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THE SHORT FICTION
OF THOMAS HARDY:
AN EXPLORATION AND ASSESSMENT

by

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ABSTRACT

Hardy's novels and poetry have received extensive criticism, in due proportion to their merit. Hardy's short stories, however, have been virtually excluded from the annals of Hardy criticism, even though Hardy wrote over forty short stories, several of which are truly outstanding. In part, the reason for this neglect is because of the neglected state of the short story in Victorian England. Short fiction, published mainly only in periodicals and never collected in volume form, was obscured to a large extent by the highly popular serial novel. This thesis examines Thomas Hardy's short stories in the context of both the Victorian period and the Victorian short story genre, and explores the ways in which Thomas Hardy improved upon and deviated from some of the common types of short fiction being written in his day.

In the first chapter, Hardy's use of the sensation formula is discussed. While relying upon melodramatic situations and improbable events, Hardy adds more psychological interest to his characters than many other sensationalists. Chapter two examines Hardy's depiction of the modern condition in short fiction and shows that, in general, Hardy's attitude towards modern life is pessimistic, an attitude contradicting the views held by the majority of his Victorian audience. The third chapter discusses Hardy's historical tales and the unique concept of history that shapes these tales. Hardy denies the individual nature of an historical period to show that all history is alike, being ruled by chance alone. Chapter four discusses Hardy's use of marriage and love, a central concern in his short fiction. Hardy views:
convention, especially the marriage convention, as being diametrically opposed to individual happiness and love. This opposes the views of the Victorian public, who would not allow the possibility of love existing beyond the marriage bond. Hardy portrayed love in a less sentimental fashion than most Victorian writers, emphasizing instead its sexual aspect. Several of his short stories underwent bowdlerization. In the fifth and final chapter, Hardy’s tales of rustic life are examined. Hardy endows his rustic characters with charm, grace and wit; his sentimental treatment of these characters is essentially non-realistic, yet coincides with the nostalgic attitudes of many Victorians towards the country. Though rustic life is only fully depicted in two or three tales, these tales were singled out for praise in the few contemporary criticisms of the short story volumes.

Victorian short fiction, which appeared briefly in a periodical, and thus had to either succeed at once or not at all, tended to be written mainly by "hack" writers, those interested primarily in pleasing their audience, with artistic expression being a minor or non-existent concern. The periodical form lends itself to works which profess the same opinion or philosophy of their readers. Hardy’s short fiction represents, in many instances, an expression of his personal philosophy, and his pessimistic, deterministic views of life, especially prevalent in his short fiction, did not create the instant popularity necessary for Victorian short fiction to receive much attention from critics, unlike George Eliot and her immediately successful Scenes from Clerical Life. This lack of initial attention is responsible for the current neglect of Hardy’s short fiction. In my opinion, Hardy’s short fiction needs to be evaluated on the basis of its artistic merit and not judged on the basis of the opinions which it professes.
INTRODUCTION
Between the years 1871 and 1895, Thomas Hardy wrote thirteen novels,¹ many of which are regarded today as being outstanding works of literature and which have received attention in accordance with their merit. Hardy also wrote eight volumes of poetry,² much of which is highly regarded as well. Between the years 1874 and 1899, however, Hardy also wrote over fifty short stories,³ stories which have been largely neglected by critics. These short stories, collected in four volumes--Wessex Tales (1888), A Group of Noble Dames (1891), Life's Little Ironies (1894) and A Changed Man (1913)--represent a substantial contribution to the Victorian short story genre. But Hardy's short stories have received only sparse treatment from critics. Many earlier critics, and later ones as well, generally regard Hardy's short stories as "fragments chipped off his larger works".⁴ In accordance with this view, Hardy's short stories are only occasionally mentioned by these critics to illustrate points about the author's novels or his poetry.⁵ Though two recent critical works on Hardy devote separate sections to his short stories,⁶ and several dissertations have been published on the subject,⁷ few, if any, attempts have been made to assess them in relation to the forms assumed by other Victorian short stories.

Any exploration of Thomas Hardy's short stories in relation to those of other Victorian short story writers is impossible without an understanding of the state of the short story in Victorian England. In comparison with America, the short
story was late to develop in England. Heinz Bergner claims that "Theories and theoretical systems of the short story genre, or a clear, fixed awareness of the artistic demands it made, were completely unknown to nineteenth-century England". There were, indeed, no established criteria for writing short fiction. Poe's theory on the short story—that it should be short because it cannot be long, be complete in and of itself and possess singleness of incidence—had not yet reached the shores of England.

The exact nature of Victorian short fiction was ambiguous. One proof of this can be seen in the fact that there was not one clearcut term by which Victorians identified this fiction genre. A short story could be subtitled a "tale" or "story"—but these terms were just as frequently applied to novels. A short story was often called a "scene" or "sketch", but these labels were applied to prose essays as well. The only titles which were given solely to short fiction, "novelette" and "little novel", are themselves derived from the term "novel".

In Victorian England, short fiction was written primarily for periodicals. If a short story was written for the brief, weekly periodical, it would appear in two or perhaps three installments; if written for the lengthier, monthly periodical, the short story would, in most instances, appear in only one installment. Being scattered throughout different periodicals, short stories were difficult to collect, and therefore were usually not printed in hardback form unless they made an immediate impact upon the public, or if the author's fame was already established, most often through another medium.
Being published in periodicals, short fiction had to compete for popularity with the serial novel, which also appeared in periodical form. The serial novel usually appeared for close to a year in a single periodical. Hence, the readers of a serial novel were given time in which to familiarize themselves with its characters and its setting. A serial novel would, in a sense, enter into the private lives of its readers. Readers would discuss with others possible endings for a certain novel while it was still in progress, and often they would become so caught up in the lives of its fictional characters that they would write impasioned pleas to the author, insisting upon their own personal endings. The serial novel performed an important social function in Victorian England, perhaps comparable to that performed by the television soap opera in modern American culture.

If the serial novel did not immediately capture the attention of its audience, it had several months in which to do so. The short story, on the other hand, appeared only in a few installments and thus had to create an impact upon its readers immediately, or not at all. Because of its brevity, the short story could not perform the social function of its lengthier competitor. In short, the success of the serial novel overshadowed that of the short story. Unless a short story was exceptionally successful in its periodical appearance, the better Victorian reviewers generally waited until the short story was collected and published in volume form to review it. But much Victorian short fiction was not collected and given a chance to compete with the hardbound novel.
for the attention of both the Victorian reviewers and readers.

As a result of the relative unpopularity of short fiction, there existed a large discrepancy between what a novel could earn for its author and what could be garnered by the same author's venture into short fiction. Novels were economically more rewarding than short fiction. A collection of Anthony Trollope's short sketches entitled An Editor's Tales, for example, published in 1870, brought him a mere £378 at a time when his three-volume novels commanded as much as £3000 each. George Eliot receive a paltry sum of £52 from Blackwood's for her "Sad Fortunes of Amos Barton" in 1856. Monetary considerations contributed towards delegating short fiction a minor role in the world of Victorian literature.

The generally neglectful attitude of the Victorians themselves towards short fiction is certainly a large factor in their neglect of Hardy's short fiction. This is not to imply, however, that Victorian critics entirely overlooked his short stories. The Westminster Review published a short notice on Wessex Tales, the National Review expressed its personal opinion that Hardy's novels are superior to A Group of Noble Dames and his short stories are mentioned in two general surveys of Hardy's works as well. But the attitude of these reviewers towards Hardy's shorter works was, to a large extent, lukewarm, and this attitude has continued up until the present. Within the context of the Victorian short story genre, however, Hardy's short stories demonstrate a remarkable versatility and power, and for this reason alone merit closer critical attention...
than they have hitherto been accorded.
Footnotes

1 See select bibliography for complete listing.

2 See select bibliography for complete listing.

3 See select bibliography for complete listing.


5 See:

6 See:

7 See:
  Janice Stewart Bohi, Thomas Hardy's Short Stories: A Critical Approach, Ph.D., Case Western Reserve University (Ohio: 1975).
  William F. Browne, Diversity and Unity in Thomas Hardy's Short Stories, Ph.D., City University of New York (New York: 1979).
  Alexander F. Fischler, Thomas Hardy's Short Stories: Their Relation to Major Trends and Interests in the Criticisms of His Works, Ph.D., University of Washington (Washington: 1961).
Elizabeth J. Higgins, *Class Consciousness and Class Conflict in the Novels and Tales of Thomas Hardy*, Ph.D., University of California, Los Angeles (California: 1964).


13. Ibid., p. xxxvii.

CHAPTER ONE

SENSATIONALISM

AND

TALES OF THE SUPERNATURAL
Thomas Hardy has often been "accused" of being highly sensational in his fiction--"accused" because sensationalism is traditionally scoffed at in most literary circles. Sensationalism reached its height of popularity during the mid-Victorian period, with the writings of Charles Dickens, Charles Reade and Wilkie Collins. These three writers may be said to have formed a distinct school, with Dickens at its head. All three writers admired each other's work, not surprisingly in view of their common adherence to sensation formulas.

Sensationalism has two primary characteristics. First, sensationalism emphasizes strong passion for its own sake. Most often, sensationalism delineates terrible emotions which lead to terrible acts, or the emotion of love, which leads to similarly interesting acts. The materials of the sensational formula are villainy, crime and passionate affection. The second hallmark of this formula is its deliberately external method in character delineation. Charles Reade found the novelty of George Eliot's internal character dissections particularly revolting. Sensation fiction resembles drama, in particular melodrama, for sensation writers voluntarily adopt two of the restrictions faced by playwrights, both by steering clear of psychological analysis of motive and reason, and by conducting their narrative almost entirely by dialogue. This avoidance of description throws emphasis upon plot.

Surprise, coincidence, fortuitous retribution and mistaken
identity, a device inherited from the Gothic novel, are all commonly employed in sensation fiction. Surprise enables the sensation writer to evoke the proper intensity of thrill and horror, while coincidence serves to do this as well, but also presents an easy method by which loose ends in the usually complex plot may be joined. Many sensational stories demonstrate a fairytale-like quality, a quality caused by both excessive coincidence and by the inevitable inclusion of a fair and happy ending, with proper retribution falling upon those deserving it. Sensationalists are among the most "moral" of Victorian writers, but this morality must be qualified. By imposing a moral conclusion upon their works, sensationalists could justify their inclusion of gruesome and generally unsavory incidents to their Victorian audience.

An examination of Wilkie Collins' treatment of sensationalism and the supernatural in his short fiction will prove useful to a later examination of these elements in Hardy's shorter works. Collins, like his fellow sensationalists, maintained that drama and fiction were "twin-sisters of the same family". Unlike them, however, Collins believed in presenting the realm of the irrational and the supernatural as a way of stimulating emotion, namely curiosity and suspense. Collins remarks in his preface to Basil, a novel published in 1852, that:

By appealing to genuine sources of interest within the reader's own experience, I could certainly gain his attention to begin with, but it would be only by appealing to other sources (as genuine in their way)
beyond his own experience, that I could hope to fix his interest and excite his suspense to occupy his deeper feelings, or to stir his nobler thoughts.3

Such Collins tales as "Miss or Mrs.?"6 and "She Loves and Lies"7 adhere to typical sensation formulas, though neither one of these stories is particularly outstanding or memorable. The sinister central character in "Miss or Mrs.?", Richard Turlington, provides the sensation element of intense passion. When his complex schemes to marry Natalie Greybrooke, daughter of the wealthy Sir Joseph, fall through, Turlington's villainy manifests itself in a savage attempt to kill both Natalie and Sir Joseph by firing a pistol at them through a door. Fortuitous retribution steps in, though, as the revolver in Turlington's hand explodes while he is attempting to look down its barrel. "She Loves and Lies" revolves around the emotion of love, and the disguise adopted by an actress to ensure that the man she loves does not marry her for her wealth. The actress' love is played out in the context of a basically sensational plot, a plot which includes surprise, mistaken identity, revelation and coincidence. Both "Miss or Mrs.?" and "She Loves and Lies" demonstrate a largely unoriginal employment of the sensation formula.

Collins is not at his best as a sensation writer, however, in the tales discussed above. Collins' forte, rather, is sensation fiction which relies upon the supernatural or the irrational. The effective "Mrs. Zant and the Ghost",8 for in-
The course of this narrative describes the return of a disembodied spirit to earth, and leads the reader on new and strange ground. Not in the obscurity of midnight, but in the searching light of day, did the supernatural influence assert itself. Neither revealed by a vision, nor announced by a voice, it reached mortal knowledge through the sense which is least easily self-deceived: the sense that feels.9

The tale then introduces the very odd behavior of Mrs. Zant, a widow who turns out to have experienced the sight and touch of her dead husband. Collins' use of the supernatural to create suspense can be seen in the following passage, where Mrs. Zant relates her encounter with the ghost:

A sense of unutterable expectation kept my eyes riveted on the grass. Suddenly, I saw its myriad blades rise erect and shivering. The fear came to me of something passing over them with the invisible swiftness of the wind. The shivering advanced. It was all round me. It crept into the leaves of the tree over my head; they shuddered, without a sound to tell of their agitation; their natural and pleasant rustling was struck dumb. The song of the birds had ceased.10

The ghost rescues Mrs. Zant from probable rape, laying its invisible but paralytic grip upon the threatening arms of her brother-in-law. The supernatural element is primarily employed in this tale to provoke an atmosphere, that of mystery and suspense, and to forward the plot to its happy conclusion. The reaction of the characters to the ghost is of little importance. At the end of the tale, Mrs. Zant concludes, "The
guardian spirit was with me. The promised protection was with me. I know it. I wish to know no more." Collins' characters have no interior lives which can be affected by the appearance of the supernatural.

The supernatural is utilized to sustain interest in "Mad Monkton", a tale concerned with the means by which a supernatural prophecy is fulfilled. The prophecy, or, rather, family curse, discovered on a blank leaf of an ancient manuscript at Wincot Abbey, predicts that when one of the Monktons dies and is left unburied on foreign soil, they all will perish. When Alfred Monkton is haunted by a vision of his only surviving relative's face, he traces the relative to Italy, where he discovers that the relative is, indeed, as suspected, dead and unburied. Alfred attempts to return the body to English soil, but a storm sinks the ship, and the body with it. The prophecy is fulfilled at last, for Alfred, now the last of the Monkton race, dies of distraction. Alfred's death, however, occurs almost as an afterthought and is of little significance in the story. The events which fulfill the supernatural prophecy, rather, are of foremost interest in this tale. Even though Collins uses supernatural elements, their psychological implications remain largely unexplored.

Hardy, like Collins, Dickens and Reade, had a marked preference in fiction for the sensational as opposed to the mundane. He agreed in essence with Collins' argument that a writer should appeal to sources beyond the readers' everyday
experience, commenting that "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". In accordance with this view, Hardy's short stories include such unusual events as hanging, drowning, murder, bigamy, elopement and, more often than not, illegitimacy.

Hardy, however, transforms the sensation formula into something rather different in nature. Hardy's sensational and supernatural elements do not merely excite curiosity and maintain suspense. Rather, they provoke tragedy in the lives of individuals. Lord David Cecil's observation that Hardy's works must be read in the spirit in which we read King Lear, "prepared to swallow naive, melodramatic plots, full of mysteries and coincidences," remains true. Hardy's fiction is an idiosyncratic blend of tragedy and melodrama. In a journal entry dated 1888, Hardy draws an important distinction between what he terms "physical" and "psychical" sensation fiction:

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 manner to be depicted.

Unlike sensationalists, Hardy does not excite strong emotion for its own sake; rather, his more complex aim is to present
the often tragic reaction of characters to events.

This aim can be seen even in those of Hardy's stories which abound in typical sensation elements. Hardy's "The Honorable Laura", for instance, appears to be straightforward melodrama, complete with a villainous operatic singer named Signor Smittozzi, an elopement which becomes a kidnapping and a gun duel that turns into attempted murder. In the tale, Laura secretly marries her cousin, but betrays this marriage by eloping with Smittozzi. When Laura's husband, Northbrook, catches up with the couple and challenges Smittozzi to a duel, Smittozzi pushes him off a cliff, nearly killing him. The characterizations, as in most sensation tales, seem to be superficial and established mainly through dialogue:

"O yes, you were quite ignorant; I can believe that quite readily," sneered Laura's husband.
"Captain Northbrook, your insinuations are as despicable as your wretched person!" cried the baritone, losing all patience. And springing forward, he slapped the captain in the face with the palm of his hand.

There is, however, a discrepancy between the first half of the tale, outlined above, and its second half. In the second part, the numerous sensational events and external characterizations disappear, and the internal tragedy which these events cause becomes of foremost interest. The focus here lies upon the reactions of Northbrook and Laura as individuals. After her attempt to escape from Northbrook, Laura sees more and more that her elopement was a piece of folly. She would now be willing to sacrifice "the greater part of
everything to ensure the presence and affection of that hus-
band whose very austerity and phlegm—qualities that had for-
merly led to the alienation between them—seemed now to be
adorable features in his character"(703). Northbrook, on
the other hand, discovers that, unable to forgive his wife,
he can no longer love her, either. He leaves, and Hardy
describes Laura's reaction:

She hoped and hoped again, but all to no purpose.
Captain Northbrook did not alter his mind and return.
He was quite a different sort of man from one who
altered his mind; that she was at last despairingly
forced to admit. And then she left off hoping, and
settled down to a mechanical routine of existence
which in some measure dulled her grief, but at the
expense of all her natural animation and the sprightly
wilfulness which had once charmed those who knew her,
though it was perhaps all the while a factor in the
production of her unhappiness(703,704).

When Laura suffers "retribution" for her past crime of elope-
ment, her punishment is not physical but psychical. Laura's
self-imposed loneliness is relieved when Hardy returns to
the sensation formula in the end of the tale and reunites
the couple. Yet this ending seems unsatisfactory, for "The
Honourable Laura" has tragic depths that can not be dismissed
by the sensation formula.

In Hardy's "mystery" sensation tales such as "The Three
Strangers" and "The Distracted Preacher", the mystery lies upon
a human, explicable level, as in Collins' "She Loves and Lies".
"The Three Strangers" is a unified, tightly-knit story con-
cerning the coincidental meeting between a hangman and his
intended victim, who is in the process of escaping. The tale involves three cases of mistaken identity which, one by one, are revealed. To escape a raging storm, the fleeing convict gains entrance to a shepherd's house, where a lively christening party is being held. Keeping his true identity as a watchmaker secret, the convict presents himself to the guests as a wheelwright. Soon the hangman also arrives from out of storm, hiding his grisly identity from the guests until he reveals it at last through a combination of riddle and song. Immediately after the hangman's identity is guessed, a third stranger knocks, enters and suddenly flees in horror. Next, a gunshot is heard, signalling that a prisoner has escaped. The guests assume the third stranger is the convict and pursue him, while the true convict and the hangman drink a toast to each other and go separate ways. When caught, the third stranger reveals that he is the fugitive's brother, and that he fled the room in the fear that he would betray his brother. The identity of each visitor to Shepherd Fennel's house is uncovered and the story concludes with the fugitive's successful escape. Coincidence, surprise and revelation all contribute to the readability of "The Three Strangers".

"The Three Strangers", however, is more than readable sensationalism. Its interest extends beyond mere events. The reaction of the convict and his brother to the strange situation they find themselves in is what makes the tale interesting.
The escaped convict responds to his encounter with the hangman with both coolness and daring and thus averts a potential capture. Not only does he elude discovery at the party; his courageous "hob-and-nobbing with the hangmen, under the unprecedented circumstances of the shepherd’s party"(31) wins the admiration of the countryfolk, who aid the fugitive’s subsequent evasion of the law. When the man whom he is desperately trying to avoid, the hangman, sits down next to him in close companionship, the convict actually fraternizes with the coarse-mannered fellow, joining him in drink and in song when even the guests refuse to do so. His brother's discomposure upon entering the room serves as a contrast to the convict's composure:

He stood before them, the picture of abject terror--his knees trembling, his hand shaking so violently that the door-latch by which he supported himself rattled audibly; his white lips were parted, and his eyes fixed on the merry officer of justice in the middle of the room (23).

In "The Three Strangers", Hardy does not present mystery and incongruity for its own sake, but for the range of psychical response it allows him to explore.

Similarly, the mystery and sensationalism in "A Distracted Preacher" are only the means by which Hardy examines human response. Such elements as nocturnal disappearances, hidden compartments (a Gothic remnant), and mysterious appearances contribute towards making the tale appear, at least in outline, highly sensational. In essence, though, the tale is con-
cerned with how Stockdale, a minister, reacts when he discovers that Lizzy, the woman he loves, is engaged in the immoral pursuit of smuggling:

He did not wish to repeat his own share of the adventure; but, act as he would, his uneasiness on her account increased with the decline of day. Supposing that an accident should befall her, he would never forgive himself for not being there to help, much as he dislike the idea of seeming to countenance such illegal escapades (218).

After struggling between his love for Lizzy and his principles, Stockdale follows his principles, being more concerned for his own moral state than for Lizzy herself. His moral condemnation of Lizzy's secret activity causes her to struggle between her love for Stockdale and her addiction to smuggling. She pleads, "O Richard, you cannot think what a hard thing you have asked, and how sharp you try me when you put me between this and my love for 'ee!" (243). In the end of "A Distracted Preacher", the two are united and live happily ever after, as in "The Honourable Laura". But Hardy adds, in a note dated 1912, that "The ending of this story with the marriage of Lizzy and the minister was almost de rigueur in an English magazine at the time of writing" (247). Hardy's own, less conventional ending is not the "moral" conclusion imposed by sensationalists. Lizzy cannot give up smuggling and the minister cannot yield his principles. Though the surface mystery of the smuggling and its final unravelling structures the tale, the substance of "The Distracted Preacher" is devoted to pre-
senting the subtleties of human behavior.

Three of Hardy's short stories derive their more complex mystery, like those of Collins, from an appeal to the irrational and the supernatural. Hardy, however, does not appeal to these elements solely in order to create an atmosphere of suspense, as does Collins. Rather, Hardy's emphasis is placed upon the reactions of individuals to uncanny and macabre circumstances.

In "The Romantic Adventures of a Milkmaid", a variation on the Cinderella theme, the order of Margery Tucker's world is disturbed by a mysterious stranger, the Baron von Xanten. Margery, a dairymaid, prevents the Baron from committing suicide one day, and, as a result, he rewards her by taking her to a ball. When, the next day, Margery's fiance, Jim, remarks innocently to her that "anybody would think the devil had showed you all the kingdoms of the world since I saw you last!", Margery replies ambiguously, "Perhaps he has!"(1017). The Baron is a figure of mystery who exerts an almost demonic power over Margery. When he makes her promise to obey his future summons and deliver him "from that darkness as of Death"(1011) which sometimes afflicts him, Margery keeps her word, even though doing so means that she must miss her scheduled wedding to Jim. Margery responds to the Baron's call "with an unreasoning obedience worthy of a disciple in primitive times"(1032). The cost of Margery's obedience to the Baron is her father's displeasure and her fiance's temporary anger. The Baron decides to "correct" the damage he has done by calling Margery to his bedside and asking her to marry Jim, which she does.
After the ceremony, though, Margery cries, "I must ha' been enchanted--bewitched--when I gave my consent to this!" (1049). Margery insists that she and Jim keep their wedding secret and live apart. When, through a scheme to arouse her jealousy, Jim almost succeeds in recapturing Margery's alienated affection, the Baron intrudes once more, whisking Margery off in a carriage. Fortunately for Margery, the Baron resists his demonic impulse and returns Margery to Jim. She explains to Jim, "He said I was to come, and I went" (1075). Margery and Jim become reconciled and almost live; in fairytale fashion, happily ever after. This happiness, however, is qualified when Margery learns of the Baron's death and remarks:

Now that he's dead I'll make a confession, Jim, that I have never made to a soul. If he had pressed me--which he did not--to go with him when I was in the carriage that night beside his yacht, I would have gone. And I was disappointed that he did not press me (1076).

Though the Baron represents an irrational and perhaps demonic force, his exact nature remains obscure. The primary focus of "The Romantic Adventures" lies in both Margery's unconscious obedience to forces outside human comprehension and the havoc which results from this behavior.

When confronted with the supernatural, Hardy's protagonists often behave irrationally, as can also be seen in "The Fiddler of the Reels". The Baron's power is possibly demonic in nature; that of Mop Ollamoor in this tale is decidedly, though weirdly, sexual. Mop's origin, like that of the Baron, is unknown. His influence over people derives from his fiddling,
which especially exerts power over children and "unsophisticated maidenhood" (402), such as Car'line Aspent, who passes by a house one day where he is playing:

The aching of the heart seized her simultaneously with a wild desire to glide airily in the mazes of an infinite dance. She strode on boldly. But when closer her step grew timid, her tread convulsed itself more and more accordantly with the time of the melody, till she very nearly danced along. Her gait could not divest itself of its compelled capers till she had gone a long way past the house (404).

After this strange encounter, Car'line inexplicably bursts into tears each time she senses that Mop is near. As a result of her infatuation for Mop, Car'line decides to reject her previous suitor, Ned Hipcroft, a decision which turns out to be unwise. For, after exerting the power of his supernatural fiddling upon her and taking sexual advantage of her, Mop abandons Car'line, leaving her to cope with having an illegitimate child.

Mop, with his seductive fiddling, does not again disrupt the pattern of Car'line's life for several years and, in the meantime, happiness and order are restored. Ned decides to renew his offer of marriage, despite Car'line's unfaithfulness, largely because of his affection for her child, Carry. One day, however, Carry is abducted by Mop, who encounters Car'line in a tavern and fiddles until she dances herself unconscious. The music is "a sort of blissful torture" (416) for Car'line. She convinces herself she is dancing of her own will, but is,
in truth, dancing "slavishly and abjectly, subject to every wave of the melody" (417). When Car'eline sinks to the floor, Mop's supernatural fiddle emits "an elfin shriek of finality" (417). His purpose accomplished, Mop steals away with the child. Thoroughly saddened by the loss of his adopted child, Ned makes it "the entire business of his over-hours to stand about in by-streets in the hope of discovering" (419) the beloved Carry. "Fiddler of the Reels" is a fascinating portrayal of how the irrational, embodied in this tale by Mop Ollamoor's strangely powerful music, affects the "fragile and responsive" (403) Car'eline, ultimately disrupting her husband's life as well as her own.

"The Withered Arm" is perhaps Hardy's most striking tale of the supernatural. As in the tales discussed above, Hardy's focus lies not with the supernatural, but on its effect upon individuals. In this case, the effect is the breakdown of human reason and the growth of superstition. Rhoda Brook, a dairymaid, learns that Farmer Lodge, the man whose illegitimate son she bore, is now married to a "rosy-cheeked, tisty-tosty little body" (67). Rhoda has a nightmare in which the new Mrs. Lodge waves her glittering wedding-ring in front of Rhoda and attempts to suffocate her. In the dream, Rhoda seizes the offending arm and whirls it off her chest. The next day, Gentrude appears with a discoloured spot on her left arm of mysterious origin, corresponding in size to Rhoda's hand. Rhoda begins to believe she might be a sorceress and becomes obsessed with the thought. Normally practical by nature, Rhoda now becomes
superstitious. Despite the fact that she has become Ger-
trude’s friend, Rhoda experiences a vindictive thrill of
pleasure when Gertrude learns, through visiting a conjuror,
of her supernatural power:

For the first time a sense of triumph possessed her,
and she did not altogether deplore that the young
thing at her side should learn that their lives had
been antagonized by other influences than their own.

The subject was no more alluded to during the long
and dreary walk home. But in some way or other a story
was whispered about the many-dairied lowland that
winter that Mrs. Lodge’s gradual loss of the use of
her left arm was owing to her being ‘overlooked’ by
Rhoda Brook. The latter kept her own counsel about
the incubus, but her face grew sadder and thinner;
and in the spring she and her boy disappeared from
the neighbourhood of Holmstoke (83).

Rhoda’s encounter with the supernatural leads her to believe
in her own supernatural powers and also leads to her aliena-
tion from her neighbours.

The second part of the tale is concerned with Gertrude
Lodge’s reaction to the blight on her arm, an affliction that
grows increasingly worse as time passes. Gertrude, too, under-
goes a character transformation as a result of this mysterious
wound:

The once blithe-hearted and enlightened Gertrude was
changing into an irritable, superstitious woman, whose
whole time was given to experimenting upon her ailment
with every quack remedy she came across. She was honestly
attached to her husband, and was ever secretly hoping -
against hope to win back his heart again by regaining
some at least of her personal beauty (83).

Gertrude lines her closet with “herbs, charms and books of
necromancy, which in her schoolgirl time she would have ridiculed as folly" (83). When her afflicted arm begins actually withering, Gertrude returns to the conjuror, who advises her to touch the afflicted limb to the neck of a man who has just been hanged. Hardy writes:

She did nothing for months, and patiently bore her disfigurement as before. But her woman's nature, craving for renewed beauty (she was but twenty-five), was ever stimulating her to try what, at any rate, could hardly do her any harm. 'What came by a spell will go by a spell surely,' she would say (86).

Though she shrinks from the grisly remedy, Gertrude overcomes her aversion and her pangs of conscience. The formerly kind, good-natured Gertrude now longs for the death of a fellow creature. Her unconscious nightly prayer is "O Lord, hang some guilty or innocent person soon!" (87). Not only do Gertrude's reason and scruples collapse when confronted with the supernatural; when the hanged man Gertrude touches turns out to be Rhoda's son, and when Rhoda curses her in Satan's name, Gertrude herself collapses from the shock, and immediately dies. The inexplicable and diabolic events of "The Withered Arm" push Gertrude beyond the limits of her ability to react.

Hardy's group of sensational and supernatural tales possesses a psychological interest and a sense of real human tragedy that is largely absent in the works of sensation writers. For Hardy, delineating the response of individuals is more important than creating dramatic atmosphere. Though Hardy does em-
ploy the sensation formula in his tales, he also clearly tran-
scends its limitations by creating characters with inner lives.
Footnotes


2Ibid., p. 109.

3Ibid., p. 142.


5Ibid., p. 5.

6"Miss or Mrs?" and Other Stories in Outline (London: Bentley, 1873). First published, The London Graphic Illustrated Newspaper, December 13, 1871.

7"She Loves and Lies", The Spirit of the Times (December 22, 1883).


9Ibid., p. 456.

10Ibid., p. 478.

11Ibid., p. 507.


16 Thomas Hardy, The Short Stories of Thomas Hardy (London: MacMillan and Co., Ltd., 1928). (All subsequent references to Hardy's short stories are taken from this volume. Page numbers will be denoted in parenthesis.)
CHAPTER TWO

REFLECTIONS OF THE MODERN CONDITION
Hardy wrote several short stories which portray the modern condition of Victorian England, most of which are collected in *Life's Little Ironies*. The social ramifications of nineteenth-century England's territorial and industrial expansion were of great interest to the Victorian writers witnessing this growth and, as a result, much of the literature of this period deals with the modern condition. In general, the attitudes adopted in these works towards the changes wrought by the Industrial Revolution are optimistic, reflecting the attitude of the average Victorian, who "could hardly help feeling that he lived, if not in the best of all possible worlds, at least in a world which was rapidly becoming better." Though not all Victorian writers portray the nineteenth-century with an optimism to match that of their public, a great number of them do. In *Yeast: A Problem*, for instance, Charles Kingsley enthusiastically writes:

Look around you and see what is characteristic of your country and of your generation at this moment. Your very costermonger trolls out his belief that "there's a good time coming", and the hearts of gamins, as well as millenarians, answer, "True!". And as for flesh, what new materials are springing up among you every month. Railroads, electric telegraphs...chemical agriculture, a matchless school of inductive science, an equally matchless school of naturalist painters,—and all this in the very workshop of the world!

This enthusiasm for nineteenth-century progress often was tinged with awe. In *North and South*, for example, Mrs. Gaskell writes of manufacturers that they seem "to defy
the old limits of possibility, in a kind of fine intoxication, caused by the recollection of what had been achieved, and what yet should be. 3

Richard Jefferies, like Hardy, depicts modern change in his works. The son of a Wiltshire farmer, he began working as a journalist for the North Wilts Herald at the age of eighteen. His prose efforts met with little success until the year 1872, when the twenty-year old Jefferies wrote a long letter to the Times on the modern condition of agriculture. The Times printed the letter in full, and Jefferies suddenly found himself widely regarded as "an authority on agriculture." 4 He later wrote several vignettes on the modern rural condition, most notably a volume of such sketches entitled Hodge and His Masters. Jefferies is a particularly interesting writer of the period, and his writings are full of contrast, presenting both a realistic and grim portrayal of the labouring class, which will be discussed later, and a generally optimistic attitude towards the future of English agriculture.

Jefferies' works often lie somewhere between the short story and the descriptive essay. His primary intention, unlike that of an historical or a sensation writer, is not to depict the past or to tell a story, but to give, as he writes at the end of "John Smith's Shanty", "an uncompromising picture of things as they are." 5 Jefferies does not concern himself with a tightly-knit plot; rather, his method is a kind of
descriptive reporting strengthened by literary devices. The result is an artistic presentation of existing facts.

On the whole, Jefferies' vignettes describe the unenviable life of the Victorian rural labourer in order to point out ways in which this life can be improved. For Jefferies, increased technology is one such means of improvement. He embraces progress, calling it "the light of the future". The chapter entitled "A Man of Progress" in Hodge is, more or less, a farm parable in which "a man of capital". Cecil, becomes his own landlord and implements such startling steam-powered innovations as a drainage canal, engine-shed and tramway. Jefferies' "moral" is unequivocally and explicitly stated at the end of the tale: "Nothing will ever convince me that it was intended for England agriculturists to go on using wooden-ploughs, to wear smock-frocks, and plod round and round in the same track for ever". Capitalism as well as technology is a virtue in the eyes of Jefferies. He writes disdainfully of those without ambition: "There is no class so jealous of a rapid rise as old-fashioned farming people. They seem to think that if a man once drove pigs to market he should always continue to do so, and all his descendants likewise". Jefferies views tradition and custom as being obstacles in the way of farmers who are offered, through technology and capitalism, the means to improve their lives.

In his writings, Jefferies also advocates education as a
means of improving the lot of the farmer. Throughout the Victorian period, education was becoming less of an aristocratic privilege and more and more of a lower and middle-class option. In Hodge, Jefferies says of young rural girls that "It is right, that they should wish to rise above that old, dull, dead level in which their mothers and grandmothers worked from youth to age. The world has gone on since then--it is a world of education, books and wider sympathies".¹¹ Jefferies sees that disadvantages also may accrue from the increasing availability of education to the rural class, with newly-educated country girls tending to scorn farmers as husbands. On the other hand, he credits the same country girls with educating farmers out of their "old, boorish ways".¹² He notes that the rising generation of tenant farmers have lost "much of the bigoted mode of thought, together with the provincial pronunciation".¹³ For Jefferies, the increase in education among the rural class most often works in a positive way, training rural minds out of their ignorance and away from old methods of farming.

Unlike Jefferies, the changes in the modern condition which Hardy presents are negative. Hardy wrote an essay on "The Dorsetshire Labourer", published in Longman's eleven years after the publication of Jefferies' letters on the Wiltshire labourer.¹⁴ In his essay, Hardy directly blames the unfortunate condition of village tradesmen upon the demand for large farms which caused many old cottages to be pulled down, and thus forced many homeless cottagers to emigrate to larger villages.
Pointing out that the language used by Hardy becomes coloured by emotion when he speaks of these occurrences, Michael Millgate comments:

It seems open to question whether, even taking into account the limitations of an immediately contemporary perspective, Hardy can really have believed that the pulling down of cottages in such circumstances was the only, or even the most important, cause of the decline in the numbers and fortunes of the village tradesmen. But the idea of such destruction carries a powerful emotional charge.15

Hardy's emotional indignation over the destruction of cottages in this essay is indicative of his overall attitude in fiction towards the changing condition of his period. For Hardy, change is an uprooting process out of which, more often than not, springs evil.

In his rural sketches, Jefferies depicts the usually beneficent ramifications of increased technology and education upon farming and the rural class as a whole. Hardy, on the other hand, portrays the less obvious emotional implications for the modern individual of the changes taking place around him; and to him, the emotional implications are frightening. In Hardy's short fiction, the great social mobility made possible by the Industrial Revolution plants self-destructive ambition in the breasts of individuals. The greater availability of education leads only to increasing alienation and class consciousness. The modern spirit of capitalism invades not only business dealings, but personal relationships as well, resulting in opportunistic attitudes towards fellow human beings.
The increased mechanization of Victorian society leads to mechanical, indifferent outlooks on life. For Hardy, ambition, loneliness, apathy and selfishness constitute the modern condition.

Hardy's "On the Western Circuit" describes the nineteenth-century as an age "wherein sordid ambition is the master-passion that seems to be taking the time-honoured place of love" (352); and, later in the tale, a cathedral is juxtaposed with a steam circus, symbolically showing what Hardy sees as a disparity between old values and new. Education and modern ambition work together in the tale to provoke bitter frustration and lifelong despair. In this tale, Charles Raye, a rising London barrister, finds himself attracted physically to a country girl. He seduces her, but returns to London, intending to deny his socially dangerous affection for the trusting but uncultured Anne. When letters written in a genteel, intelligent manner, however, arrive from Anne, Raye feels he has misjudged her and that, thanks to national education, she "would make as good a professional man's wife as could be desired" (370). He marries Anne, only to find out after the marriage ceremony that her married employer, Edith Harnham, has actually written the letters and not Anne, who can barely read or spell. Raye is stunned, and envisions his married life as "a galley in which he, the fastidious urban" is "chained to work for the remainder of his life with her, the unlettered peasant."
chained to his side" (375). Though he treats the simple Anne with resigned kindness, he is doomed to unhappiness in a marriage that can satisfy neither his professional ambition nor his cultivated tastes. For Hardy, the high expectations of individuals in an educated and upwardly mobile society often result in defeat and dissatisfaction with life.

The tragic displacement of love by ambition is, as the title suggests, especially central in Hardy's "A Tragedy of Two Ambitions", where religion is no more than a means of scaling the social ladder. Joshua and Cornelius, two feverishly ambitious brothers, work their way up through teaching in the national school system and in a theological seminary. Joshua turns to the Church, for he feels that it confers social prestige "up to a certain point at a cheaper price than any other profession or pursuit" (336). The brothers persuade themselves that ardour for Christianity, and not "pride of place" (326), is their motivating drive. Ambition pervades all their relationships: they love their sister ambitiously, scheming for her own rise as well as for their own, while they detest their disreputable, vagabond father, who represents an obstacle in their path to success. They allow their father to drown, for Joshua feels that "to succeed in the Church people must believe in you, first of all as a gentleman" (330). After watching their father drown, the brothers find their careers in the
Church and national schools are meaningless. Their father's remark, "I'll spoil your souls for preaching"(340), actually comes true, for knowledge of their own unchristian deed makes their claims to religion and religious education ring hollow in their own ears. The guilty pair return to the drowning site and, acknowledging the meaninglessness of their existence, express a wish to die. The ruthless ambition of Joshua and Cornelius in "The Tragedy of Two Ambitions" succeeds only in exterminating their own will to live.

Family relationships are sacrificed at the altar of ambition in "To Please His Wife" as well. The tale charts the insidious growth of ambition in the heart of a mother, Joanna, until the mother at last shoves aside maternal instincts. Joanna marries a former sailor out of spite directed at Emily, her rival in the sailor's affections. When Emily marries a rich merchant who sets up shop across the street from her, Joanna feels a persistent urge to compete with her neighbours. At first, her ambition is limited to her sons. Wanting her sons, like those of Emily, to attend College instead of the Parish School, Joanna sends her husband to sea, despite the attendant dangers of this move. Though he returns safely, the money he earns at sea is not enough. Joanna's ambitions have increased, for Emily and her merchant have set up a carriage and pair in the sailor's absence. Speaking of her neighbours, Joanna tells her husband, "we count by hundreds, they count by thousands"(390). Joanna now sends both her husband and her sons off to sea, with
allegiance to mammon dissolving her ties of affection. Joanna's human need for love and companionship is undermined by her gnawing desire for rank and wealth. Her sons and husband do not return, and neither her ambition nor love is satisfied. Joanna becomes a pathetic creature, obsessed by the "certainty" that her loved ones will return home any day, even though several years pass by without their reappearance. Having gambled away her love and humanity because of the ambition resulting from the desire to rise above her station, Joanna becomes a "skeleton of something human"(397): her self-destructive ambition leaves her only a shell of a human being.

In "The Son's Veto", considered by Hardy to be his best short story, a mother is alienated from her son because of social mobility and education. A parson commits "social suicide" (288) and marries his maid, Sophy. He subsequently dies, but only after first making arrangements in his will for his son's education. The son is sent off to public school, where he drifts increasingly farther and farther apart from his mother. With his "aristocratic school-knowledge, his grammars, and his aversions"(290), the boy now blushingly corrects his mother's grammatical errors and feels her humble origins as a source of pain. Isolated from her neighbors because of her common social background, one day Sophy meets her ex-fiancé, Sam, who soon after renews his proposal of marriage to her. Eager for a simple life and a loving companion, Sophy broaches the subject of the
marriage to her son, who immediately locks himself in his room and cries through the keyhole, "I am ashamed of you! It will ruin me! A miserable boor! a churl! a clown! It will degrade me in the eyes of all the gentlemen of England!" (297). The son forces his mother to swear on the cross and altar he has erected for private devotions that she will not wed Sam. When, at the end of the tale, Sophy is buried, her unloving son, now a priest, glares at Sam, literally bristling with class hostility.

Sophy's loneliness in "The Son's Veto" is characteristic of the alienation which Hardy sees as being entailed by the greater social mobility of his age. Sophy does not feel comfortable around her educated son. Speaking of him, she tells Sam: "He seems to belong so little to me personally, so entirely to his dead father. He is so much educated and I so little that I do not feel dignified enough to be his mother" (295); but Sophy cannot return to her former undignified lifestyle and thereby gain happiness. Sophy murmurs plaintively, "Why mayn't I say to Sam that I'll marry him? Why mayn't I?" (298). Hardy's answer is clear: social mobility has removed Sophy from her natural sphere and has robbed her son of natural affection for his mother.

The selfishness entailed by nineteenth-century society is the theme of Hardy's "For Conscience's Sake". When the guilt-ridden Mr. Millbourne hunts up his former mistress, now a dancing-school teacher, to finally marry her and thus satisfy
his conscience, she refuses, denying that she is bound by honor to marry him. She accepts out of ambition, however, when he points out that their marriage would eliminate the need for her to run a dancing-school and would increase her respectability, thereby hastening a match between their illegitimate daughter and the reputation-conscious curate who has been courting her. They marry, and Millbourne has a "re-established sense of self-satisfaction" (311) at his deed. When, as a result of the daughter's resemblance to Millabourne, the curate suspects her true heritage, he selfishly hesitates to marry her. His affections are "fastidious---distinctly tempered with the alloys of the century's decadence" (313).

Upon learning of the curate's suspicions, Mrs. Millbourne takes out her disappointment on her husband, blaming him for returning. The discord caused by individuals acting from "fastidious" motives is ended at last when Millbourne admits he was wrong to search out his wife and exiles himself to Brussels. The curate at last marries the daughter, now certain that her identity will not, at least, be discovered by others. Hardy comments that "a passionate lover of the old-fashioned sort might possibly never have halted to weigh" (313) his doubts about the daughter's lineage, as does the curate. For Hardy, the decadence of modern society is the selfishness of ambition that undermines human relationships.
In "A Mere Interlude", selfishness and apathy both are the products of modern society. Baptista is a remarkably un-demonstrative individual, "with scarcely emotions or character" (947). Her actions are mechanical, and she remains unaffected even when her newlywed husband drowns:

With his personal disappearance, the last three days of her life with him seemed to be swallowed up, also his image, in her mind's eye, waned curiously, receded far away, grew stranger and stranger, less and less real(960).

Baptista apathetically allows her neighbor, Trewthen, to marry her as had been originally planned, and her unwillingness to cause a commotion keeps her from revealing the fact of her prior wedding. Baptista's emotional passivity is equaled by that of Trewthen, whose proposal of marriage is not based on passion, but stinginess. His letters to Baptista convey "little more matter than details of their future housekeeping, and his preparations for the same, with innumerable 'my dears' sprinkled disconnectedly to show the depth of his affection without the inconvenience of syntax"(950). When Baptista at last discloses the truth of her former marriage, he responds in kind by revealing his true motive in marrying her: that having four daughters from a previous marriage, he wants Baptista, a former schoolmistress, to "teach 'em and bring 'em into a genteel condition, all for nothing"(979). The mercenary and mechanical attitudes towards life displayed by Baptista and Trewthen are indicative of Hardy's view of the increasingly materialistic and mechanized nineteenth-century society.
The modern elements in "An Imaginative Woman" are less important than the tale's depiction of marriage and love; nevertheless, these elements contribute to the unhappiness in the story. Ella's distaste for her husband is compounded by his being a gunmaker in a thriving northern city. After Ella marries the gun manufacturer, she realizes that his very occupation is one large objection to having him as a husband. The gunmaker himself is selfishly materialistic, being "supremely satisfied with the condition of sublunary things which made weapons a necessity" (257). The married couple's house is made of the finest "modern wrought-iron work" (273), a fact which contributes to thwart Ella's attempt to meet the poet with whom she is infatuated, for he is repelled by the "new and monied" (274) look of their house. Modernity is equated with sordidness in this tale.

Hardy's portrayal of the Victorian condition in his short fiction is clearly pessimistic. The tales in Life's Little Ironies were not well-received by their Victorian reviewer, whereas Jefferies, generally optimistic in his fiction about the future, was respected by critics for his knowledgable presentations of "the effect of the Industrial Revolution upon the centuries-old methods of agriculture". Jefferies is more thorough than many other Victorian writers in his portrayals of the impact of modernization. But though Jefferies is not a typical Victorian writer, his attitude towards change is characteristic of the general spirit of his Victorian
public. Hardy, on the other hand, adopts in his short fiction an amelioristic view of modern change, a view which jeopardized the somewhat deliberate Victorian outlook of optimism.
Footnotes


5 Ibid., p. 41.

6 Ibid., p. 40.


9 Ibid., p. 133.

10 Ibid., p. 77.

11 Ibid., p. 28.

12 Ibid., p. 28.

13 Ibid., p. 28.

14 "The Dorsetshire Labourer", Longman's Magazine (July 1883).

CHAPTER THREE

CHANCE AND HARDY'S USE OF HISTORY
Historical fiction was especially popular with the Victorian public, as is evidenced by the large amount of historical fiction written during this period.\(^1\) As Andrew Sanders notes, ""To an age of progress and ringing grooves of change, the study of history offered proof that men were moving efficiently and inexorably upwards, drawn towards the climax of Creation by a divine force".\(^2\) The Victorians wanted reassurance that the changes taking place around them were changes for the better. In addition, however, Victorians also turned to historical fiction as a source of stability in their rapidly changing lives.

Much fiction is set in the past; this alone does not make a story historical. The group of tales in Hardy's *A Group of Noble Dames*, for instance, all take place in the seventeenth century, but only one of these tales is "historical" in its recognized sense. Speaking of historical fiction, Avrom Fleishman remarks, "Regarding substance, there is an unspoken assumption that the plot must include a number of 'historical' events, particularly those in the public sphere (war, politics, economic changes, etc.), mingled with and affecting the personal fortunes of the characters".\(^3\) The aim of historical fiction is often, through a portrayal of moral, social and various other influences, to create a sense of what it must have felt like to live in one particular period.
Charles Kingsley, Charlotte Yonge and Thomas Adolphus Trollope are among the more prominent writers of historical fiction during the Victorian period. The works of T.A. Trollope, who wrote mainly in the 1860's and 1870's, are fairly representative of the type of historical tales being written at this time. Victorian historical fiction generally did not actually set out to teach history; rather, its prestige and steady popularity were based on "principles of good storytelling, 'high-seriousness', and social and psychological realism." T.A. Trollope's historical tales, usually set in Revolutionary France or Renaissance Italy, are often dramatic in tone, as can be seen in the following passage from his "A Romance of Florence":

With desperate force she shrieked with cry redoubled upon cry, till her parched throat refused to give forth sound! Still only those hideous mocking echoes answered; and then all was again silence--the silence of the tomb! ---Still the light!--and now certainly stronger! strong enough she thought to enable her straining eyes to distinguish that the space immediately in front of her between her and the light--was void and unencumbered by any object. Fearfully and slowly, with half-outstretched hands, she grasped her way towards the side from which it came.5

Along with his adherence to purely fictional techniques, however, T.A. Trollope conveys a sense of the political and social attitudes existing during the period in which his historical tales are set. In the tale mentioned above, he delineates the political and social divisions prevailing in Renaissance
Florentine society:

Between the Almieri and the Rondinelli, there could be neither marrying nor giving in marriage. Not only were the two families opposed in the burning politics of the day, but the Almieri were a house of old patrician stock, while Rondinelli was the descendant of one of those plebians who had led the populace against the magnates in 1343.

Better might a daughter of the Almieri love one of her father's servingmen than fix her affections on a Rondinelli! But in that time and clime, the papas of marriageable daughters were wont to make very slight work of any such erratic fancies. Each free citizen, who was ready at any moment to upset the whole order of society, for the securing of a political liberty, was a thoroughly despotic master of his own household.

With a slight smugness as to the inferiority of the practices of Florentine society to those of his own, T.A. Trollope writes in "How Meo Varalla Won His First Love":

Nor in making himself the medium of overture and negotiation in such an affair, did the worthy Canon in any degree quit the ordinary track of ecclesiastical practice and habits. Such match-making, never undertaken, it must be rightly understood, by the mundane and reprehensible means of bringing the young folks together, or giving any opportunity for such vanities and dangerous frivolities as flirting and love-making—Heaven forefend!

T.A. Trollope recreates the past through describing its political and social attitudes. Other Victorians, such as Charlotte Yonge, are adept at describing the religious character of an historical period. Many of Hardy's tales are set in historical periods, as their titles suggest. "A Tradition of 1804" takes place during the Napoleonic period,
as do "The Melancholy Hussar" and "The Committee-Man on 'The Terror'". "The Duke's Reappearance" concerns the Duke of Monmouth's claim against the throne, "Master John Horseleigh, Knight" takes place during the reign of King Henry VIII, while "Anna, Lady Baxby" takes place amidst the English Civil War. Hardy's historical tales, however, vary radically from the accepted norm, as does his concept of history. In his historical tales, Hardy deliberately avoids describing the characteristics of the periods in which they are set. Hardy's concept of history questions its very individuality. In 1884, Hardy wrote in his notebook:

Query: Is not the present quasi-scientific system of writing history mere charlatanism? Events and tendencies are traced as if they were rivers of voluntary activity, and courses reasoned out from the circumstances in which natures, religions, or what-not, have found themselves. But are they not in the main the outcome of passivity—acted upon by unconscious propensity?

The unconscious propensity which acts upon the individuals in Hardy's historical tales is chance, as can be seen in another journal entry:

History is rather a stream than a tree. There is nothing organic in its shape, nothing systematic in its development. It flows on like a thunder-storm-rill by a roadside; now a straw turns it this way, now a tiny barrier of sand, that the offhand decision of some commonplace mind high in office at a critical moment influences the course of events for a hundred years.

By setting his tales in an historical period and then refus-
ing to portray that period as being unique in any way, Hardy ultimately affirms his personal concept of history as not being influenced by the particular social and political circumstances of any one period, but, rather, being arbitrarily determined by chance and coincidence.

Hardy's "A Tryst At An Ancient Earthwork", a sketch of an ancient-British fortress, questions the ability of humans to particularize history. In the story, Hardy writes:

Doubtless such a column has passed this way in its time, but the only columns which enter in these latter days are the columns of sheep and oxen that are sometimes seen now.

Men must have often gone out by those gates in the morning to battle with the Roman legions under Vespasians, some to return no more, others to come back at evening, bringing with them the noise of their heroic deeds. But not a page, not a stone, has preserved their fame.

Who was the man that said "Let it be built here!"—Whether he were some great one of the Belgae, or of the Durotriges, or the travelling engineer of Britain's united tribes, must for ever remain time's secret; his form cannot be realized, nor his countenance, nor the tongue that he spoke, when he set down his foot with a thud and said "Let it be here!"

The details of history cannot be determined, for the past is inexplicably mingled with the present. Hardy notes that "We can almost hear the stream of years that have borne these deeds away from us. 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." For Hardy, history
is an indeterminate "stream of years", and he questions the audacity of those who attempt to discriminate between periods of history. The archaeologist in the tale is satirically labelled a "venerable scholar with letters after his name" (874) and, in the end of the story, the archaeologist sacrifices his personal integrity to prove to himself his "great argument"(874) that the ancient Celtic forthold had been, at one time, occupied by Romans. Hardy's moral is clear: history, cannot be viewed with a "quasi-scientific" outlook.

In Hardy's historical tales, when the characteristics of a certain age are described, it is often only to hint at their ultimate meaninglessness. The individuals in these tales remain uninfluenced by the general attitudes of their period. Hardy begins "The Melancholy Hussar" on a misleading note of historical authenticity, saying:

It was nearly ninety years ago. The British uniform of the period, with its immense epaulettes, queer cocked-hat, breeches, gaiters, ponderous cartridge-box, buckled shoes, and what not, would look strange and barbarous now. Ideas have changed; invention has followed invention. Soldiers were monumental objects then. A divinity still hedged kings here and there; and war was considered a glorious thing (45).

After this brief sketch of the attitudes held during the period, however, Hardy then writes of a German Hussar, who decidedly does not believe a divinity hedges the ruling King George, nor that war is a "glorious thing". The German Hussar and his
comrades hate the war in which they are involved, and they "hated England and English life; they took no interest whatever in King George and his island kingdom, and they only wished to be out of it and never to see it any more" (51). In the beginning of "The Melancholy Hussar", Hardy creates a sense of the past that he subsequently reverses.

Historical attitudes are similarly meaningless in "A Tradition of 1804". The shepherd in the tale begins his story by describing the characteristic concern of his Napoleonic period:

It was thought and always said by my Uncle Job, sergeant of foot, that Bonaparte meant to cross with oars on a calm night. The grand query with us was, Where would my gentleman land? Many of the common people thought it would be at Dover; others, who knew how unlikely it was that any skilful general would make a business of landing just where he was expected, said he'd go either east into the River Thames, or west'ard to some convenient place, most likely one of the little bays inside the Isle of Portland, between the Beal and St. Alban's Head (37).

The sense that the "grand query" of where Napoleon will land is the predominant concern of the age, however, disappears at the end of the tale. When the shepherd and his uncle accidentally discover where Napoleon might land, their discovery creates little, if any, impact. The shepherd notes, "My uncle Job told his officers as soon as he got back to camp; but what they thought of it I never heard--neither did he. Boney's army never came" (41). The shepherd, his uncle and the officers now seem indifferent to the question of where Napoleon might land.
The intrinsic insignificance of the political beliefs held by a period is made clear in "Anna, Lady Baxby", a tale set during the English Civil War. The "arbitrary conduct of the King" (642) has divided England and has brought Lord Baxby, a royalist, and his brother-in-law, a Parliamentarian, to war against one another. Though Hardy gives his readers this much historical orientation, he does not attempt to define what exactly has brought England and these two relatives to war. Rather, he ignores the political issues of the period to show how Anna, Lady Baxby is influenced in her political loyalties not by the issues at stake, but by small, chance events. After a visit to her brother, Anna is "more Parliamentarian than ever" (644) and decides to desert her husband and his castle. Upon encountering a woman near the castle wall with whom her husband has made an assignation, however, Lady Baxby becomes jealous and protective, and returns to her husband, "as firmly rooted in Royalist principles as any man in the Castle" (646). Royalist and Parliamentarian principles have no intrinsic value, being subject to the whims of chance.

In "A Committee-Man of 'The Terror'", neither the political beliefs nor the historical personages involved in the French Revolution are clearly identified. The noblewoman who flees France is called "Mademoiselle V___" and, in an unintentionally amusing passage, Hardy "reveals" the identity of the Frenchman responsible for guillotinings during the war. Mademoiselle
V__ asks the Frenchman:

"Are you not Monsieur B__?"

Monsieur B__, alias Monsieur G__, explains the political beliefs which prompted his past behavior, saying "I only believe in the god called Reason, and I do not repent. I was the instrument of a national principle"(908), and later, he notes that his life has been devoted to "the cause of Liberty"(916). These abstractions do not establish a sense of the particular issues at stake. Hardy does not delineate the political views of the period other than in vague, abstract terms. Similarly, Hardy does not adequately establish the social attitudes at the time of the French Revolution. He remarks that the Frenchman is, in Mademoiselle V__'s "tradition", both "vengeance and irre-ligion personified"(913), but he allows his readers to guess at the nature of her hitherto unmentioned social tradition.

Though the romance in "A Committee-Man" is technically thwarted by the political situation and attitudes of Revolutionary France, Hardy describes these in as broad and as unspecific a manner as possible, in keeping with his vision of history as a "stream of years".

Hardy's original concept of history can also be seen in "Master John Horseleigh, Knight", a tale set in the mid-1500's. Instead of defining in some way the uniqueness of the period, Hardy points out how the period resembles his own. He writes,
for instance, that one of his characters is "sitting in an upper room on one of the lath-backed, willow-bottomed 'shepherds' chairs, made on the spot then as to this day, and as they were probably made there in the days of the Heptarchy" (921). When describing the locality of his tale, Hardy remarks "It is unnecessary to describe Oozewood on the South-Avon. It has a railroad at the present day; but thirty years of steam traffic past its precincts have hardly modified its original features" (921). Later in the tale, he turns to "a manuscript dated some years later than the events", Hutchin's History of Dorset, to describe a manor house no longer in existence; yet Hardy merely gives a blueprint description of an estate and grounds which could conceivably have been built in his own century. Though Hardy utilizes an historical source in this tale, the details from it which he chooses to include are essentially non-distinct. For Hardy, history can only be traced, and not detailed.

Hardy chooses not to particularize history in his historical tales in order to point out the omnipotence of chance, of the "unconscious propensity" of which he writes in his journal. Random chance rather than an historical tendency determines the lives of his individuals. In "The Melancholy Hussar", chance intervenes to prevent Phyllis from leaving England with her Hussar, and when the Hussar and his friends accidentally mistake the island of Jersey for the coast of France, they are caught and executed for desertion. The shepherd and his uncle,
a sergeant, in "A Tradition of 1804", cannot capture Napoleon and thereby become heroes because the sergeant has, by chance, forgotten to bring his rifle. The farmer in "The Duke's Reappearance" refuse shelter to a stranger after he chances to see the stranger making an attempt to kiss his daughter. The stranger turns out to be the Duke of Monmouth, who, because he is turned away by the farmer, is soon after caught and beheaded. Anna's accidental encounter in "Anna, Lady Baxby" causes her to return to Lord Baxby, thereby saving his castle from being besieged by Anna's loving brother. The untimely arrival of a letter in "A Committee-Man" divides Mademoiselle V___ from the Frenchman, and when the opportunity arises for the couple to become reconciled, it is destroyed because of Mademoiselle V___'s chance oversight of the Frenchman on a stagecoach. In "Master John Horseleigh, Knight", a chance slip-up enables Sir John to marry Edith legally, but leads Edith's brother to assume that he is already married, an assumption which results in the brother's shooting Sir John. Hardy ignores the particular character of history and its role in the lives of individuals to instead affirm his view that events and lives are ruled by chance, in the past as well as in the present. Fleishman comments that historical fiction is "pre-eminently suited to telling how individual lives were shaped at specific moments in history, and
and how this shaping reveals the character of those historical periods. Hardy shows how individual lives are shaped by specific moments of history by chance alone, denying the established concept of history as possessing individuality and the Victorian concept of history as being divinely ruled.
Footnotes


4Sanders, p. ix.


6Ibid., 52.

7Ibid., 52-53.

8Trollope, "How Meo Varalla Won His First Love", *Temple Bar*, 33 (1871), 476.


10Quoted in Fleischman, p. 181.


12Fleishman, p. 1.
CHAPTER FOUR

TALES OF MARRIAGE AND LOVE
A large portion of Hardy's short stories, more than can be dealt with here, are centrally concerned with questions of love and marriage. For Victorians, however, marriage did not present much of a question: marriage "was held to be sacred, and an offence against its sanctity very serious". To a large number of Victorians, love did not exist outside the bond of marriage, or at least if it did, they did not want to be told about it in literature. Similarly, they did not want to be told about the explicitly sexual side of love. In accordance with these attitudes towards love and marriage, Victorian writers generally depicted love in a sentimental, romantic fashion. Marriage was the ideal happy ending for a tale. As A.O.J. Cockshut notes, "the marriage at the end of the volume provides a neat method of avoiding the consummation". While some authors, such as George Eliot, do portray the marriage experience within the story itself, that experience is, with a few exceptions, rarely unhappy. For George Eliot, marriage is often a means by which protagonists are brought to realize their spiritual potential.

In Hardy's short stories, however, marriage is not a goal which promises or provides happiness, but a convention which kills love by commanding it to endure. Similarly, love is neither sentimental nor spiritual, but primarily sexual and
instinctive. Love and marriage are mutually exclusive states, for marriage eliminates the possibility of ecstasy. Tragedy results both when Hardy's protagonists repress their sexual longings to obey the marriage convention, and when they attempt to repress their sexual longings to fulfil their sexual drives. In either event, the tragedy is precipitated by convention, particularly by conventional marriage.

Hardy's tales of marriage and love fall roughly into two categories, both of which are too large to discuss in their entirety. Instead, I will examine a representative sampling from each group. "The Waiting Supper", "Alicia's Diary" and "The Marchioness of Stonehenge" will serve as examples of the first category, those tales in which sexual love is repressed for the sake of convention. In "The Waiting Supper", the sexual attraction between Nicholas and Christine remains unrealized because of the invisible pressures of a rigid class system and those of an unhappy marriage. Christine, a squire's daughter, secretly promises her lover, Nicholas, a "mere tiller of the soil" (749), that she will marry him. After several years of being secretly engaged, Christine begins to feel anxiety about her social position, an anxiety which detracts from her feelings for her lover. Christine's class anxieties cause her to behave coldly to Nicholas, despite her true passion for him. After this behavior, an offended Nicholas leaves and there is "nothing left but frigidity" (754) in Christine's future.

The passion of Nicholas and Christine is circumvented in
the first half of the tale by class barriers; in the second half of the tale, their passion is cut off by a marriage that is a marriage in name only. Nicholas returns after fifteen years to fulfill his love for Christine. Seeing her again revitalizes "to sudden heat feelings that had almost been stilled" (769), but Christine has, in his absence, married Mr. Bellston, a man of her father's choosing. Bellston, though, has abused her physically, has deserted her and has not been seen for nine years. Nicholas and Christine decide to consummate their passion and, after placing advertisements in newspapers for Bellston, they make plans to marry. These plans are rudely interrupted when, on the scheduled wedding day, Christine receives a note from Bellston informing her of both his existence and his imminent return. Believing Bellston to be alive and Christine to be legally married, Nicholas and Christine remain "in close communion, yet not indissolubly united" (782), a tantalizing state of suspended passion that lasts seventeen years. Nicholas and Christine at last discover Bellston's skeleton in a stream, where it has lain all along. Ironically, this discovery comes too late to benefit the two, for, with the passing of years, the couple's burning ardour has faded into saddened affection. The couple no longer have the will to marry. In "The Waiting Supper", the restraints of convention that take the form of class barriers and marriage frustrate and erode Nicholas' and Christine's passion for one another.

Love is prevented from being realized by the conventional bond of engagement in "Alicia's Diary", apparently Hardy's
only attempt at epistolary narration. Alicia's sister travels to the continent and becomes engaged to a French painter named Charles, but when her mother dies, the sister must return home to attend the funeral. Charles eventually follows her to England, where he meets Alicia. Alicia and he are instantly attracted to one another. When Alicia is in Charles' presence, her senses become weak, and she writes in her journal: "I caught him on two or three occasions regarding me fixedly in a way that disquieted me somewhat"(301). later adding, "his contiguity is strangely disturbing to me now"(304). Their attraction is instinctive and purely emotional: "It is no yesterday's passion, cultivated by our converse; it came at first sight, independently of my will"(305).

Alicia, however, denies her sexual impulses for the sake of Charles' prior engagement to her sister, to whom she is affectionately attached. Unwilling to marry the sister because of his "unaccountable fascination"(305) for Alicia, Charles leaves for Europe, sending letters to Alicia that leave her "trembling, hot and cold by turns"(306). When the sister sickens of grief, Charles returns at Alicia's request, agreeing to carry through only a mock marriage ceremony with the sister. The sister recovers, believing herself to be Charles' true wife. When the sister learns the truth and becomes distraught, a concerned Alicia calls upon Charles. She writes of her meeting with Charles: "I expected him to be amazed; but he showed another kind of feeling to an extent which dismayed me. I may have revealed something similar, but
I struggled hard against all my emotion"(816). Alicia denies her own sexual desires and asks Charles to fulfil his original proposal of marriage to her sister. Charles agrees, saying, "Very well. But I will not answer for the consequences"(820). Hours after his marriage to Alicia's sister, he is found drowned in a weir. Alicia must bear privately the knowledge that she is responsible for his suicide. Because she abandons her sexual instincts to remain loyal to her sister and to support the artificial convention of engagement, Alicia suffers a lifetime of grief and penitential spinsterhood.

The third tale in which a denial of love for convention leads to unhappiness is "The Marchioness of Stonehenge". Lady Caroline, wearied of "more artificial [sic] men"(576), falls passionately in love with an assistant land steward. Filled with sexual longings for the steward, Lady Caroline entices and wins him, using "all the craft of fine loving"(576). Hardy comments upon the ability of desire to make itself felt, noting "a time comes when the stupidest sees in an eye the glance of his other half"(576). The two marry secretly and blissfully realize their passion. The happiness of Caroline and the steward, however, is short-lived. Subordinating her ardour for her husband to her social anxieties, Caroline reproaches herself for not having married a knight or a baron instead of a land steward. She quarrels with her husband, during which the steward perceives her sudden coldness to him and suffers a fatal heart attack. Lady Caroline subsequently strives to cover all traces of her marriage of passion, convincing a
village maiden in love with the steward to assume her role as legal widow. Later, finding herself pregnant, she also convinces the girl to accept her baby. She succeeds in hiding her previous love-match from the eyes of society and eventually contracts a marriage of convenience to the elderly but rich Marquis of Stonehenge. Years later, left childless by her loveless second marriage, Caroline is disturbed by a glimpse of her son. She bitterly repents of the denial of her first marriage and attempts to gain the affections of the stranger who is her son. The son rejects Caroline's overtures, however, a rejection which leads to her heartbreak and eventual death.

"The Marchioness" pits the passionate claims of a sexual attraction against the colder claims of convention. Lady Caroline breaks her lover's heart and her own as well because of her betrayal of love for social considerations.

In the second group of Hardy's marriage and love tales, the protagonists attempt to escape the unhappy ties of marriage in order to fulfill their sexual drives, attempts which are both futile and costly. The cost of defying convention and obeying sexual instincts is that of death for Emmeline in "The Duchess of Hamptonshire". Emmeline, a rector's daughter, develops an attachment with a curate named Aldwyn. But their love is interrupted by the Duke of Hamptonshire, who sees Emmeline one day and takes "fire to a degree that was well-nigh terrible"(667). He persuades the rector to force Emmeline into marriage and subsequently subjects his
wife to mental torture. An unhappy Emmeline, who, as Hardy
tells us, has a "natural inappetancy for evil things"(667),
meets secretly with her lover. The two leap together as
naturally as "a pair of dewdrops on a leaf"(669). Emmeline
begs Aldwyn to allow her to sail with him for America, as he
has planned to do, saying of her request, "It cannot be sin,
for I have never wanted to commit sin in my life"(670). The
curate refuses her on moral grounds and departs. As a result
of his refusal, he becomes a man of limited human sympathy,
thinking of Emmeline "with the strict yet reluctant niggard-
liness of an ailing epicure proportioning the rank drinks
that cause his malady"(671). Nine years later, Aldwyn learns
that the Duke has died, and he returns to claim Emmeline,
only to discover that the Duke's widow is not Emmeline, but
a second wife. Emmeline is dead: she had disobeyed the curate's
instructions nine years before and had followed him on board
ship disguised as a rauper, only to die of fever before gather-
ing up the courage to reveal to him her presence.

"The Duchess of Hamptonshire" is one of Hardy's most clear-
cut statements in favor of marital infidelity and fidelity to
the bidding of one's heart. Hardy portrays Emmeline's instinc-
tive obedience to sexual drives with sympathy and casts an un-
flattering light upon Aldwyn's refusal to disobey social and
moral codes. For Hardy, attempts to flee convention and
marriage are correct, though doomed to failure.

In "An Imaginative Woman", an attempt to escape an unhappy
marriage similarly ends in disaster. Here, Hardy's portrayal of sexual drives is highly suggestive. "The necessity of getting life leased at all cost, a cardinal virtue which all mothers teach" (256), leads Ella to accept the hand of Mr. Marchmill, a man who turns out to share none of her interests. Dreamy by nature, Ella finds her husband's inclinations "sordid and material" (255). She resigns herself to a lifetime of marital unhappiness and turns to writing occasional verse. When, one year, the couple vacation at a seaside cottage only recently vacated by a poet, Ella suddenly develops an unaccountable but definitely sexual longing for the absent poet, Robert Trewe. "Possessed by her fantasy" (263), Ella tries on the clothes Trewe has left behind and ecstatically prepares to view his photograph for the first time:

To gratify her passionate curiosity she now made her preparations, first getting rid of superfluous garments and putting on her dressing-gown (266).

After contemplating Trewe's picture, she places it beside her in bed and falls asleep, "immersed in the very essence of him, permeated by his spirit as by an ether" (268), an ether which transports her from the dullness of her marriage. Ella schemes to meet Trewe in the flesh and eagerly awaits "the pregnant day and hour" (273).

However, Ella's contrivances to escape her marriage and fulfil her sexual fantasies fail. Each anticipated meeting with the poet is frustrated by arbitrary chance. After the
last such thwarted encounter, Trewe kills himself from his despair over an attraction, paralleling that of Ella's, to an imaginary woman. Ella attends his funeral and Marchmill discovers her there, having suspected her affinity for the poet. He escorts her home, and they travel "almost without speaking, under the sense that it was one of those dreary situations occurring in married life, which words could not mend" (278-9).

Ella dies several months later, giving birth to a child who gradually comes to resemble Trewe. Marchmill finds the poet's photograph, compares it to the child, and concludes:

"I'm damned if I didn't think so! Then she did play false with that fellow at the lodgings. Let me see: the dates—the second week in August... the third week in May... Yes... yes... Get away, you poor little brat! You mean nothing to me!" (280).

Though Ella's infidelity is only imaginary, the consequences of her marital betrayal of marriage are as real and as unjust as those of Emmeline's physical flight. Ella herself dies from heartbreak and leaves her child an inheritance of imaginary illegitimacy, for which it will suffer a lifetime of social scorn. In "An Imaginary Woman", extramarital fantasies are punished as severely as if they were true.

"Barbara of the House of Grebe" is perhaps Hardy's most forthright representation of convention's strangling grip upon individual natures. Barbara's existence is frustrated by "the ignoble ambitions of her parents and the conventions of the time" (571). Barbara's socially sensitive parents separate Edmond and Barbara, and Barbara is enjoined by
those around her not to follow Edmond to Italy when he is burned in a fire while attempting to rescue others. Barbara cannot flee from the interference of convention, even when she directs her escape efforts inwards. Lord Uplandtowers, her second husband, intrudes upon Barbara's imaginary relationship with the dead Edmond and confronts her rudely with the fact of her marriage to him. Barbara is forced unnaturally to reciprocate the love of Uplandtowers; accordingly, her attempts to give him an heir result in unnatural miscarriages. These miscarriages represent Barbara's last attempt to defy Uplandtowers and convention. In "Barbara of the House of Grebe", Barbara's sexual desires become subservient to the demands of her husband and of convention.

Hardy deals with the marriage question from varying angles in "A Changed Man", "The First Countess of Wessex" and "Interlopers At the Knap". In "A Changed Man", Hardy does not sanction infidelity, as in most previous tales, but rather hints that infidelity is morally wrong, not merely wrong in the eyes of society. In another exceptional tale, "The First Countess of Wessex", Hardy's protagonists actually achieve a happy marriage, though only after a prolonged ordeal. Hardy points out for his readers that this marriage "might have led, but providentially did not lead, to great unhappiness" (534). In a more characteristic treatment of marriage and love, Hardy portrays in "Interlopers At the Knap" a character who achieves happiness largely because she operates independently of convention and remains single. Taken as a whole, Hardy's short stories de-
pict marriage as being rather grim. As the rector remarks in "The Waiting Supper", the "tragedy of marriage...is full of crises and catastrophes, and ends with the death of one of the actors"(745).

Hardy's regular insistence upon love as an earthly, sexual drive and his ready depiction of the existence of love outside of marriage in his short fiction were not welcomed by his Victorian audience, and several of Hardy's more graphically suggestive short stories had to undergo revision. At the request of the editor of the Graphic, for example, Hardy "slightly chastened" some of the tales in A Group of Noble Dames and drastically bowdlerized several others. Though Hardy may have tailored his stories somewhat to suit the tastes of his public, however, it is clear that his short fiction was not written to satisfy the public alone, but to express his own personal philosophy with respect to love, marriage and convention.
Footnotes


2Ibid., p. 23.

3Purdy, pp. 65, 66.
CHAPTER FIVE

HARDY'S GOOD-NATURED RUSTICS
George Eliot, Richard Jefferies and Thomas Hardy were contemporaries in an age that valued its English countryside highly. As W.J. Keith comments in *The Rural Tradition*, "The nineteenth-century still retained a vision of Nature, however sentimental or inadequate it may have been. Although thoroughly urbanized, he still yearned for the open air". With the advent of railroads that simplified travel, a large number of middle-to-upper-class Victorians spent their leisure time in the country. But many more urbanites indulged their rural cravings vicariously, through the arts. Public interest in rural life was met by an abundance of pages and canvases covered with nature depictions. The Victorian era was a period when "the precise description of natural detail had become almost de rigueur for poets and artists alike---inducing urban painters to get up their botany and shortsighted poets to peer intently at horse-chestnut buds".

The recently urbanized Victorian society tended to idealize their countryside. Leslie Stephen wrote in an 1880 article entitled "Country Books" that "A love of the country is taken, I know not why, to indicate the presence of all the cardinal virtues. We assert a taste for fresh and innocent pleasures, and an indifference to the feverish excitements of artificial society". He later discusses the writers of country literature: "Who are the most potent weavers of that delightful magic? Clearly, in the first place, those who have been themselves in contact with rural sights and sounds.---Our guide may save us the trouble of stumbling through farmyards and across ploughed fields, but he must have gone through it himself till his very voice has a twang..."
of the true country accent".4 Victorians wanted rural writers to present a "fresh and innocent" portrait of country life and to attempt to make this idyllic scene as authentic as possible.

Though the nineteenth-century cultivated an image of "a happy and innocent countryside, where all the vicars were hard-working and all the girls virtuous".5 not all Victorian rural writers maintained this tradition in their works. Richard Jefferies, for instance, consistently refuses to idealize his rustics. The prose which he uses to describe his sunburnt, weary protagonists is plain and unadorned: "Hard toil and hard fare; the bread which the reapers have brought with them for their luncheon is hard and dry, the heat has dried it like a chip".6 To Jefferies, "wheat is beautiful, but human life is labour".7 Though the natural environment in Jefferies' fiction is pleasing, the artificial conditions imposed upon it by man are harsh. Jefferies has, nonetheless, a practical sympathy for country life and those associated with it; he refuses to patronize his rustics as mere animals. In "Golden Brown".8 for instance, Jefferies' narrator begins by envying the glorious life of two females he sees starting out for a day's work in the fields. At the end of a hard day of labour, however, the women return, now "so heavily intoxicated they could but stagger to and fro and mouth and gesticulate, and one held a quart from which, as she moved, she spilled the ale".8 The narrator loses his original naive illusion regarding rural life but, at the same time, does not blame the women. They are human, like him, as he had recognized earlier, in the morning. When Roger in "One of the New Voters" goes to the alehouse and becomes drunk, Jefferies shows why Roger does this:
Just as his body needed food and drink, so did his mind require recreation, and that chiefly consists of conversation. The drinking and the smoking are in truth but the attributes of the labourer's public-house evening. It is conversation that draws him hither... Not being an animal, though his life and work were animal, he went with his friends to talk.

Jefferies neither condemns nor idealizes his rustic protagonists but, rather, understandingly presents the grim realities in their lives.

George Eliot, who did most of her writing a decade earlier than Jefferies, displays in her works the more popular nineteenth-century concept of rural life. In her *Scenes from Clerical Life*, a collection of three short stories published in 1857, the villagers are generally content with their lives and are full of rustic wisdom, humour and even poetry. Though uneducated, the merchant in "Janet's Repentance" is satisfied with his place in life, commenting several times that his father had given him "no eddication, and he didn't care who knowed it; he could buy up most o' th' eddicated men he'd ever come across". A blend of wit and humour characterizes these rustics. The housekeeper in "Mr. Gilfil's Love Story" humourously notes that Sir Francis Bacon, the inventor of gunpowder, "might ha' been better employed", while the gardener in "The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton" remarks that Amos "hadn't much here, but he'll be wuss off theer. Half a loaf's better nor ne'er un". In a rustic flight of fancy, the gardener in "Mr. Gilfil's Love Story" comments on the lovesick Caterina that "I shouldn't woonder if she fades away laike them cyclamens as I transplanted. She puts me i' maind on 'em somehow, hangin' on their little thin stalks, so whaite an' tinder". Even when, on occasion, these
rustics display negative qualities, these faults are largely benign. Though the gardener exclaims "They're all alike, them furriners"; he treats Caterina, an Italian waif, with loving kindness. The admirable qualities of the rustics greatly outweigh their few forgivable faults. The sordidness and depravity of life in lowerclass England has no place in the rustic world of *Scenes from Clerical Life*.

In his rustic tales, Hardy, too, fabricates a world that is immune to the harsh realities of country life in Victorian England. This can especially be seen in "A Few Crusted Characters", nine miniature sketches embedded in a Canterbury Tales framework. The "pilgrimage" is a carrier van trip to Longpuddle and the "pilgrim" storytellers are local villagers. Many of these tales depict rustic characters who are often amusing, sometimes mischievous, but always good-natured and harmless. The main character in "Tony Kytes, the Arch-Deceiver", for example, is hardly a sinister conniver, as the title suggests; rather, he is an innocuous, bumbling rustic whose only fault lies in his susceptibility to the opposite sex. On his way to pick up his fiancee, Milly, Tony gives Unity Sallet a ride, and is "a-struck with the truth o't"(428) when she suggests that she would make a better wife than Milly. Unity asks Tony if he can deny she is pretty:

> He let his eyes light upon her for a long while. "I really can't," says he. "In fact, I never knewed you was so pretty before!"(428).

After proposing to Unity, Tony encounters Hannah, a former
girlfriend, whom he gives a ride home as well:

Hannah looked round sideways into his eyes. "This is nice, isn't it, Tony?" she says. "I like riding with you."

Tony looked back into her eyes. "And I with you," he said after a while. In short, having considered her, he warmed up, and the more he looked at her the more he liked her, till he couldn't for the life of him think why he had ever said a word about marriage to Milly or Unity while Hannah Jolliver was in question (431).

Though Tony promises to marry Hannah as well as Unity and Milly, his intentions are honest. If he could marry all three, he conceivably would. When the girls discover what has happened and begin fighting amongst themselves, Tony intervenes:

"Don't ye quarrel, my dears--don't ye!" says he, taking off his hat out of respect to 'em. And then he would have kissed them all round, as fair and square as a man could (435).

Though Tony is clearly over-susceptible to the female sex, his charm and ultimate goodness are never suspect.

Similarly, though the unmarried Jane is pregnant in "Andrey Satchel and the Parson" and her sweetheart, Andrey, is too fond of drinking, their innocence is never questioned. When a clergyman (appropriately named Toogood) accuses Andrey of being "in liquor" (452) on his wedding day, he defends himself well, saying "I reckon that if you, Pa'son Billy Toogood, had kept up a christening all night so thoroughly as I have done, you wouldn't be able to stand at all; d___ me if you would" (452). The story-
teller passes lightly over Jane's pregnancy, calling it "bodily circumstances owing to that young man"(457), and the women in the van sigh, "Ah, poor thing!"(451). Hardy not only portrays Andrey and Jane with sympathy; he also endows them with rustic nobility. The two are locked up in a churchtower at Jane's request until Andrey's drunkenness passes and they can be married. Though the clergyman forgets about them until the next day, the two behave with restraint and dignity. Jane explains to the parson that they were ashamed at what led to their being locked up and says, "We felt that if it were noised abroad it would cling to us all our lives! Once or twice Andrey had a good mind to toll the bell, but then he said: 'No; I'll starve first. I won't bring disgrace on my name and yours, my dear'"(459). At the end of the tale, Hardy's rustics emerge far more virtuous than the neglectful, sanctimonious parson.

Andrey's father, Andrew, is the main character in "Old Andrey's Experience As a Musician", and he gets himself into a scrape because of his somewhat greedy fondness for food and drink. Despite this flaw, however, Hardy portrays him in a sympathetic and flattering manner. When Andrew invites himself to the Squire's party, pretending to belong to the local choir, the Squire's mother asks him why he has no instrument to play. The storyteller comments that "Everyone of the quire was ready to sink into the floor with concern at the fix Andrew was in. We could see he had fallen into a cold sweat"(461). Later, the Squire's mother gives "poor wretched Andrew"(461) a fiddle, and the story-
teller notes, "Andrew's face looked as if it were made of rotten apple as he stood in the circle of players in front of his book; for if there was one person in the parish that everybody was afraid of, 'twas this hook-nosed old lady" (401). Though Andrew brings his predicament upon himself, Hardy sympathizes with him and even casts him in the role of martyr.

In "Absentmindedness In a Choir", Hardy creates sympathy for a rustic choir that drinks brandy in church to keep warm, falls asleep during the sermon and, upon being awakened, bursts into "The Devil and the Tailors" instead of the Evening Hymn. The storyteller carefully justifies their drinking in church, explaining "'Twas so mortal cold that year that they could hardly sit in the gallery" and later remarking "'Twas freezing an inch an hour" (463). Though the song the choir members play is totally unsuited for church, their mistake is understandable, their having been kept up late the night before to play at a dance. The Squire's reaction to this honest mistake is both harsh and hypocritical:

"Never such an insulting, disgraceful thing---never!" says the Squire, who couldn't rule his passion (465).

"Not if the Angels of Heaven," says the Squire (he was a wickedish man, the Squire was, though now for once he happened to be on the Lord's side)---"not if the Angels of Heaven come down," he says, "shall one of you villainous players ever sound a note in this church again" (465).

The severely chastened choir members, guilty only of trying to keep themselves warm, creep down from the gallery, "all looking as little as nine-pins" (465). Hardy treats his rustics with
sympathy, making clear that the Squire is the true villain, not they.

Though the deeds of the rustics in "Incident in the Life of Mr. George Crokhill" and "Netty Sargeant's Copyhold" are more questionable than those of Hardy's other rustics, they nonetheless are at least partly virtuous. The storyteller in the former tale comments:

Honest Georgy crept out of his bed by stealth, and dressed himself in the farmer's clothes, in the pockets of the said clothes being the farmer's money. Now though George particularly wanted the farmer's nice clothes and nice horse, owing to a little transaction at the fair which made it desirable that he should not be too easily recognized, his desires had their bounds: he did not wish to take his young friend's money, at any rate more of it than was necessary to pay the bill (476).

According to the rustics on the trip to Longpuddle, Georgy is "one of the shady sort" (475); yet even the shadiest of Hardy's rustics are redeemed by their good-intentions and general affability. Georgy is only a "borrower" (477), not a thief. All sense of Georgy's wrong-doing disappears when the farmer turns out to be a soldier deserting from the army, who has deliberately planted the suggestion in Georgy's mind that they exchange clothes. Georgy is "as innocent as a babe of this matter of the soldier's desertion" (478) and becomes the innocent dupe of the soldier.

Netty is similarly innocent in "Netty Sargeant's Copyhold", despite her unscrupulous method of securing her uncle's property. The storyteller explains to the stranger on the trip that Netty is "a oneyer, if you like, sir. Not any harm in her, you know,
but up to everything" (479). The behavior of Netty, who forges her uncle's signature on a renewal deed, is understandable, for her selfish fiancé tells her "no house no husband" (481). In addition, her act is only slightly scandalous, for her uncle dies only hours before signing the deed as he has intended. Netty's fiancé, Jasper, is not unredeemably selfish. When the storyteller remarks, "Jasper's eyes might have been fixed upon Netty, but his mind was upon her father's house", he adds, "though he was fond of her in his way--I admit that" (480). In a similar vein, the storyteller reveals that Jasper beats Netty after they are married, but immediately adds "--not hard, you know, just a smack or two" (485). Whenever his rustics come close to being less than virtuous, Hardy is quick to redeem them.

Rustic characters appear only in a few of Hardy's other short stories, in relatively minor roles. In "Interlopers At the Knap", Dairyman Johns is not the central character, yet he is portrayed in a similar fashion as the rustics in "A Few Crusted Characters". The dairyman is both wise and innocent. He tells Farmer Dalton:

"I shouldn't call Sally Hall simple. Primary, because no Sally is; secondary, because if some could be, this one wouldn't. 'Tis a wrong denomination to apply to a woman, Charles, and affects me, as your best man, like cold water. 'Tis like recommending a stage play by saying there's neither murder, villainy, nor harm of any sort in it, when that's what you've paid your half-crown to see (157).

Sally turns out to be anything but simple, and the dairyman's observations on female nature are proven correct. When the farmer
marries Helena instead of Sally, Dairyman Johns calls him "a
curst no'thern fool to be drawn off the scent by such a red
herring doll-oll-oll"(177), an acute judgement, for the farmer
comes to regret his choice of a wife. The dairyman is himself
a model of virtue. He drinks cider-wine rather than malt-liquor,
explaining, "And there's this to be said for 't--'tis a more
peaceful liquor, and don't lie about a man like your hotter
drinks. With care, one may live on it a twelve-month without
knocking down a neighbour, or getting a black eye from an old
acquaintance"(169). The dairyman, rough in both speech and com-
plexion, is nonetheless gentle and virtually omniscient.

The central characters in "The Three Strangers" are the hang-
man and the watch-and-clock maker; the rustics at the shepherd's
christening party serve only as a backdrop for the interaction
between these two. Hardy depicts these rustics as being genial
and good-natured. He comments that "cheerful events were in
course of enactment within Fennel's pastoral dwelling"(12) and
that the rustics have "absolute confidence in each other's good
opinion"(11). The shepherd's wife, Mrs. Fennel, is the only
rustic with a less-than-generous nature, but her stinginess has
its bounds. When the players ignore her injunction and play for
over an hour, thus stimulating the appetites and thirst of the
dancers, Mrs. Fennel does not stop the players from fear that
"she might lose her character of genial hostess if she were to
interfere too markedly"(12). The generosity of her husband, who,
in Mrs. Fennel's opinion, is "in the mood to exhibit the most
reckless phases of hospitality"(12), more than compensates for
his wife's frugality. The rustics in this tale are well-intentioned at heart, even the watchful Mrs. Fennel.

Hardy's depiction of rustic life in his novels pleased his Victorian readers. The critics consistently singled out the rustic scenes in his novels for praise. Many compared him to George Eliot in respect to his pictures of rural life in these works. The *Athenaeum* noted that the parish clerk and the cider-making scene in Hardy's first novel, *Desperate Remedies*, were "really almost worthy of George Eliot",15 while the *Pall Mall Gazette* commented in 1873 that "there are chapters in Under the Greenwood Tree which rival the most admirable rustic pieces of George Eliot herself".16 Hardy's short stories of rustic life are relatively few, but these were the short stories which received the most attention from Victorian reviewers. In a short notice of *Wessex Tales*, the *Westminster Review* praised its vivid pictures of rustic life.17 Edmund Gosse writes in 1890 that "Besides his ten great oil-pictures [i.e., Hardy's first ten novels], Mr. Hardy has occasionally hung up in his gallery a water-colour sketch of extraordinary charm and quality. Of these studies, as they may be called, "Interlopers At the Knap", which appeared in 1884, will occur to everyone as a typical example"; and the critic goes on to praise "The Three Strangers" as well.18 The idyllic fashion in which Hardy portrays rustic characters in his few short "rustic pieces" matched the tastes of his Victorian audience.
Footnotes


4 Ibid., III, p. 177.


7 Ibid., p. 107.

8 Ibid., p. 32.

9 Ibid., p. 103.


11 Ibid., p. 127.

12 Ibid., p. 80.

13 Ibid., p. 154.

14 Ibid., p. 123.

15 Athenaeum (April 1871), 398-9.

16 Pall Mall Gazette (October 1873), 312.
17 Westminster Review, CXXX (July 1888), 115.

18 Edmund Gosse, "Thomas Hardy", The Speaker, II (September 1890), 295.
Thomas Hardy's short stories, taken as a whole, represent an impressive, as well as substantial, contribution to the Victorian short story genre, as can be seen by comparison with other Victorian short fiction. Many of the short stories written by such mid-Victorian writers as Elizabeth Gaskell, Anthony Trollope and George Eliot consist of strictly linear plots and leisurely indulge in character development and analysis. A skeletal novel rather than a short story is the result. On the other hand, the suspenseful mystery and horror stories of later Victorian writers, which evade such profound but lengthy character analysis, become tangled instead in a web of plot complications. Such intricate plots as those of Charles Reade and Wilkie Collins, for instance, often tend towards the novel, being essentially different in nature from the short story, in which the economic spectrum is narrowed down to a single incident. In his short fiction, Hardy demonstrates an awareness of the limitations and demands of the short story mode. The tendency to run off, like George Eliot in her Scenes from Clerical Life, "to sententiae, in generalizing abstractions out of the special point in hand", which numerous critics noticed in Hardy's novels, is conspicuously absent in his short fiction. Similarly, though Hardy lends greater psychological consistency to his short story characters than do sensationalists, he does not carry this to the extremes to which George Eliot does in her Scenes, of which John Blackwood commented that its author
made the mistake of "trying too much to explain the characters of his actors by description instead of allowing them to evolve". Hardy does not maintain a running criticism on his characters in his short fiction. Though largely critical of the collection, the National Review did concede that A Group of Noble Dames possessed a "pointed and terse narrative".

Many Victorian short fiction writers appear to be "hack" writers--i.e., they gave their public what it wanted. Though certainly more skilled at writing fiction than the largest number of Victorians, T. A. Trollope and Wilkie Collins both qualify for this label. It is possible that writers of the Victorian short story, which appeared largely only in periodicals and hence had to succeed immediately if it was to succeed at all, were, to an extent, forced to profess and accommodate their opinions to those already held by the public instead of attempting to improve them or present alternate ones.

While Hardy's short stories may have given the Victorian audience, in some respects, what it wanted, they also express an idiosyncratic philosophy that often varied from that held by Victorian readers and critics. This is true of Hardy's novels as well; his novels, though, were praised not for their underlying pessimism, for instance, but for their creation of an elaborate rural setting, one not possible to create in a short story, and also for their sympathetic portrayal of rustic life, which Hardy treats in only a few short stories. The attitudes of post-Victorian critics to Hardy's short stories
appear to be influenced by uneasiness at the message they convey. William Rutland wrote in 1931 that:

On a general review of them, one is tempted to say that the distinguishing characteristics of Hardy's short stories are improbability and unpleasantness. The extreme nastiness of most of the contents of Life's Little Ironies is not redeemed by the undeniable power of the writing and reveals how thoroughly Hardy's view of life was jaundiced when he wrote them.

Although Rutland recognizes that the stories have "undeniable power", he unfairly dismisses their literary merit on the basis of Hardy's idiosyncratic view of life.

In most of his fiction, Hardy does not inculcate the opinions of his Victorian audience. "A Few Crude Characters" being one of the few exceptions. Rather, Hardy's short stories express his personal concept of how the world works. For Hardy, convention, especially that of marriage, is basically inimicable to the happiness of human beings; history is impotent with respect to influencing individual lives, which are ruled by arbitrary coincidence and chance; and the universe is not changing for the better, but largely for the worse. The relative neglect of Hardy's short stories is at least partly because of their regular insistence upon a mode of regard, undisguised by scenery and good-natured rustics, with which early reviewers of his novels disagreed. Samuel Chew, for instance, regretted that Hardy's Mayor of Casterbridge, though "tender" and "sympathetic", was not "sweet". In his 1949 study of Thomas Hardy, Albert Guerard calls for a reassessment of Hardy's works in
accordance with changing modern attitudes. He writes:

We should look on Chew’s generation with envy rather than with disrespect, and perhaps we shall have to win our way back to that sweet and gentlemanly confidence. But we have been to a different school. We have rediscovered, to our sorrow, the demonic in human nature as well as in political process; our everyday experience has been both intolerable and improbable, but even more improbable than intolerable.

Though Hardy’s novels have received the reassessment Guerard wished, the short stories still are neglected. In fact, Hardy’s short fiction must first be evaluated before it can be reassessed. This study has attempted that evaluation in terms of Victorian short fiction generally. On the basis both of their often crisp and powerful writing and on the basis of their expressions of experience, the short stories of Thomas Hardy deserve recognition alongside his novels and poetry.
Footnotes


2. *Saturday Review*, xxxii (1871), 441.


7. Guerard, p. 3.

8. Ibid., p. 3.
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