive views on the Whence and Wherefore of things have never been advanced by this pen as a consistent philosophy," he cautioned his readers that any sentiments apparent in his art regarding human experience in relation to the fundamental issues of existence were his "mere impressions of the moment" (*Personal Writings* 48, 49). Certainly, those impressions never conveyed to Hardy any conviction of the just, rational, orderly universe presupposed by earlier traditions, but neither did they make him view human beings as utterly helpless, innocent pawns of the alternative chaos, as the dominant critical opinion has long maintained. Even his most conscious endorsement--outside of his fiction--of the philosophical doctrine of

the Immanent Will acknowledges something of the thematic duality, involving both fate and individual responsibility, which emerges in the short stories as the most significant and pervasive of Hardy's "impressions" of life:

The will of a man is . . . neither wholly free nor wholly unfree. When swayed by the Universal Will (as he mostly must be as a subservient part of it) he is not individually free; but whenever it happens that all the rest of the Great Will is in equilibrium the minute portion called one person's will is free, just as a performer's fingers will go on playing the pianoforte of themselves when he talks or thinks of something else & the head does not rule them. (CL 3: 255)

Still, this abstract notion of human beings as generally subservient extensions of the unconscious forces propelling the universe does not equate exactly with the emphasis Hardy places on their relationship in the short stories themselves. The concrete representations of real experience in the stories, as in all of "his distinguished work," rest upon "a vision of life that is a good deal more dramatic, complex and unsettled. Hardy's world-view--what he called his 'idiosyncratic mode of regard'--is something quite different from, and far less reducible to a few leaden axioms, than his formal philosophy" (Howe, Hardy 26). His stories are complicated and enriched beyond mere development of such axioms by his more immediate and deeply compassionate interest in human beings themselves and their day-to-day struggle with the forces that trouble their existence. The passions, attitudes, and inherited traits that guide them individually in that struggle may be part of those random forces, but what one senses most consistently in the stories from Hardy's treatment of both character and theme is that the opportunity for significant choice and action does not depend solely upon some vague state of universal equilibrium. The metaphysic that informs and controls his art is "more a feeling than an idea, an ethical metaphysic rather than an intellectual" (Abercrombie 20); and it concerns itself most immediately, through his intuitive

understanding of human nature, with the variable clarity of vision and emotional willingness of beleaguered individuals to deal responsibly with their circumstances, by either generating their own opportunities or at least actively seizing the ones chance brings their way, to alter those circumstances for the better.

The obstacles that deter most individuals from responding with genuine effectiveness to this challenge arise from, and are as varied as, human nature itself. Often, of course, the major difficulty in acting and choosing rightly stems from the inability of the human mind to see life whole, with all its multitudinous possibilities and hidden dangers. But, more specifically, as the characters in Hardy's short stories demonstrate, human beings frequently have within them some quality that either blinds them to or makes them hesitant to grasp the constructive opportunities that actually surface in their lives. It is this "weakness, disability, inherited instinct, or . . . error in the assertion of their strength, which inevitably becomes the chance for the power of the world finally to assert itself against them" (Abercrombie 31). Time after time in the stories, one meets characters who help doom themselves to unhappiness by means of their oversubmissiveness, impulsiveness, distorted values, or inappropriate uses of power. Timid women like Sophy Twycott, Gertrude Lodge, and Lady Uplandtowers all cut themselves off from life by bowing insecurely to the imperious wills of crassly selfish men in their lives. The thoughtless impulses of drifters like Mr. Millborne and Charles Raye bring ruin and misery to those characters' lives (and to others' besides), as Baptista Trewthen's very nearly do to hers. And, certainly, those characters who base their identities and happiness on such shallow criteria as social class and material wealth inevitably find their ambitions bitterly unrewarding. From struggling "commoners" like Joanna Jolliffe and the Halborough brothers, to the wealthy but middle-class Timothy Petrick, to

the aristocratic Marchioness of Stonehenge and Lady Icenway, choices based on social aspiration and pride lead only to intense dissatisfaction with life. Even the most powerful members of the privileged class--like Lord Uplandtowers, the Baron von Xanten, the squire in "The Doctor's Legend," and the murderous Duke in "What the Shepherd Saw"--ironically undercut their own ambitions and best interests by interfering ruthlessly or proprietarily in the lives of others.

In many instances, human misery results simply from people's unwillingness "to adapt [themselves] to life as it is, to lower [their] demands upon life, to forego" unrealistic dreams (Morrell 36). Cruel movements of forces beyond their control may well have maneuvered them into painful or disappointing situations, but their refusal to attempt any adjustments, either to the circumstances themselves or to their attitudes toward those circumstances, merely makes permanent the misfortune initiated by chance. Instead of facing disappointment squarely and making the best of what life gives them, these people tend to wallow in self-pity and forsake reality in favor of daydreams. One finds in dreamers like Ella Marchmill, George Barnet, and the diarist Alicia nothing of the dignified, stoic endurance of a Sam Hobson or a Phyllis Grove, or of the resilient, positive efforts in the face of hardship of Emily Lester, Shadrach Jolliffe, or Shepherd Fennel and his family at Higher Crowstairs. The former characters simply intensify their misery by torturing themselves with unrealistic and unattainable dreams. Sometimes, however, what is required of human beings is not stoic acceptance of a grim reality, but rather the courage to pursue a legitimate dream and demand more of life than they have settled for out of fear of disturbing their familiar (and therefore safe), if unhappy, state of equilibrium. Drifters like Hardy's Nicholas Long and Christine Everard, and even Sophy Twycott, repeatedly have easily with their reach the opportunity to realize

their dreams of happiness. But they consistently lack the courage, and in Sophy's case the self-esteem, to defy public opinion, social convention, and the snobbish values of their families. Rather than risk the little stability they have, they deny themselves forever the almost certain acquisition of happiness and rewarding companionship.

By focusing on these many self-defeating weaknesses in his characters, typical of the flaws in real human responses to life's challenges, Hardy is not merely harping cynically on the foolishness of human beings and the hopelessness of their common condition. Indeed, for all but the most ruthless of those characters, he displays extraordinary compassion and a sensitive, generous understanding of the reasons behind their unfortunate choices.² Moreover, through his emphasis on the very existence of options for his characters, however ineffective or misdirected their responses to those options, Hardy suggests anything but hopelessness. It is, in the end, only "his pity and love for man, his belief in the dignity and potentiality of life, that give his Ironic Vision its irony. If Hardy were a cynic, . . . the gap between is and ought to be would hold no torment for him" (Richards, "Part Two" 35). No reader of his short stories can even remotely deem Hardy to be untormented in that regard. But, for all the human suffering he perceives and records, Hardy is ultimately more concerned in those stories with emphasizing the possibilities of life than with grimly cataloguing its painful limitations. In an oft-cited conversation with William Archer, he rigorously defended his unflinching artistic presentation of the suffering he observed in the world, explaining that:

² Guerard describes Hardy's attitude as "an incorrigible sympathy for all who are lonely and all who long for happiness" and stresses that he "understood the plight of ordinary, simple, and well-meaning persons, subjected to the extraordinary, complex, and seemingly malign circumstances of life. He could find a saving grace in all failure" (158).

my pessimism, if pessimism it be, does not involve the assumption that the world is going to the dogs, and that Ahriman is winning all along the line. On the contrary, my practical philosophy is distinctly meliorist. What are my books but one plea against 'man's inhumanity to man'--to woman--and to the lower animals? . . . Whatever may be the inherent good or evil of life, it is certain that men make it much worse than it need be. When we have got rid of a thousand remediable ills, it will be time enough to determine whether the ill that is irremediable outweighs the good. (Archer 46-47)

By continually examining in his stories both the part his characters often play in creating or exacerbating some of those "thousand remediable ills" and the poor use they make of their opportunities to eliminate or alleviate them, Hardy not only focuses attention on the problems themselves but also, by contrast, emphasizes the kind of effort really required for addressing them. Regardless of whether his characters' choices and actions inspire horror, exasperation, pity, disapprobation, or praise, they consistently point toward vital human concerns and generate the kind of sympathetic enlightenment in the reader regarding those concerns that encourages tolerance, right conduct, and more appropriate choices under like conditions. This is precisely the constructive emotional effect Hardy insisted upon in his essay "The Profitable Reading of Fiction":

Our true object [in reading fiction] is a lesson in life, mental enlargement from elements essential to the narratives themselves and from the reflections they engender. . . . It is the force of an appeal to the emotional reason rather than to the logical reason; for by their emotions men are acted upon, and act upon others. (Personal Writings 114-15)

There is a "reformist zeal" in Hardy's fiction (Millgate, Biography 411), born of his own deep sympathy for the pain human beings, in their varied but fallible approaches to life, heap needlessly upon themselves in addition to that which mere accident inflicts upon them from without. Yet "Hardy is not suggesting that for the achievement of happiness we must look forward to a change in human nature but rather use resources we already possess" (Morrell 98). And those resources reside

precisely in the disconcerting and demanding, but undeniable power of independent human choice: "Through man's conscious awareness he can control and change those parts of the universe which are the products of his consciousness (i.e. society) even if he cannot overcome or change for the present the unconscious portions of the universe or the unconscious (i.e. emotional) parts of himself" (Webster 195). Too many of the injustices suffered by humanity are inflicted by human beings upon one another, in the shape of inflexible social prejudices, conventions, and restrictions; but the problem contains its own solution. What can be done can also be undone, Hardy implies, through diligent effort and a courageous acceptance of responsibility for our own choices and for our fellow human beings. Ultimately, it is within such mature responsibility and effort that the one true source of meaning and dignity lies, in an indifferent universe, for both the individual and the race.

That realization of human potential in spite of the obstacles imposed by chance is for Hardy the essential goal of mankind. His argument for an unflinching effort toward its achievement is implicit in the very fabric of his short stories; and every pattern of technique and character he uses to develop those stories urges the reader to recognize and share his vision. His basic plot repetitions, for example, focus as much attention on the remediable social ills he deplored as on the unpredictable caprices of inscrutable forces. For all his dramatic acknowledgement of those forces, in fact--through the astonishing array of ironic coincidences, sudden deaths, and other painfully mistimed events that crowd his plots--Hardy's strongest emphasis invariably falls upon the surrounding context and details of the social climate, which generally have more to do with the painfulness of the events than do the coincidences themselves. The crushing misery that descends upon Edith Harnham, for instance, is a direct result of Charles Raye's accidental touch of her

hand; but it can actually be traced much further back, to the conventional Victorian attitudes toward and expectations of women that propelled her in the first place into a life so empty that a casual encounter could elicit from her so intense a response. Similarly, in "The Marchioness of Stonehenge," the sudden demise of Lady Caroline's first husband generates a more than ordinary emotional distress for the young widow because her lifelong indoctrination into the prevailing social prejudices and ambitions of her class has overwhelmed her finer instincts and made her desperate to salvage her aristocratic pride and future prospects at all costs--here, by concealing her link to the socially inferior husband she now views with shame.

Such rigid social conventions and class prejudices lie at the root of almost all the avoidable suffering experienced by the characters in Hardy's stories. Chance may, and often does, make a painful situation worse, but those human constructs are quite capable of leading, unaided, to such needless injustices as ambitious parents sacrificing their children to their own dreams of titles or wealth; lovers foregoing happiness together in fearful concession to public opinion or expectations; and those individuals with the greatest social or sexual power abusing those dependent upon or otherwise powerless against their whims. And yet, these very problems of greed, hypocrisy, egotism, artificial social inequalities, and gross materialism are within the power of human beings to change if they so choose--primarily by the exercise of what Hardy repeatedly referred to as "loving kindness." The challenge is immense, of course, but through his most pervasive plot pattern of all--the continual emphasis on marriage, elopement, and the plight of unlucky lovers--Hardy reveals the persistent, deep-seated, instinctive desire of most human beings to approach one another in a positive way. The instinct itself is often masked, thwarted, or distorted

by more mercenary, learned motives and behavior, but it still drives people to try to connect emotionally with at least one other person in a powerful relationship capable of providing them some measure of stability and meaning amid the larger uncertainties of life. In a "harsh world [Hardy] sees man as thirsting for happiness and imagining that he will find it by love in some form or another" (Cecil 121); and, whatever the degree of individual success or failure owing to the variable forces of chance and character, that common yearning proves that men and women do possess within themselves the constructive inclination required for effecting change.

That Hardy did discern a real potential as well as need for change helps especially to explain the dominant patterns within his narrative technique in the short stories. Both his purely omniscient and his artificially imposed (and usually soon abandoned) frame narrators reflect his need to control the narration in ways that allow him to present the problems and possibilities of human experience with unmistakable clarity. Both techniques permit him to comment directly on the external events, social pressures, and personality traits that lead his characters to choose and act as they do when destiny-shaping opportunities present themselves. Hardy's comments are--impressively--seldom lengthy or cumbrously intrusive as they can be at times in the novels, but they enable him nonetheless to draw attention consistently to both the social and cosmic obstacles to human happiness and the many instances in which his characters are actually granted the opportunity and means at least partially to overcome those obstacles, had they but the foresight and courage to exert themselves. By directly analyzing why and how his characters too often misuse or forfeit their opportunities, Hardy continually emphasizes the fact that human beings need not be as miserably, helplessly subject to the workings of forces outside themselves as they allow themselves to be.

In much the same way, the patterns evident in Hardy's use of setting in the stories point toward the real, if under-utilized, power of human choice and effort. His descriptions of dramatic, even overwhelming, natural settings such as the crashing, moonlit waterfall in "The Honourable Laura" and the storm-battered uplands in "The Three Strangers" and "A Tryst at an Ancient Earthwork" inspire a legitimate awe, it is true, of forces that lie beyond human control. But those descriptions are significantly countered by Hardy's deliberate direction of the reader's attention to setting details that inspire a kind of awe as well of the marks human beings have nevertheless managed to impose on their environment. From the mundane rows of household receptacles set out at Higher Crowstairs to make the storm serve the Fennel family's needs to the enormous earthen fortress raised by an ancient people to dominate the surrounding landscape, those marks provide an impressive visual demonstration of the meaningful exertions human beings are capable of making on their own behalf, despite the ever-present element of chance. To emphasize the relative rarity of and implicit need for more such effective exertions, however, Hardy sketches in most of his settings with small, commonplace details that highlight the waste most people make of their lives by not responding rightly to their circumstances and opportunities. Thus does one find his characters repeatedly imprisoned and excluded from life by such ordinary structural features as the windows, railings, walls, dreary gardens, and dusty streets to which their own misguided choices have restricted them.

The characters themselves, of course, provide Hardy with his most powerful means of exploring the difficulties and possibilities of choosing rightly. They also exhibit the strongest evidence of his penchant for repetition in the short stories. But while they sometimes seem to fall too obviously into nameable categories, Hardy's

characters represent legitimate, recognizable human types, which in turn embody the very errors in response to life's challenges that most hinder mankind's progress in regard to the "thousand remediable ills." Each type (save the stoics, who respond constructively) is driven by a characteristic attitude and approach toward life that merely perpetuate the harm done by man-made social injustices and clear the way for chance to work its worst. Those strange characters discussed here under the heading of "demonic mesmerizers," for instance, callously seek satisfaction or at least diversion in their own lives through a total, immensely destructive disregard for the rights and happiness of others. Like the ambitious schemers, they are generally motivated in their actions by prevailing notions of the social order and their consequent assumption of a right to all the power and privilege linked to their position in the hierarchy. The exception, of course, is Mop Ollamoor, who represents no order at all, but rather the chaos of sensual passion that distracts, to some degree, men and women of every type from their most effective choices. Only a few stoic individuals, in Hardy's estimation, have genuinely mastered their own desires and self-interest so as to place the welfare of others first and face their own disappointments not merely with dignified resignation, but with conscious efforts as well to forge a meaningful, productive life from the destiny to which their circumstances and choices have brought them. Hardy's drifters and imaginative women are no less responsible for assisting circumstance in directing their destinies; but, unlike the stoics, their choices are generally negative ones of passive avoidance and weak-willed escapism. They make little effort either to resist the social restrictions that deny them happiness or to anticipate the consequences (good or bad) of the chance events and personal impulses that shape their experience.

Judging from his distribution of these five character patterns throughout his short stories, it is clear that Hardy saw most human beings as belonging to either the destructively aggressive or the ineffectually acquiescent categories, and thus as being too little aware as yet of the extraordinary effects their own action or inaction has on the quality of their lives. The complex, immediate realities of their experience tend to blind them to the potentialities--in regard to both the results of their actual choices and the available alternatives that could, at the very least, minimize the ill effects brought by chance into their lives. It is Hardy's sympathetic comprehension of this real difficulty of seeing one's options clearly amidst the day-to-day problems of existence that keeps his emphasis on character types from becoming stale. Here, in the short stories as elsewhere, "he comes nearest of nineteenth-century novelists to treating men and women with a due sense of their dignity and their claim to consideration as independent beings" (Beach, English Literature 168). Despite fundamental similarities, each of his characters encounters a unique set of circumstances and difficulties and sheds, with his or her specific response, instructive new light on both the general plight of humanity and the vital issues of how individuals might better manage their misfortunes and opportunities so as to improve that plight.

Even the patterns of imagery which Hardy uses to make his stories more emphatically visual contribute emblematically to this lesson that is always to be drawn from his characters concerning the thematic truths of human experience, error, and potential. From the superstitious details by means of which some characters try to explain the undeniable play of chance in the world to the commonplace, but personally significant objects that remind others painfully of their own ill-advised actions, Hardy's images provide a symbolic commentary on the

ongoing struggle of human beings to discover meaning in their circumstances, and an ironic reinforcement of the mistakes they make in the process. Isolated images like the chalked farewell that so torments Joanna Jolliffe for her selfish ambition point relentlessly toward many characters' disastrous choices and toward the approaches they should have taken to their original situations. So too do the motifs of unwelcome facial resemblances and imprisoning windows, both of which often emphasize additionally not only wrong choices and lost opportunities of the past, but also some characters' continuing forfeiture of opportunities still available to them but for their insurmountable timidity, stubbornness, or romanticism. More subtly and poignantly than any of the other patterns in Hardy's short stories, these images emphasize the vital but largely unrecognized and uncontrolled ironic participation of human choice in the creation of "life's little ironies."

With their continual, unapologetic reliance on such repetitious devices as those examined in this study, and especially with their frequent emphasis on folk traditions and the past and their relatively leisurely pace, Hardy's short stories strike some readers as old-fashioned and artistically negligible; but Hardy's serious thematic focus on the complex nature, cause, and potential cure of those often heartbreaking "ironies" that trouble human existence earns the stories, unequivocally, a significant and critically acknowledged place beside his more renowned work. If a short story is a creation that "makes tiny bits of life speak for the whole of life" (O'Faolain 144), then the majority of Hardy's tales, with their representative types of humanity and incisive enactments of familiar social and moral dilemmas, constitute notable examples of the genre. And, like the stories themselves, the technical patterns ultimately become their own justification; for, while the notion that human destiny results from an ironic collaboration between

chance and choice is the thematic "pattern among general things which [Hardy's artistic] idiosyncrasy move[d] him to observe" in the whole carpet of existence (EL 198), the repetitious devices that develop his characters' specific circumstances and responses to life are his idiosyncratic means of reflecting that larger, commanding pattern. The devices provide a consistent medium through which he can present vividly his major "impressions" of life, human nature, and the potential of both. They also enable him to accomplish his other narrative goals of entertaining his readers with "things unusual"--through his plot patterns of bizarre coincidence and grotesquerie--and of recording fading local traditions--often through patterns of setting and imagery. But, above all, they help him to tell realistic and humane stories of fateful choice that come full circle to the universal experience of "every average man and woman" (Personal Writings 120), and to impress upon such ordinary people the necessity of seizing the constructive opportunities that come to them as they too struggle with the difficulties posed equally by their own fallible humanity and the unpredictable world around them. It is this last achievement that makes Hardy, in his finest works, "a poet of the short story" (Beachcroft 118).

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VITA

Lawana F. Day was born in Beaumont, Texas, on July 10, 1958. She graduated from Amarillo High School in Amarillo, Texas, in May 1976. The following August she entered West Texas State University, and in May 1980 she received a Bachelor of Arts degree in English Education. In the fall of 1980 she accepted a teaching assistantship at West Texas State and began study toward a Master's degree in English. This degree was awarded in December 1983.

In the fall of 1983 she entered The Graduate School of The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and accepted a teaching associateship in the English department. While completing her dissertation in 1991-1992, she worked as an adjunct instructor in the English department at Pellissippi State Technical Community College. She received the Doctor of Philosophy degree with a major in English in May 1992.

Ms. Day is a member of Phi Kappa Phi, the Modern Language Association, and the South Atlantic Modern Language Association.