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A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THOMAS HARDY
AS A SHORT STORY WRITER

By

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AS A SHORT STORY WRITER

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PREFACE

Much critical material has been written on the novels and poetry of Thomas Hardy, but very little criticism has been written on his short stories. In evaluating Hardy's ability as a short story writer, I have first discussed the conventional standards of quality in the short story form, then used these standards as criteria in judging Hardy's contribution in the field. I have not, however, viewed Hardy's stories in isolation from his other work; rather, I have noted the relationship of the stories to the novels and poetry in subject matter, philosophical ideas, and craftsmanship. In this way, I have tried to evaluate Hardy's achievement in the art of the short story and to determine whether his stories are of comparable worth to his novels and poetry.

I am indebted to Dr. Agnes Berrigan for her valuable guidance in this study; to Dr. D. J. Milburn for his aid as second reader; and to other members of the graduate faculty in English for their interest. I also wish to thank Dr. Wayne J. Boyd, without whose assistance I could not have completed this work.

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

Thomas Hardy's contribution to the novel and poetry in English literature is well-established. His contribution in the field of the short story is not so well known. Prolific in all three fields, he published more than seven volumes of poems, fourteen novels, and fifty short stories.

In showing the relative significance of Hardy's various works, Lascelles Abercrombie, in his book, Thomas Hardy, A Critical Study, uses Wordsworth's simile comparing a proposed trilogy of poems to the body of a Gothic church.

> In the great building, which fancy easily sees Hardy's several books uniting to shape, the pillared nave would be the series of the six principal novels; unless the two last of them should be seen as transepts, since each of these is large enough to stand somewhat by itself. Under the Greenwood Tree might be the porch or ante-chapel; and certainly The Dynasts must be the quire, a place, as sometimes happens, of loftier proportions, more intricate carving, and more varied material than the nave through which it is approached. This is the main building; but round about, though not separate, supporting but not intimately concerned in the chief composition of the building, there are, like side-chapels and miscellaneous recesses, the poems, the short stories, and the other novels.[1]

If the short stories, in comparison with the novels and poems, "do not add much power to the effect of [Hardy's] writing as

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[1]Lascelles Abercrombie, Thomas Hardy, A Critical Study (London, 1912), 76-77.

a whole, they nevertheless fit in with it."[2] When seen and examined as a whole, they may add at least an impressive chapel to the cathedral of Hardy's work.

As a novelist, Thomas Hardy showed insight into human character, philosophic depth, and artistic craftsmanship. Set against a background of nature, indifferent and immense, the often unhappy lives of his characters are governed by blind coincidence, unreasoning circumstance, and the capricious whims of sexual selection. Hardy's novels also reflect his criticism of a society in which, though unfair class distinctions arise as a result of the senseless passion for position, some hope may be held out for future improvement. Egdon Heath, nature primitive and impassive, is a presence felt more powerfully than any single character in _The Return of the Native_. Fate, as implacable as it is impartial, is perhaps most in evidence in _The Woodlanders_. The irrational caprices of sexual selection on the part of women is well illustrated in the character of Bathsheba Everdene in _Far from the Madding Crowd_. Michael Henchard in _The Mayor of Casterbridge_, perhaps Hardy's greatest tragic hero, foreshadows the epic figures of _Tess of the D'Urbervilles_ and _Jude the Obscure_. These six novels and _Under the Greenwood Tree_ form a natural whole which is a work of art in itself.[3]

As a poet, Hardy made an undisputed, though not unquali-

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[2]Ibid., 79.

[3]Ibid., 49.

fied, achievement as a profound philosopher, a penetrating psychologist, and a conscious artist. Skillfully concentrated in exact verse patterns, Hardy's language gives exciting immediacy to his concept of the "profoundly purposeless energy of existence; its terrible limitations, compared with what, in our fantasy, it might have been; the unalterable pace of . . . its 'rote-restricted ways.'"[4]

Hardy's success as a novelist and as a poet has greatly overshadowed his skill as a short story writer. Most serious critics of Hardy's work either ignore his contribution in this field or give it only cursory attention. Many otherwise discriminating readers are not even aware that Hardy worked in this form, although some of these minor works approach in excellence of form and style the author's greater creations in the fields of the novel and poetry. It is the purpose of this study to determine whether Hardy's short stories can be regarded as a third part of his work that is, although admittedly of lesser importance, comparable to his novels and poetry.

Before determining the quality of Hardy's short stories, this question must be answered: Was Hardy sufficiently interested in the short story to devote his best ability to this literary form? Hardy always preferred writing poetry, abandoning the novel and resuming this medium after the adverse

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[4]Ibid., 176-177.

critical reception of Jude the Obscure.[5] Yet it is in the field of the novel that Hardy made his most lasting contribution. There are many indications, however, that he did regard the short story as a literary form, perhaps not so important as the novel or poetry, but with a value of its own.

First, the very bulk of his short stories indicates his interest in the medium. It is unlikely that an author would spend the amount of time undoubtedly required to produce such a volume of work if he did not regard the form of expression as significant. Hardy's first venture into the field of the short story was made for commercial reasons, and many of his subsequent stories were, like some of his novels, mere "potboilers" slanted toward popular periodical markets. His first story, "An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress," was lifted, Carl J. Weber suggests, from the last fifteen chapters of his first novel, the unpublished The Poor Man and the Lady. Printed in New Quarterly Magazine, July, 1878, on request by the editor for a contribution from Hardy, "According to his own austere artistic code, 'An Indiscretion' was a trifle which was only of commercial value. He never reprinted it, never referred to it."[6] But the editor of the Quarterly was apparently well satisfied; he requested further contributions from Hardy, and within the following two years published

[5]Florence Emily Hardy, The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, 1892-1928 (New York, 1930), 65.

[6]Carl J. Weber, Hardy of Wessex, His Life and Literary Career (New York, 1940), 78-79.

"The Distracted Preacher" and "Fellow Townsmen."[7] Having thus embarked on the business of writing for popular periodicals, Hardy continued supplying short stories to editors of no less than twenty magazines and reviews for the next twenty-two years,[8] sometimes, it is true, using the same materials over in thinly disguised variations of the originals. The story, "The Honourable Laura," collected in A Group of Noble Dames, appeared in two other versions as "Emmeline" and "The Duchess of Hamptonshire." "The Waiting Supper," collected in A Changed Man and Other Tales, had an earlier version, "The Intruder." "Having begun the practice of utilizing every shred of manuscript in his earliest attempt at fiction, [Hardy] kept up the habit as long as there were editors eager to accept — and pay for — manuscripts from his pen."[9] Yet commercial reasons alone could hardly account for such a large output of work if the author were not interested in the field in which he was working.

Second, Hardy apparently wrote short stories for the same purpose that he wrote his novels and poems. The same characteristics of Hardy's work are found in all three media. Nature is impressive, but indifferent to the fortunes of her creatures. Chance and circumstance, the ironies of fate,

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[7]Ibid.

[8]Ibid., 80

[9]Carl J. Weber, "A Masquerade of Noble Dames," PMLA, LVIII (1943), 562-563.

perversely rule human lives. Man has high aspirations, which are as unrealizable as they are unrealistic. Women, wanting to fascinate and dominate those more powerful than they, fall capriciously in love on the basis of sexual selection rather than reason. Men, idealizing mere physical attraction as great love, read virtues they want women to have into women who lack such virtues. Leading ultimately to inconstancy and unfaithfulness, such love has questionable advantages. Town life submerges the individual into a class, and unfair class distinctions lead to unfair discrimination against the poor. In general, "the world in which 'crass Casualty obscures the sun and rain' is a 'senseless school' in which only dolts learn lessons that 'leave no time for prizes.'"[10] Although the indifference of nature makes it impossible to alter many social injustices which man has caused,[11] Hardy sees some hope for future amelioration in eliminating remediable ills and in accepting the inevitable without expecting too much out of life.[12] It is significant that the same criticism of life which Hardy voices in his novels and poetry is also found in the underlying philosophy of his best short stories.

Third, Hardy himself was conscious enough of the

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[10]Harvey Curtis Webster, On a Darkling Plain (Chicago, 1947), 77.

[11]Thomas Hardy, "Nature's Questioning," Collected Poems of Thomas Hardy (New York, 1926), 58.

[12]Webster, 124.

artistic value of his stories to classify them in the four natural groups in which he published them.[13] Wessex Tales, a collection of stories published previously in the periodical press, appeared in 1888. The two volume edition contained some of the best of Hardy's shorter fiction, including "The Three Strangers" and "The Withered Arm." This anthology closely parallels Life's Little Ironies, which appeared in 1894, a collection of tales characteristic of Hardy in that each turns on the classic ironies of concealment, coincidence, or injustice. Hardy's interest in his short stories is apparent in the care with which he classified the stories found in these two volumes. In a prefatory note written May, 1912, to a later edition of Life's Little Ironies, Hardy says:

> Of the following collection the first story, 'An Imaginative Woman,' which has hitherto stood in Wessex Tales, has been brought into this volume as being more nearly its place, turning as it does upon a trick of Nature, so to speak, a physical possibility that may attach to a wife of vivid imaginings, as is well known to medical practitioners and other observers of such manifestations.
>
> The two stories named 'A Tradition of Eighteen Hundred and Four' and 'The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion,' which were formerly printed in this series, have been transferred to Wessex Tales, where they more naturally belong.[14]

A Group of Noble Dames, published in 1891, has, like The Decameron and The Canterbury Tales, a group of story tellers, all known to each other, who tell the tales in a genial spirit which adds to the interest of the individual stories. When

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[13] Hardy refused to admit to his collected volumes many stories which were obviously "pot-boilers."

[14] Thomas Hardy, Life's Little Ironies (London, 1952), v.

the regular business of a Wessex Field and Antiquarian Club, "of an inclusive and intersocial character," falls through, the club members, to keep the meeting from being wasted, decide to pass the time by telling stories drawn from the personal history of the county. As one might expect from a gathering of males, they agree that all of their stories must concern the characters and fortunes of women. In these tales, which Hardy puts "into the mouths of the unsuspecting narrators, the world of respectable optimism suffers, without knowing anything about it, a considerable invasion from Hardy's world of tragic fatalism."[15] _A Changed Man and Other Tales_, which appeared in 1913, was the last collection of Hardy's shorter works published during the author's lifetime. Although several of the sketches cannot properly be called short stories, the collection does contain, besides the title story, several other artistically done tales. The care with which Hardy classified his stories in the four published volumes indicates his interest in the short story as a literary form. It is significant that many stories which were printed in popular periodicals were never collected by Hardy in a published volume, possibly because they were not up to the artistic level of the stories he did see fit to reprint.

It is thus evident that Hardy was enough interested in the short story form to put into it real creative effort, but it remains to be determined whether these stories are of

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[15] Abercrombie, 62-63.

comparable worth, though perhaps in a smaller way, to his novels and poetry. In this study, I propose to determine the answer to this question by critically evaluating a representative number of the short stories he wrote.

CHAPTER II

EVALUATIVE CRITERIA

The short story, as it has been developed during the past hundred years, is a form of fiction that is distinct from prose narrative, the novel, the novella or novelette, and the story that is merely short. Definite, though not inflexible, standards for determining quality in the short story may be formulated by observing those characteristics which have distinguished some of the most artistically successful stories written during the brief history of this literary medium.

The essential difference between the short story and other forms of prose fiction lies in unity of effect rather than in length. A short story should have only one single dominant impression[1] since it gains its unity chiefly through this impression. The length of the short story is determined by the length of time for which this single effect can be

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[1]Cf. Edgar Allan Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition," The Works of Edgar Allan Poe (n.p., n.d.) IX, 172: "I prefer commencing with the consideration of an effect. . . . I say to myself, in the first place, 'Of the innumerable effects, or impressions, of which the heart, the intellect, or (more generally) the soul is susceptible, what one shall I, on the present occasion, select?"

sustained without tiring the reader.[2]

Plot

An important method for gaining this unity of impression is through the arrangement of incidents. The unity of action will be greater if the story begins at a definite point and ends at a definite point, if the beginning and end are right in terms of each other, and if everything that occurs in between is related logically to both beginning and end.[3]

The structure of Robert Louis Stevenson's "The Sire de Maletroit's Door" is an illustration of this principle. The unity of effect in this story is due entirely to action. The action begins as Denis de Beaulieu, to escape a party of drunken men-at-arms, presses on the door that suddenly opens, trapping him in the bizarre household of the Sire de Maletroit. This nobleman, imagining his family name to be in jeopardy because of the clandestine tryst of his niece, Blanche, with an unidentified lover, demands of Denis, under

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[2]Ibid., 175: "It appears evident, then, that there is a distinct limit, as regards length, to all works of literary art—the limit of a single sitting—"

[3]Cf. Aristotle, <u>The Poetics</u>, tr. W. Hamilton Fyfe (London, 1946), 31: "A whole is what has a beginning and middle and end. A beginning is that which is not a necessary consequent of anything else but after which something else exists or happens as a natural result. An end on the contrary is that which is inevitably or, as a rule, the natural result of something else but from which nothing else follows; a middle follows something else and something follows from it. Well constructed plots must not therefore begin and end at random, but must embody the formulae we have stated."

threat of death, that he marry the girl. The action is completed as Denis and Blanche, each having protested preference for death to a marriage forced against the other's will, but each having observed noble qualities in the other, fall in love and agree to be married. The sense of form in the action of the story gives one an extraordinary satisfaction as one sees the end grow logically out of the beginning and feels the total action to be essentially one. The movement of Ivan Bunin's "The Gentleman from San Francisco" is another illustration of this principle. From the opening lines, as "the Gentleman," with his wife and daughter, embarks, first class, on his voyage to Europe, where he reacts to European culture and the hired servility of subordinates with the same unappreciative smugness, to the closing lines, as his unmourned body is returned unceremoniously in the black hold of the ship, the story is structurally perfect. In "The Sire de Maletroit's Door," the single unified effect is gained entirely through unity of action. In "The Gentleman from San Francisco," however, as in most modern stories of quality, the plot is functionally integrated with character, setting, and theme. Aristotle, in The Poetics, compared a well constructed plot to an organism composed of parts which, as "in everything that is beautiful," are orderly arranged.[4] A story which has this organic unity of parts is more likely to have the desired single effect than one in which one

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[4]Ibid.

element predominates.

The short story usually differs from longer narratives in that it is concerned not with an entire lifetime, but with a single important experience which represents a crisis in the life of the person concerned. This principle, though specifically applicable here to the short story, is not new. Aristotle emphasizes the importance of the single piece of action in his discussion of plot in The Poetics; although he has specific reference to epic poetry and tragedy, his principles are applicable on a smaller scale to the short story.

> A plot does not have unity as some people think, simply because it deals with a single hero. Many and indeed innumerable things happen to an individual, some of which do not go to make up any unity, and similarly an individual is concerned in many actions which do not combine into a single piece of action. . . . As then in the other arts of representation a representation means a representation of a single object, so too the plot being a representation of a piece of action must represent a single piece of action and the whole of it; and the component incidents must be so arranged that if one of them be transposed or removed, the unity of the whole is dislocated and destroyed. For if the presence or absence of a thing makes no visible difference, then it is not an integral part of the whole.[5]

In the short story, the single piece of action is centered in a crisis situation. This situation may be either an external incident or an inner consciousness, but it should be of such importance that the character afterwards is changed in some particular from the person he was before.[6] In

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[5]Ibid., 33-35.

[6]Adrian H. Jaffe and Virgil Scott, Studies in the Short Story (New York, 1949), 4.

Katherine Mansfield's "The Garden Party," for example, Laura faces such a crisis situation when her secure upper-middle-class existence is interrupted by the sudden accidental death of a cottager nearby. The young girl is initiated into life as she becomes aware not only of the suffering of people in less fortunate circumstances than she, but of her own family's indifference to that suffering.

In every story where plot is of major importance, there is a complication and a dénouement. In order to make clear the significance of the crisis situation, the writer usually has to pick up and put into the story some things which have happened before the crisis situation. Since he must also get into the conflict as soon as possible, he often solves his problem by beginning as near the crisis situation as possible, foreshadowing the conflict while acquainting the reader with the necessary background.[7] These incidents outside the plot and some of those in it usually form the complication.[8] Conflict between a protagonist and an antagonist is basic to the complication. The antagonist may be a character opposed to the protagonist, or it may be the forces of environment, or some quality within the protagonist himself. The important thing in the story is not the exciting action that may take place, but the clash of these two conflicting forces. Good writers have found that the

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[7]Ibid., 7.

[8]Aristotle, The Poetics, 67.

more equally balanced the two opposing sides are, the more interest and suspense the story has for the reader.[9] Two other devices frequently used to heighten story interest are dilemma and irony. In the dilemma a character is faced with only two possible courses of action, both of which are undesirable.[10] Irony involves a contrast, a disparity between surface meaning and underlying meaning in words or actions.[11] The progression of action leads to the dénouement, the final "resolution, or untying of the plot,"[12] "the point at which the fate of the character is clear, the moment of success or failure, or perhaps, the moment when the character comprehends his own final position."[13] The dénouement, which may or may not coincide with the moment of illumination in theme and with the climax of the action in a purely physical sense, begins with the occurrence of a change. This change may be a reversal of the situation or a discovery that leads from ignorance to knowledge or a coincidence of the two. It is most effective when it comes as the probable or inevitable result of the foregoing action or situation. Thus, "the

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[9]Jaffe and Scott, 5.

[10]Ibid., 6.

[11]R.G. Lillard, "Irony in Hardy and Conrad," PMLA, L (1935), 316-317.

[12]Cleanth Brooks, Jr., and Robert Penn Warren, Understanding Fiction (New York, 1943), 603.

[13]Ibid., 583.

complication is the part from the beginning up to the point which immediately precedes the occurrence of a change . . . ; the dénouement is from the beginning of the change down to the end."[14]

In evaluating the worth of any short story, one should consider the question of honesty in plot. An honest plot is true and effective; a dishonest one is false and ineffective. Most dishonesty in plots comes as the result of plot manipulation, the wrenching of the action of a story to bring about a desired direction without regard to the consistency of this action with other elements of the story. Probably the most common reason that some writers manipulate plots is to force a happy ending where in terms of character, setting, and story direction the only logical ending is an unhappy one. Adhering to the principles of poetic justice that good, by all rights, ought to triumph over evil, such writers wring from a story an improbable happy outcome for the protagonist regardless of the relative strength of the opposing forces. While there is nothing fundamentally wrong with a happy ending, it, to be effective, must, like any other ending, grow logically out of the materials in the story. When a trick is introduced illogically into a story to bring about the desired outcome, or when there is insufficient motivation in the story for such an outcome, the ending is ineffective. In Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's "The Revolt of 'Mother,'" Sarah

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[14]Aristotle, The Poetics, 69.

Penn, while her husband is away, succeeds in getting a new home by the simple expedient of moving into the new barn her husband, Adoniram, has built on the hillside where he has been promising for forty years to build a house. Sarah emerges as a woman of character and determination; Adoniram as a crusty man of few words. It is hardly believable that such a man would so readily accept his wife's action as final, or that a family problem of such long standing would be resolved so easily.

The false use of coincidence and the arbitrary change of a character to effect a desired ending are two common methods of plot manipulation. When the solution of a story is forced by the coincidence of outside circumstances in disregard of the principle of fiction that the characters should be allowed to work out their own destinies, the solution is not genuine. When a character is changed without adequate motivation and credible reasons, the ending effected by his change is unconvincing.

It is obvious that if the reader is permitted to recognize such basic deficiencies in plot as these, he will not accept the story as genuine and true. Some writers, therefore, attempt to disguise these weaknesses by various dishonest devices, the most common ones being melodrama and the forced surprise ending.

In melodrama action is used for the sake of action; unnecessary complication takes the reader's mind off the validity of the action in terms of motivation and logical

progression.

The surprise ending, when it is logical and right in terms of the whole story, is an effective asset in some good short story plots. When it is siezed upon to distract the reader's attention from weaknesses in the essential elements in the story — characterization, directional progression, theme — the surprise ending is abused, and the device becomes an added liability to an already ineffectively constructed plot. A contrast of O. Henry's "A Blackjack Bargainer" with Guy de Maupassant's "The Necklace" will illustrate this point.

O. Henry uses an unbelievable coincidence to shift story direction and to bring about a change in character in "A Blackjack Bargainer." Just after Yancey Goree has gambled away the two hundred dollars paid him by Pike Garvey for title to his old feud with the Coltranes, Colonel Abner Coltrane, who had been a friend of the Goree family some twenty years before, appears, for no apparent reason, to reclaim the drunken degenerate Goree and to take him into his own home. Goree is so responsive to this sudden gesture of friendship on the part of his enemy that he willingly, if needlessly, gives his life to save Coltrane from the bullet of the crazed Garvey, who has assumed ownership of the feud in earnest. Not only are the sudden coincidental appearance of Coltrane at the crucial moment and the inadequately motivated change in Goree's character effected by it unbelievable, but the melodramatic message and illogical surprise ending

are also, as a result, equally unacceptable to the critical reader.

Guy de Maupassant, on the other hand, employs to good effect many of the same devices that O. Henry uses dishonestly. In "The Necklace," Mme. Loisel's loss of the borrowed necklace, which she believes worth forty thousand francs, leads to a change in her character from that of a vain, emotionally immature girl to that of an impoverished and disillusioned but mature woman. Mme. Loisel's acceptance of this unexpected situation in life is motivated by the same trait which motivated her actions at the first part of the story — her desire "to please, to be envied, to be charming, to be sought after." Having come into misfortune as a result of indulging this desire, she sets about paying for her indulgence as conscientiously as she had set about satisfying her desire. The surprise ending is right in terms of character and story direction. Although based on the coincidence of Mme. Loisel's choice of a paste necklace instead of one made of real jewels, it is logical because such a choice is consistent with Mme. Loisel's character. The surprise ending to "The Necklace" is not devised to jerk the reader's mind off flaws in plot or character, but to add credibility to both. It does not exist merely for its own sake, for the story would still be effective if the ending were not a surprise.

Character

Another basic element in the short story is character.[15] Even in stories which are predominantly action stories, the reader is often more interested in the people concerned than in what happens, for he wants one of those people to win. The writer cannot hope to invent an entirely new plot situation, but he can present individual rather than stock characters.

It is more difficult for the writer to create an individual character than to formulate a plot. In characterizing a person in his story, he is trying to convince the reader, both intellectually and emotionally, of the individual reality of that character. Whereas he presents action directly, he usually presents character indirectly. Through dramatization of his characters, he gives an impression of reality that he could not achieve through abstraction. It is not enough for him to say that a character is a particular kind of person;

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[15]Aristotle, "Tragedy," (from The Poetics), tr. not given, The University Library, ed. John Huston Finley (Garden City, New York, 1930), XIX, 52-53: "In respect of Character there are four things to be aimed at. First, and most important, it must be good. . . . The second thing to aim at is propriety. . . . Thirdly, character must be true to life . . . . The fourth point is consistency: for though the subject of the imitation, who suggested the type, be inconsistent, still he must be consistently inconsistent. . . . As in the structure of the plot, so, too, in the portraiture of character, the poet should always aim either at the necessary or the probable. Thus a person of a given character should speak or act in a given way, by the rule either of necessity or of probability; just as this event should follow that by necessary or probable sequence."

for most effective characterization, he must show the character being that kind of person. He accomplishes this end by showing the character's appearance, thoughts, action, speech, emotional reactions, and the opinions of him held by other characters in the story.[16]

The character in a story is expected to be consistent, to be the same kind of person all the time, or to be consistently inconsistent. If he faces a crisis situation in which he becomes changed in some particular, his change is the more credible if it is logical and right in terms of what he was before. Not only should his change be convincingly motivated by causes strong enough to produce such an effect, but the reasons for his being the kind of person he was in the first place should be made clear. Good fiction demands individual characters rather than stock characters. By the careful use of suggestion, description, and selected minor action, the author achieves the illusion of reality and creates rounded rather than flat characters.[17]

Character in the story is not an element which exists for itself alone. It is an integral part of the whole story, logically related to plot, setting, emotional effect, and theme.[18] In Eudora Welty's "Ida M'Toy," the shrewd, enthusiastic Negro midwife and dealer in second-hand clothes

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[16]Jaffe and Scott, 10.

[17]Ibid., 11.

[18]Ibid., 12.

comes through as an utterly believable person. But although her character is carefully developed through description, minor action, and the effect she has on others, it is not unified with a plot or a significant idea. In Anton Chekhov's "The Kiss," Riabovitch, the awkward, undistinguished, and painfully timid staff officer, emerges as an equally plausible individual. His character, however, delicately drawn in subtle, sensitive lines, is integrated with the plot, setting, emotional effect, and theme of the story. Miss Welty's classification of "Ida M'Toy" as a character sketch and not as a short story[19] is correct by conventional standards. In Chekhov's "The Kiss," the total effect of the story is more important than any single element.

Setting

Setting in literature, after the publication of Charles Darwin's Origin of the Species[20] in 1859 and again after the publication of Sigmund Freud's The Interpretation of Dreams in 1900, took on greater significance and covered broader scope. No longer could the physical background of the story be thought of only as a convenient locale in which the events

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[19] Ibid., 58.

[20] Cf. Webster, 64: The World View Implied in Darwin's Origin of the Species is similar to that of Hardy's Wessex peasants. In Hardy's work, as in Darwin's theory, "Accidental variations enable some species to succeed in their environment. If a species does not happen to develop variations which enable it to survive, it perishes."

of the plot might take place. Good writers became increasingly aware of the effects of both physical and psychological environments upon the bodies, minds, personalities, and characters of individuals. Thus setting includes everything, both material and immaterial, which affects the action and characters of the story.

Although usually of less obvious importance in the short story than in longer fiction, setting can be used effectively not only for realistic accuracy, but for accomplishing definite ends in terms of the story itself. If the setting is vivid and memorable, the credibility of character and action is increased. If presented in a style consistent with character and theme, it may serve as an index to character and as a symbol of meaning. The emotional atmosphere of the setting can be used to establish a mood in keeping with the other elements in the story.

In the short story, setting is used most effectively when there is no obvious straining for effect, when the accumulation of valid details unobtrusively suggests itself to the reader both on the conscious, realistic level and on the unconscious, thematic level.[21]

Jack London's "To Build A Fire" is an example of a story in which material setting is used effectively on both realistic and thematic levels. As he proceeds alone on his journey toward camp, "the man" encounters in the unspeakable cold of

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[21] Brooks and Warren, 573-574.

the Yukon at seventy-five degrees below zero an antagonist impossible to conquer. Through vivid descriptions of the frozen Yukon scene and the accumulation of numerous details of the increasingly disastrous effects of cold on the desperate man, London gives an impression of physical reality that is immediate and credible. Although the protagonist is presented as an unimaginative man not given to philosophical speculation, London, through the material setting, suggests man's "frailty as a creature of temperature, and . . . man's frailty in general . . ." Symbolically he may also be implying man's inability to survive alone devoid of the warmth of human relationships.

Immaterial setting in the modern short story has, however, greater significance than material setting. In "The Apple Tree" by John Galsworthy, although the romantic atmosphere of the physical surroundings on the farm furnishes the background for Frank Ashurst's meeting with Megan David, it is the immaterial setting, the artless beauty of her simple unsophisticated way of life in the natural world, that enchants him with her. Again it is the immaterial setting of social class distinctions that prevents Ashurst's marrying Megan and that sends him into a convenient if uninspiring marriage with a woman of his own caste. Thus the immaterial setting has far reaching effects: Megan, hurt as a small shy animal is hurt, drowns herself in a shallow narrow stream; Ashurst, maladjusted to life, longing for he knows not what, never loses his sense of loss, his feeling that "there's something

wanting. . . The apple tree, the singing, and the gold!"

Theme

However important the elements of plot, character, and setting may be to the success of the short story, most good modern stories imply ideas or meanings beyond these basic essentials. A good story does not necessarily contain a "moral" in the Horatio Alger, Jr. tradition; in fact, credibility is lessened if the story is contrived on the purely didactic level of the parable. But a story should "involve an idea of some real significance for mature and thoughtful human beings,"[22] in short, a theme. Furthermore, although the theme may be most pointedly revealed in one particular element of the story, it should also be felt in the other elements. For example, significance is revealed in Rudyard Kipling's "The Man Who Would Be King" primarily through action; yet it is Dravot's character that reflects the change in concept from the view of kingship as absolute power to the idea that true kingship lies in power over oneself. Although meaning may lie behind the symbolism in such stories as Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery," Franz Kafka's "In the Penal Colony," or Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Birthmark," these stories are constructed not as mere riddles, but as meaningful living organisms. Similarly, the realism in such stories as Stephen Crane's "The Open Boat," Ernest Hemingway's "The

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[22] Ibid., xv.

Killers," or William Faulkner's "That Evening Sun" is used not only as a thematic device, but to stamp the story situations with the truth of life. A theme that overshadows plot, character, setting, and total effect defeats the purpose of the story. To be most effective, the story should "involve a vital and functional relationship between the idea and the other elements in that structure."[23]

Thus it can be seen that during the brief hundred year history of the literary form, some standards of quality in the short story have been developed. Although not inflexible, those standards are definite enough to be considered in determining the relative merit of individual short stories.

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[23]Ibid.

CHAPTER III

THOMAS HARDY'S SHORT STORIES

Thomas Hardy's interest in the short story as a literary form worthy of real creative effort has been indicated. Although he wrote for popular periodicals, Hardy was conscious enough of the artistic value of his stories and the significance of their subjects to classify them in the four natural groups in which they were collected and published. Keeping the author's own classification, I shall evaluate a representative selection of his short stories, using as criteria for criticism the conventional standards of quality that have been developed during the brief history of this literary medium. In this way, I propose to determine whether Hardy's short stories are of comparable worth, though perhaps in a smaller way, to his novels and poetry.

Life's Little Ironies

In Life's Little Ironies, as the title implies, the stories turn on coincidences which arise as "trick[s] of Nature."[1] The stories in this collection are structurally sound. The plots, built on a series of related events, have

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[1] Thomas Hardy, Life's Little Ironies, v.

clear cut beginnings and ends. The characters, in general, are logically motivated and drawn in the round. The settings, both material and immaterial, add credibility to character and action, and illuminate the themes. Social and philosophical significance is functionally integrated with other story materials. In "The Son's Veto," a woman, who marries unhappily above her social station, is prevented by her snobbish son from making a second marriage with a man of her own social standing. In "A Tragedy of Two Ambitions," two ambitious curates intentionally allow their derelict father to drown to prevent his standing in the way of their social and professional advancement. In "To Please His Wife," a socially pretentious wife sends her husband and sons to sea to earn enough money to enable her to live on a par with friends who are better situated financially. Not only is each story in Life's Little Ironies an organic unit in itself, but taken together the stories comprise an artistically satisfying unit. Published in 1894, this most characteristic volume of Hardy's short stories is also his most distinguished.

In "The Fiddler of the Reels," one of the stories collected in Life's Little Ironies, Hardy integrates a clearly defined plot, rounded characters, and an emotionally meaningful setting into a structurally sound and artistically satisfying whole.

The plot has a definite beginning as Car'line Aspent, entranced by the sound of Wat "Mopp" Ollamoor's violin, moves past the olive-skinned fiddler's house in an unwilling dance,

caught in the rhythm of the sweet, yet subtly tortuous, music. So compelling is Ollamoor's fascination for Car'line that her faithful but ordinary suitor, Ned Hipcroft, can offer little competition. Car'line rejects Hipcroft, and he goes to London to work as a mechanic. Four years later, when he receives a tactfully worded letter from Car'line hinting that a new proposal from him would be welcome, Ned sends for her. Arriving in London on an open excursion train carrying sightseers to the Great Exhibition of 1851, Car'line brings with her a little girl of three, her child by "Mopp" Ollamoor. Although somewhat taken aback, Ned marries Car'line and accepts her child. A year later, when they return to Stickleford, Car'line waits with little Carry at the Quiet Woman Inn, while Ned goes to get a cart to fetch their belongings. Compelled by the painful, sensuous music of "Mopp" Ollamoor's fiddle, the young wife allows herself to be drawn into a dance at the Inn. After all of the other dancers have dropped out of the figure and her own energy has given out, Car'line collapses on the floor. Wat Ollamoor disappears with the child. When Ned Hipcroft returns to the scene, he searches frantically but vainly for the little girl, whom he has come to love as if she were his own child. Although rumors are heard that a similar fiddler and child have been seen in London and in America, the unhappy ending of the story is inevitable. No trace of the pair is actually found.

The characters in "The Fiddler of the Reels" have striking parallels in some of Hardy's better known works.

Wat Ollamoor, one of Hardy's "Mephistophelian visitants,"[2] is introduced "into a tranquil current of events to project a disturbing force into the story."[3] Although he speaks not a word, the fiddler's character is revealed through the effect he has on others: the envy he arouses in the less interesting young men of the village, the intense sexual attraction he has for the girls. Like the musician of Hardy's poem, "The Fiddler," "Mopp" Ollamoor believes that

. . . . 'Music hails from the devil,
Though vaunted to come from heaven,
For it makes people do at a revel
What multiplies sin by seven.'[4]

Yet Ollamoor's true character is shrouded in the same Satanic mystery that surrounds the characters of Sergeant Troy in Far from the Madding Crowd and Dr. Fitzpiers and Felice Charmand in The Woodlanders. Differing from Hardy's other "human 'apples of discord'"[5] in some ways, "Mopp" Ollamoor has in common with them "the subversive Mephistophelian endowment, brains,"[6] a mocking attitude, religious scepticism, and

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[2]Thomas Hardy, The Return of the Native (New York, n.d.), 36.

[3]J. O. Bailey, "Hardy's 'Mephistophelian Visitants,'" PMLA, LXI (1946), 1146.

[4]Thomas Hardy, "The Fiddler," Collected Poems of Thomas Hardy, 232.

[5]Bailey, 1146.

[6]Ibid., 1176.

striking personal appearance. As he does with his other villains, however, Hardy attributes such qualities to Ollamoor primarily to color his villainy; there is nothing necessarily preternatural about him.[7]

Although Ned Hipcroft lacks the dimensions of such men as Gabriel Oak in Far from the Madding Crowd or Giles Winterbourne in The Woodlanders, the mechanic has more than a little in common with his sturdy counterparts. A plain, uncomplicated man, he is too kind to reject Car'line, even after she deceives him by not telling him about the child. Too simple for complex city life, he returns to his "rote-restricted ways" only to have his life shattered by the abduction of the child he has grown to love.

Less complicated and less intelligent than Bathsheba Everdene in Far from the Madding Crowd or Grace Melbury in The Woodlanders, Car'line Aspent more nearly resembles Fanny Robin in Far from the Madding Crowd. She has one quality in common with all three of them and with most of Hardy's female characters: she has no common sense where men are concerned. Though abetted by the ironic chance which places "Mopp" Ollamoor at the Quiet Woman Inn at the exact time of her arrival there, Car'line brings about her own fate and that of her innocent husband and child by the capricious whims of her sexuality. Ironically, it is not she, but Ned Hipcroft, who is most concerned about her child's abduction.

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[7] Ibid., 1177-1178.

In the immaterial setting, "the simple old country life" is contrasted with "the complex, disturbing, and urban new." The Great Exhibition of 1851 "stands behind the story as a symbol of the collision between the two ways of life."[8]

Told in the easy colloquial style and charming Wessex dialect of Hardy's greatest works, "The Fiddler of the Reels" presents a unified effect comparable, though on a much smaller scale, to that of Far from the Madding Crowd and The Woodlanders. It is with justification that critics have called the tale "one of the finest short stories in the language."[9]

Hardy had an intuitive understanding of the psychology of character. It is to his credit as an artist that his penetrating studies of character not only meet the Aristotelian specifications of being good, appropriate, true to life, and consistent, but also antedate the findings of modern psychology. Without even considering the great characters of Hardy's novels, one may find numerous instances in his short stories of his intuitively right representation of character.

Two stories in Life's Little Ironies, "An Imaginative Woman" and "On the Western Circuit," elaborate instances of sexual frustration. In the first story, a poignant study of a woman's loneliness, Ella Marchmill and her inattentive husband, William, a small-arms manufacturer, spend a holiday at a fashionable watering place called Solentsea. They occupy

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[8]Albert J. Guerard, Thomas Hardy, The Novels and Stories (Cambridge, 1949), 21.

[9]Ibid.

a cottage regularly tenanted by Robert Trewe, a poet, who goes elsewhere when the resort is "in season." While Marchmill spends most of his time boating, his wife, a very minor poet herself, spends hers in idly picking up bits of personal information about Trewe from the landlady. As her interest in the former tenant increases, she reads his poems, deciphers verse fragments scribbled on the bedroom wall, studies his photograph, and even tries on his old clothes. Having left Ella alone for most of the holiday, Marchmill decides to take his wife yachting. Mrs. Marchmill, in fantasy having fallen in love with the unseen poet, changes her mind about the outing when the landlady tells her that Trewe plans to return to Solentsea that day to pick up some books. Disappointed when Trewe fails to appear, Ella, on the chance of meeting the poet, persuades her husband to let her and the children remain a week longer. Again disappointed, she returns home to write Trewe a letter over the masculine pseudonym, John Ivy, with which she has signed her few published poems. Still hoping to meet him, she invites the poet through a mutual friend to visit in her home; but again she is disappointed, for he does not come. Shortly thereafter Ella reads an account of Robert Trewe's suicide. Despondent over an unfavorable review of his new book, _Lyrics to a Woman Unknown_, Trewe had killed himself, a letter to a friend revealed, thinking it not worthwhile to continue facing existence without the blessing of "a mother, or a sister, or a female friend of another sort tenderly devoted" to him. Ella

Marchmill, stunned by grief and by the knowledge that the poet had died without knowing of her love for him, obtains from the landlady a lock of Trewe's hair and his photograph and visits his grave. Her husband goes to Solentsea and brings her back, not, he says, in jealousy. A few months later, Ella Marchmill dies in childbirth. When Will Marchmill, on his second marriage two years later, runs across Trewe's photograph and the lock of his hair, he is struck by the unmistakable physical resemblance between the dead poet and the last child born to Ella. Ironically, this discovery and the mistaken conclusion he draws from it lead Marchmill to reject the little boy.

The structure of the plot is artistically satisfying. Not only does the action begin and end at definite points, but the ending, though it comes as a surprise, is felt, on review of the events leading up to it, to grow logically out of the story materials.

Hardy's statement of the ironic resemblance calls for careful analysis.

> By a known but inexplicable trick of Nature there were undoubtedly strong traces of resemblance to the man Ella had never seen; the dreamy and peculiar expression of the poet's face sat, as the transmitted idea, upon the child's, and the hair was of the same hue.
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> 'I'm damned if I didn't think so!' murmured Marchmill. 'Then she *did* play me 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 are nothing to me!'

Whether Hardy believed the "old wives' tales," commonly accepted in his day, that pre-natal influences could reveal

themselves physically in the child, is immaterial. His statement may be taken as an extension of his philosophy that "Crass Casualty,"[10] underlying just such coincidences as this, carelessly controls human lives. Yet Hardy's fatalism is like that of the Greek tragedians, whose heroes' lives, although influenced by outer fate, underwent changes of fortune as the outgrowth of errors or frailties within the heroes themselves.[11] In "An Imaginative Woman," though the story is in no sense a tragedy in the Greek tradition, Hardy relates what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity in accordance with Aristotelian principles as he did in his more important works. Although his phrase, "inexplicable trick of Nature," is too pointed a reference to coincidence to be ignored, it may also be noted that Hardy is careful to reveal the inner frailties of the characters which make possible the devastating effect of such coincidence. He does not merely describe his characters; he shows them being the kind of people they are in the small particulars of their action and speech.

Robert Trewe, the shy, elusive poet of the story, however, is a presence felt, but unseen, unheard. The only actual words of his in the story, those of the suicide note,

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[10]Thomas Hardy, "Hap," Collected Poems of Thomas Hardy, 7.

[11]Cf. Aristotle, "Tragedy," 49: "The change of fortune . . . . should come about as the result not of vice, but of some great error or frailty, in a character . . . . The practice of the stage bears out our view."

are not to be taken at face value. His desire for a "tenderly devoted" "female friend" is matched by an equally great fear of finding that "long dreamt of" but "unattainable creature." It may be precisely because he believes her to be "unattainable" for him that he shrinks from the very possibility of meeting such a person in avoiding Solentsea "in season" and in refusing the invitation of Mrs. Marchmill. Furthermore, nobody destroys himself for reasons that are "sound and logical."

William and Ella Marchmill, in outward appearance a well-matched couple, differ sharply in personality, "he being equable, if not lymphatic, and she decidedly nervous and sanguine," and differ even more sharply in taste, he considering his wife's inclinations "somewhat silly," and she considering his "sordid and material."

Ella Marchmill, having gotten herself "life-leased" in marriage, a social conformity which Hardy sardonically criticizes as "a cardinal virtue which all good mothers teach," becomes aware, shortly after the honeymoon, of the vast differences between herself and her husband. Her compensation for this hurt lies in assuming a condescending attitude of pity for his "obtuseness and want of refinement" and in retreating into feelings of self-pity in which "imaginative occupations, day-dreams, and night-sighs" are substituted for the happiness she is missing in real life. Her parents, Hardy implies, are the kind of people who place the "cardinal virtue" of "getting life-leased at all costs" above their

daughter's personal happiness; her husband, he says, concerns himself chiefly with destructive occupations. Thus, her need for love having gone unfulfilled, Ella drifts easily into romantic fantasies about the unseen poet, who becomes for her a symbol of all the beauty and tenderness and love that she has missed. Yet despite her conscious desire to meet Robert Trewe personally, her love for him remains essentially fetishistic. She reads his poems; she gazes at his photograph; she tries on his old clothes. But she never meets _him_. While it may not be her fault that she does not come into personal contact with Trewe at Solentsea, her subsequent attempts to attract the poet are carried out with such singular inefficiency that one wonders whether she would have been able to accept his love had it been offered to her. When she writes to him as a fellow poet, signing the letter with a masculine pseudonym, she gets exactly the kind of polite, impersonal response usually elicited in such correspondence. When she invites him to her house through a friend of a friend of his, the invitation has the appearance of including him only for the sake of courtesy. After the poet commits suicide, Ella's substitution of fetishes for the real object of her affections continues. She obtains Trewe's picture and a lock of his hair; she seeks out his grave. When she dies in childbirth, evidently not really wanting to live, it is not for love of the poet that she dies, but for the lack of a satisfying love relationship with anyone.

William Marchmill, the materialistic gunmaker, is not

the kind of man with whom such a woman could find love. His very occupation is symbolic of the destructive urges underlying his surface character. Evidence of his lack of balancing creative urges is found in his lack of interest in his wife. Yet so afraid is he of having the underlying destructiveness of his nature exposed to others, or even to himself, that he feels he must deny it openly. He is "usually kind and tolerant" to his wife, but it is a guilty conscience, rather than love, which prompts him to invite her on a yachting cruise after he has left her alone for most of the holiday and which later motivates him verbally to deny his jealousy of the dead poet. Marchmill rationalizes his guilt for his inability to love his wife into the socially justifiable resentment of the cuckolded husband. When the coincidence of the boy's physical resemblance to the poet conveniently presents itself, Marchmill uses it as an excuse for projecting this resentment in the form of hostility against the child. The story might have been called "An Imaginative Man," for the "transmitted idea" which sits upon the child's face apparently originates in Marchmill's mind. Thus, in terms of character, the story could hardly have a more appropriate ending.

The setting, in both its material and its immaterial aspects, adds to the credibility of character and action. The small house on the lonely beach at Solentsea furnishes an appropriate background for the correspondingly lonely existence of Ella Marchmill. Society's emphasis on the

necessity of marriage, which lies behind the unhappy situation in which the characters find themselves, illuminates the familiar theme often voiced by Hardy:

'I consider a social system based on individual spontaneity to promise better for happiness than a curbed and uniform one under which all temperaments are bound to shape themselves to a single pattern of living.'[12]

In "An Imaginative Woman," Hardy demonstrates his technique as a conscious artist by unifying a logically constructed plot, fully rounded characters, a symbolic setting, and a significant idea in a successful short story.

The action in "On the Western Circuit" begins as Charles Bradford Raye, a young London barrister, is attracted by Anna's natural prettiness and charm as she rides the steam roundabout at Melchester fair. Making the acquaintance of the simple country lass, he pays for her tickets to ride again and again. Edith Harnham, Anna's employer, the wife of a dull but prosperous wine merchant, comes to look for her; but on finding the girl with an obviously well-educated young man, she leaves her in his charge. Charles unknowingly and disturbingly presses Edith's hand in the crowd. Later he seduces Anna, then leaves town, giving the girl an address in London and the name, Charles Bradford. When Anna fails to write, Charles impulsively writes to her. The illiterate maid gets Mrs. Harnham to read the letter to her and to answer it for her. Edith's charming but simple reply in Anna's

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[12]Thomas Hardy, L'Ermitage, 1893, quoted in Guerard, 29.

name intrigues Charles. As the correspondence is continued, less of Anna's nature and more of Edith's appears in the letters. When Anna finds that she is pregnant, she has Edith inform Charles of her condition. He replies that he cannot leave London just then. Anna is irritated, but Edith answers Charles's letter for her in understanding tones, making no reproaches and demanding nothing. Charles decides to marry the girl. While Anna is in the country for her confinement, Edith continues the correspondence, putting her own feelings into the letters which supposedly come from Anna. When she takes Anna to London to marry Charles, the young man feels strangely drawn to Edith. After marrying Anna, he asks his wife to write one of her charming letters to his sister to thank her for a wedding gift. Anna produces only a childish scrawl, and Charles guesses the truth. Bending to kiss Edith goodbye, he tells her to give him her lips if she meant for herself the feelings expressed in the letters, her cheek if she did not mean them. She gives him her lips. On her return to Melchester, Edith misses her husband at the station and goes home alone. Charles, though he feels himself chained for life, is gentle with Anna. The action which had its beginning in the idle attraction of an impulsive and fanciful youth for a pretty girl comes to an inevitable end as Charles Bradford Raye sits beside his unwanted bride on the train, re-reading the charming letters with dreary resignation.

Although the plot is flawlessly constructed, the meticulously detailed studies of character are equally good. Charles

Bradford Raye, like many of Hardy's male characters, deceives himself. Full of "vague latter-day glooms and popular melancholies," Raye has "nothing square or practical about his look, much that /is/ curvilinear and sensuous." Essentially unrealistic, he has high professional aspirations, which, as an unretained junior barrister, he can attain only vicariously by edging himself "into this or that crowded court where a sensational case /is/ going on, just as if he were in it." Idealizing as love an attraction that is primarily physical, he reads into Anna qualities he wants her to have. When his romantic imagination is abetted by the letters supposedly written by Anna, Charles is seemingly supported in his dream. Yet the content of the letters is not the real reason for his illusion; the fact alone of the first letter's arrival is "sufficient to satisfy his imaginative sentiment." "Though sensuous, and superficially at least, infested with the self-indulgent vices of artificial society, there /is/ a substratum of honesty and fairness in Raye's character." Yet even such basically good qualities as these become destructive when misdirected. Like Jude Fawley and Sue Bridehead in Jude the Obscure, Charles Bradford Raye is an "overfastidious prude"[13] who condemns himself to unhappiness for the sake of appearance and so-called honor.[14] Thus it is not alone the ironic coincidence of Anna's choice of Edith Harnham as her amanuensis

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[13]Guerard, 22.

[14]Ibid., 28.

which brings about Raye's ultimate ruin, but his own willingness, or even propensity, to deceive himself and to be deceived by others.

Although she is not without the characteristic desire of Hardy's women to fascinate and dominate seemingly more powerful males, Anna remains a sympathetic character in that she is largely a victim of circumstances beyond her comprehension or control. Having been brought up by an ignorant aunt, she had had "nobody to care about her learning the rudiments; though . . . she had been well fed and clothed and not unkindly treated." She becomes fluent in parroting Mrs. Harnham's phraseology, but she is not so quick to learn the spelling and writing her mistress tries to teach her. As ignorant about life as she is about things in books, Anna is "Unreserved — too unreserved — by nature" and "not experienced enough to be reserved by art." When Charles Bradford Raye first spots her on the steam roundabout, "her features . . . rapt in an ecstatic dreaminess," she is "absolutely unconscious of everything save the act of riding." With the same unconsciousness of propriety or possible consequences, Anna enters into the affair which ultimately ends in Charles's and Edith's unhappiness and her own.

The character of Edith Harnham, the unhappy wife of a rich elderly wine merchant, closely parallels that of Ella Marchmill in "An Imaginative Woman." In the first scene between Edith and her husband, the relationship between the two is acted out symbolically. Edith is sitting in a darkened

room, watching from her window the life of the fair without. When Harnham enters, this conversation ensues:

> 'O, Edith, I didn't see you,' he said. 'Why are you sitting here in the dark?'
> 'I am looking at the fair,' replied the lady in a languid voice.
> 'Oh? Horrid nuisance every year! I wish it could be put a stop to.'

The real reason for Edith's sitting, unenlightened, in the dark, a voyeuristic spectator but never an active participant in life, is hinted in Hardy's comment on her reason for marrying Harnham.

> Influenced by the belief of the British parent that a bad marriage with its aversions is better than free womanhood with its interests, dignity, and leisure, she had consented to marry the elderly wine-merchant as a pis aller, at the age of seven-and-twenty—some three years before this date—to find afterwards that she had made a mistake. That contract had left her still a woman whose deeper nature had never been stirred.

It is significant that the life Edith watches so longingly is regarded by her husband as a "'nuisance'" that ought to be "'put a stop to.'" But it is the attitude of society in general, and of Edith's parents in particular, that accounts for her inability to make a satisfactory choice of a marriage partner and a satisfying marital adjustment. It is small wonder that when Charles Bradford Raye in the crowd unwittingly clasps her hand instead of Anna's, playfully slipping "two of his fingers inside her glove, against her palm" in an age-old seductive gesture, Edith feels her deeper sexual nature "stirred" by the "magic . . . wooing touch." It is not merely out of kindness to Anna, as Edith says, that she begins the deceptive correspondence. Charles had already induced a

"reasonless sigh" in her breast, and the fact that "he had been able to seduce another woman in two days [is] his crowning though unrecognized fascination for her as a she-animal." Society and "the British parent" have effectively shackled her natural impulses, however, for "the high-strung Edith Harnham" can have only "vicarious intimacy" in the "ecstasy of fancy." Like Ella Marchmill, living only in fantasy, Edith pours her own feelings into letters ostensibly written for Anna and wishes that she were the one who carried Raye's child. When Charles finally decides to marry Anna, Edith's guilt feelings for having "wrought him to this pitch—to a marriage that [means] his ruin" are overshadowed by a morbid "last desperate feeling that she must at every hazard be in at the death of her dream." Only after Charles and Anna are married does Edith feel safe enough to express the true nature of her feelings in the "desperate pressure" of a parting kiss. Edith Harnham's continued unsatisfying relationship with her husband is symbolically foretold when "in his perfunctoriness and her preoccupation" they do not "see each other" at Melchester station, and she walks "mechanically homewards" alone.

In "On the Western Circuit," setting serves not only as an index to character, but as a key to Hardy's philosophy. The latter becomes apparent through the material setting at the beginning of the story as Charles Bradford Raye surveys the spectacle of Melchester fair, that earthly life in which are merged the color and flame of "the eighth chasm of the

Inferno" and the mirth of "the Homeric heaven." "Throbbing humanity" moves so rhythmically through senseless gyrations that it seems to be manipulated by the machinery of "swings, see-saws, flying-leaps, above all of the three steam round-abouts" which occupy the center position. Hardy's comment that "It was from the latter that the din of steam-organs came" suggests a pointed reference to the Christian church and to the Trinity of the Christian religion, while the machinery in general may represent the same Unknowing Mover referred to in the poem, "Nature's Questioning," in the lines:

'Or come we of an Automaton
Unconscious of our pains? . . .'[15]

and in the "Fragment" in the lines:

'O we are waiting for one called God,' said they,
'(Though by some the Will, or Force, or Laws;
And, vaguely, by some, the Ultimate Cause;)
Waiting for him to see us before we are clay.
Yes; waiting, waiting, for God to know it.'. . .[16]

Almost as if to make certain that his meaning is clear, Hardy removes all doubt about it when he speaks of Raye's

Dreading the moment when the inexorable stoker, grimily lurking behind the glittering rococo-work, should decide that

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[15]Thomas Hardy, "Nature's Questioning," 58.

[16]Thomas Hardy, "Fragment," Collected Poems of Thomas Hardy, 482. For further evidence of Hardy's view of God as Unknowing Mover, see in the same volume the following poems: "Doom and She," 108; "God-Forgotten," 112; "God's Education," 261; "The Master and the Leaves," 620; "The Absolute Explains," 721; and "An Inquiry," 724.

this set of riders had had their pennyworth, and bring the whole concern of steam-engine, horses, mirrors, trumpets, drums, cymbals, and such-like to pause and silence . . .

Yet despite the "inexorable" nature of the "stoker," Hardy, through the immaterial setting, attributes the sad state of affairs in the lives of his characters to their own inner frailties, which stem from those of society in "a century wherein sordid ambition is the master passion that seems to be taking the time-honored place of love."

"On the Western Circuit" is another illustration of Thomas Hardy's ability as a short story writer. No single element in the story predominates. The organic unity of the story is the result of a consciously planned, functional relationship among the various elements of plot, character, setting, and theme. Yet Hardy's conscious art does not obtrude on the naturalness of the story. The sequence of events is intuitively right in terms of character and motivating forces in the setting, and the significant meaning is embodied in the unity of the three.

In "For Conscience' Sake," another of the stories collected in Life's Little Ironies, Hardy makes his most outspoken criticism of overfastidious prudes. The action begins as Millborne, a fiftyish bachelor living in furnished rooms, confesses to his friend, Dr. Bindon, that he is sorely troubled in conscience for having betrayed a girl in his youth. He had, on the strength of a promise to marry her, seduced Leonora, then left her to bear a child alone, giving her only pecuniary assistance. Dr. Bindon suggests that it

is too late to make amends now. But Millborne traces Leonora to Exonbury, where, calling herself Mrs. Frankland, she is living respectably as a widow, teaching music and dancing. Millborne admits that he does not love her, but he tells her that he wishes to marry her to relieve his guilty conscience. Leonora, since she is successful and satisfied and since she feels no more love for Millborne than he feels for her, sees no reason for accepting his tardy proposal. Millborne persists, however, and at length she accepts him, partly because he is so persistent, partly because by raising her social standing by marrying him she can increase the chances of her daughter Frances's marrying the young clergyman she loves. London life with Millborne does not prove so exciting as Leonora expects. To make matters worse, the Rev. Mr. Cope observes, on an outing to the Isle of Wight, a striking family resemblance between the seasick faces of Frances and her supposed step-father. Suspecting the truth, he grows cool toward Frances. When Frances herself becomes suspicious, Leonora tells her the whole story. The two women berate Millborne for ruining their lives by interfering only to salve his troubled conscience. Millborne settles his wife and daughter in a manor house near Cope's home in Ivel, then leaves for the Continent. In a letter to Leonora written from Boulogne, he says that he has learned that some past mistakes cannot be corrected later. He takes up residence in Brussels, where news reaches him of Frances's marriage to Cope. Although Millborne has learned by his experience, he has also lost by

it. The action which began with a guilty confession ends with Millborne's disappearing from his former society to live anonymously, a frequent imbiber of strong liquors.

In the character of Millborne, Hardy paints a striking, if unrounded, portrait of an overfastidious prude. A self-centered man, Millborne prefers living in bachelor lodgings to accepting the responsibilities of a home and family of his own. His "manner and moods [do] not excite curiosity or deep friendship." A man whose loneliness is of his own making, he has little capacity for love. His wish to marry the woman he betrayed twenty years previously does not arise, he admits, out of any love for her or desire for married life. It arises rather out of a need to mitigate his sense of guilt for not having conformed to the conventional standards of society. His lack of ability to love is re-emphasized when, on meeting his daughter, he does "not feel drawn towards her as he had expected to be." After his marriage, "his sense of a realized idea, of a re-established self-satisfaction," outweighs the fact that he has no love for his family. When Cope's discovery of the truth drops the "apple of discord" into the household, Millborne begins to understand that his selfish motives, which he had wanted to believe good, could have led only to evil ends. Although he makes amends to others as well as he can, he continues to take out his guilt feelings on himself in the self-destructiveness of personal anonymity and alcoholism.

Millborne's character has many familiar counterparts in

in Hardy's work. Like Michael Henchard, the tragic hero of The Mayor of Casterbridge, Millborne sacrifices everything for appearance. Like Sue Bridehead, the sensitive heroine of Jude the Obscure, and Charles Bradford Raye in "On the Western Circuit," he condemns himself to unhappiness for the sake of so-called honor. Like Angel Clare, the overfastidious prude of Tess of the D'Urbervilles, he does not know the difference between the genuine morality of love and the merely external morality of social convention. Unlike Henchard, Sue, Raye, and Clare, however, Millborne does not emerge as a wholly believable character. He, Leonora, Frances, and Cope remain two-dimensional paper figures, acting out their roles in Hardy's parable.

The theme, which in "For Conscience' Sake" dominates all other elements of the story, is stated in the words of Millborne's final letter to Leonora.

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

In understanding Hardy's point, it is "important to recall that the overfastidious prudes transgress on Wessex simplicity as harmfully as the deliberate or casual seducers."[17] As Thomas Guerard says in his book, Thomas Hardy, The Novels and Stories, "If fidelity is the most precious and elusive

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[17] Guerard, 22.

of the Wessex virtues, fidelity for the sake of conventional appearance and fidelity to an unworthy partner are condemned as absolutely wrong. Neither the sexual act nor even the imminence of a child is in itself sufficient grounds for marriage."[18] Nowhere else does Hardy propound this basic principle of his social philosophy more forcefully than in "For Conscience' Sake." Yet the very force of his argument weakens one's belief in his characters as men and women of flesh and spirit, thus rendering questionable their plotted actions, too. In _The Mayor of Casterbridge_, _Jude the Obscure_, _Tess of the D'Urbervilles_, and "On the Western Circuit," the same principle is an apparent and functional, but not obtrusive, part of the artistic whole. In "For Conscience' Sake," Hardy successfully demonstrates a didactic idea; he does not present an effectively integrated story.

Under cover with _Life's Little Ironies_ appears _A Few Crusted Characters_, "some colloquial sketches" supposedly told to Mr. Lackland, newly returned from America, by his fellow passengers in a carrier's van from Casterbridge to Longpuddle. Although "smaller in scope and slighter in intention [than _A Group of Noble Dames_], it is a little masterpiece." Lascelles Abercrombie said of the collection:

> Nothing could be more perfectly English; and what that epithet essentially means is a thing not easy to come by nowadays in life or in art. It is not a profound piece of literature. . . . But it is all a thing of admirable, unforced, kindly art. The persons, like the jokes, have the air of

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[18] Ibid., 28.

belonging to the common stock of humanity; . . . yet here both persons and jokes are all entirely unique . . . . The stories also have the advantage of being wholly written in that splendid language, charged with strength and fire, which Hardy has contrived out of the west-country dialect.[19]

Although charming as "colloquial sketches," the pieces collected in A Few Crusted Characters, for the most part, do not meet the conventional standards of the short story form.

Wessex Tales

In Wessex Tales, though "the stories are but dreams,"[20] Hardy draws from west country tradition some of his most engaging and ingenious plots. In "A Tradition of Eighteen Hundred and Four," a shepherd boy and his soldier uncle watch breathlessly as Napoleon Bonaparte and one of his generals survey the terrain of a Channel beach while plotting the invasion of England. In "Fellow-Townsmen," two friends, one a poor but happily married solicitor, the other a rich but unhappily married merchant, lose their wives, the former by drowning, the latter by incompatibility. When both fall in love with the same girl and the solicitor marries her, the merchant sells his holdings and leaves town, returning twenty-one years later to propose to the solicitor's widow and departing again after her first refusal, while she, ironically, reconsiders later and spends the rest of her life waiting for him to come back. In "Interlopers at the Knap,"

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[19]Abercrombie, 87-88.

[20]Thomas Hardy, "Preface," Wessex Tales (London, 1952), viii.

a prosperous farmer journeys to his fiance's house only to find on his arrival that her sister-in-law, his former sweetheart whom he still loves, is newly widowed. He marries the latter, who dies in childbirth; then he proposes again to his former fiance, who, wishing to remain single now, rejects him. In "The Distracted Preacher," a Methodist minister falls in love with his landlady, who turns out to be a smuggler of contraband ale, which she stores in the loft of the Anglican church. The minister leaves for another parish, but returns two years later and marries the lady after the Crown has virtually stamped out smuggling by placing blood-money on the heads of all engaged in the trade. Seldom outstanding in character, these stories, without exception, have well-constructed plots and effective settings in the Wessex tradition. Collected and published under their present title in 1888, they remain some of Hardy's most charming contributions to fiction.

Two of the stories in Wessex Tales, "The Three Strangers" and "The Withered Arm," deal with hangmen, and another story in the collection, "The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion," concerns a military execution. Hardy's apology in the preface for "the neglect of contrast" shown in presenting three such stories in the same volume is unnecessary, for excepting the similarity mentioned, the stories are quite different.

In "The Three Strangers," the action begins as a dark, fustian-clothed stranger, caught in a heavy rain, knocks

cautiously at the door of Shepherd Fennel's cottage, where a party is being given in honor of the birth and christening of the shepherd's daughter. Seating the stranger by the fire, the shepherd gives him mead and, on his request, tobacco and a pipe. When a second stranger, a slightly heavier set, graying man in a cinder-gray suit, knocks on the cottage door, he too is welcomed, but with less enthusiasm. Seating himself by the fire, he accepts the mug of mead proffered by the first stranger and drinks all of it to the dismay of the shepherd's frugal wife. The company begins to speculate on the strangers' trades. The first stranger says that he is a wheelwright, but the second stranger says nothing. When someone suggests a song, however, he sings a ballad that gives clues to the nature of his occupation. The first stranger joins in the chorus in a deep rich bass. The shepherds recognize from the lines,

'A little hempen string, and a post whereon to swing,
Are implements enough for me!'

that he is the hangman who has come to hang Timothy Summers, a condemned man awaiting execution for stealing a sheep. At this point, another knock on the door announces the arrival of a third stranger seeking shelter from the rain. On viewing the scene and hearing the hangman's macabre song, however, the newcomer, a small fair man, trembles and flees in terror. When the sound of distant periodic firing signals that a prisoner has escaped from jail, the assembled company concludes that the third stranger is the condemned man. At the

instigation of the hangman, the group gives chase with staves, pitchforks, and lanterns. The first stranger returns to the cottage to gulp some mead and a piece of skimmer-cake. The hangman also re-enters. Both have decided to let those who are more familiar with the wild country do the chasing. The hangman proceeds to Casterbridge, and the man in the fustian clothes goes in the other direction. The third stranger is caught by the mob. The constable, who has just arrived on the scene, tells the group that the man is not the escaped prisoner. On the constable's description, the company deduces that the first stranger is the culprit. Assisted in his escape by the sympathetic country people, the condemned man is never re-captured. The action is ended, but the legend of the three strangers who sought shelter in Shepherd Fennel's cottage during the celebration of his daughter's birth and christening is still repeated locally after the child has reached old age.

There is very little characterization in "The Three Strangers." The three wayfarers are described only in terms of their outward appearances, not in terms of their inner characters. The shepherds, though comparable to the Wessex rustics of _Far from the Madding Crowd_ and _The Return of the Native_, are not so finely drawn as they. Yet, despite the absence of rounded characterization in the story, a successful play, _The Three Wayfarers_, was adapted from it and presented at Terry's Theatre, London, in June, 1893. Hardy apparently liked the production, for on June 16, 1893, he

wrote to Charles Charrington, the actor who took the leading role, "'Your performance of the hangman was extraordinarily powerful . . . '"[21]

Although "The Three Strangers" may have some significance for the reader who likes to search for obscure meanings, it has no clearly identifiable theme. When the hangman says, "'Yes, het or wet, blow or snow, famine or sword, my day's work to-morrow must be done,'" he may be voicing Hardy's ideas on the inevitability of death. The presence of the hangman, a symbol of death, at the celebration of a christening, a symbol of birth, may be another statement of Hardy's philosophy that

> . . . Earth's old glooms and pains
> Are still the same, and Life and Death are neighbours nigh.[22]

In a more general sense, the story may imply a social criticism of the death sentence for petty stealing and of the relationship of common people to the law. It would be stretching a point, however, to say that any of these ideas are integrated in the story functionally as a theme.

"The Three Strangers," nevertheless, remains Hardy's best known short story and one of his most artistically successful ones. Its art lies chiefly in plot. In this story, perhaps more than in any other, Hardy proves himself

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[21] Thomas Hardy, The Letters of Thomas Hardy [Carl J. Weber, ed.] (Waterville, Maine, 1954), 58.

[22] Thomas Hardy, "Nature's Questioning," 59.

a master story-teller. The action which begins with the arrival of the first stranger, rises with the disclosure of the second stranger's identity, reaches a climax as the third stranger flees in terror, and ends with the discovery of the identities of the first and third strangers. Suspense is heightened by the atmospheric use of arresting images and vivid details in description, dialogue, and the traditional Wessex setting. In the sequence of events, each action grows logically out of preceding action, and the total action forms an artistically satisfying whole.

In "The Withered Arm," the action begins as the milkmaids at Farmer Lodge's dairy anticipate the return of Lodge and his new bride and the effect that the marriage will have on Rhoda Brook, a milkmaid who has borne Lodge an illegitimate son. Mrs. Lodge, encountering the curious stares of the farm and dairy workers, particularly notices that of Rhoda's twelve year old son. Having been sent by his mother to bring back a description of Gertrude Lodge, the boy dutifully reports that the lady is young, attractive, and gentle looking. Rhoda sends the boy to church to see Mrs. Lodge again. He returns to report that she is very lovely, but not so tall as his mother. In church she had worn a silver gown that had rustled so much when she walked that she had become embarrassed. In a disturbing dream, Rhoda envisions her supplanter as an older woman who comes to her bedside, sits upon her chest, and points mockingly at Rhoda with her left hand, on which she wears a wedding ring. Seizing her

by the arm, Rhoda whirls her to the floor. Awakening from the nightmare at 2:00 a.m., Rhoda remains sleepless for the rest of the night and tensely nervous all the next day. A fortnight later, Gertrude calls on her to bring some new boots she has promised to the boy and to meet Rhoda. At first resentful of the visit, Rhoda is won over by Gertrude's kindliness and gentility. During their conversation, Rhoda learns that Gertrude has on her left arm a discoloration in the shape of finger marks. The spots had come with a sudden pain that had shot through her arm on the same night and at the same hour as Rhoda's dream. Rhoda, filled with guilt and horror, fears that she has unconsciously exercised malignant power over Gertrude. The two women become friends. Gertrude's arm gradually withers, and the discoloration deepens into a blight. Although Rhoda is sorry for her friend's pain, she is not sorry for the impairment of her beauty. Gertrude, hearing of Conjuror Trendle's power to dispel warts and other such skin excresences, although she at first dismisses it as superstition, decides to visit him. She and Rhoda walk five miles across Egdon Heath to see the conjuror. Trendle deprecates his powers, but tells Gertrude that her blight is the work of an enemy. In a glass of beaten egg white, he shows her what he calls an incubus of that person. Rhoda, guessing that hers was the image that Gertrude saw, feels triumphant, but shortly thereafter leaves the neighborhood. During the following six years, the Lodges' marriage lapses into prosiness. Gertrude, her withered arm

now useless, has become a superstitious hypochondriac, willing to try any new quack remedy suggested to her. Lodge orders all of her medicants thrown out. In desperation, Gertrude agains visits Conjuror Trendle. The conjuror tells her, "'You must touch with the limb the neck of a man who's been hanged.' . . . 'Before he's cold—just after he's cut down.' . . . 'It will turn the blood and change the constitution.'" Determined to follow Trendle's prescription, Gertrude prays unconsciously for some guilty or innocent person to be hanged soon. Hearing of a man's sentence to death for arson, she makes plans to attend the hanging. Since her husband is away on business, it is easy for her to make excuses to the servants for being away on an overnight visit. Cunningly she rides in the opposite direction from her destination, but once out of sight she changes her course and proceeds to Casterbridge. After stopping at the White Hart Inn, Gertrude seeks out the hangman. An ostler, who gives her directions, offers to save her a bit of the rope he is making for the hanging. The hangman agrees, for a fee, to help her. On the day of the hanging, Gertrude waits veiled inside the jail. When the hangman beckons, she rushes forward and touches the executed man's neck with her withered arm, shrieking as she does so. A moment later a second shriek rends the air. Rhoda Brook has come in with Gertrude Lodge's husband to claim the body of the hanged man, for he is their son. Gertrude falls unconscious and dies of shock three days later. Shortly thereafter, Lodge sells all of his interests and

moves to Port-Bredy at the other end of the county. On his death two years later "of a painless decline," he bequeathes all of his holdings, except for a small annuity for Rhoda Brook, to a reformatory for boys. Rhoda, however, refuses the annuity. The action ends as "the lorn milkmaid" returns to her old monotonous job at the dairy.

As in "The Three Strangers," the art of "The Withered Arm" is most apparent in its unity of action. The action moves in a full circle. Beginning at a definite point as Rhoda Brook at the dairy taciturnly anticipates the arrival of her former lover and his new bride, the plot moves logically and dramatically through a succession of related events until it reaches a definite end in Rhoda's return to the dairy, where the reader's last glimpse of her is as a bent old woman, pondering "sombre thoughts . . . inside that impassive wrinkled brow, to the rhythm of the alternating milkstreams." Not only are the beginning and end of the story right in terms of each other, but everything that happens in between is related logically to both.

Unlike the characters in "The Three Strangers," those in "The Withered Arm" have the rounded quality of organic life rather than the flat quality of two-dimensional fiction. None is painted in the solid white or solid black of the extremes of good or bad. Both Rhoda Brook and Gertrude Lodge have the consistent inconsistency of flesh-and-blood beings.

Rhoda Brook, a wronged woman who makes her humble living by milking cows, may be compared to Tess in <u>Tess of the</u>

D'Urbervilles. In contrast to Tess, however, she is not entirely "a pure woman." Her imperfections make her the more believable as a character. Although she has an illegitimate child by Farmer Lodge, there is no indication that she conceived the child unwillingly. When she is supplanted in her lover's affections by a woman of higher birth, she reacts with inevitable natural hostility. Her jealous resentment is evident in her anxious questions to her son about Gertrude's beauty, stature, dress, and manners. To her fellow workers at the dairy, Rhoda remains silent on the subject, but her suppressed antagonism comes out in a terror dream in which, threatened by Gertrude Lodge, she seizes Gertrude by the arm and turns her bodily from her bed. When the subject of her nightmare appears with a discoloration resembling finger marks on her arm, Rhoda's guilt for her unconscious wish to hurt Gertrude is intensified by her apparent success in doing so and by Gertrude's good will. Her feelings for Gertrude are ambivalent; with human inconsistency, she is both sorry for Gertrude's pain and glad for her impairment in beauty. When Gertrude visits Conjuror Trendle, Rhoda, fearing that she has been identified as Gertrude's enemy, guiltily leaves the neighborhood. Six years later, at the hanging of her son, Rhoda acts out in reality the unconscious hostile wish that she had once acted out in a dream. Seizing Gertrude by the arm, she turns her bodily from the side of the hanged man. Gertrude dies of traumatic shock. Although Rhoda Brook remains enigmatic to her fellow workers at the

dairy, even the casual reader can surmise that the "sombre thoughts" she ponders are constituted of unmitigated guilt for her fulfilled wish.

Gertrude Lodge, a woman of natural but naive gentleness and warmth, becomes a neurotic hypochondriac, shackled by superstition and fear. The change in her character comes about logically as the result of Rhoda Brook's hostility and Lodge's rejection. Conjuror Trendle's diagnosis of her withered arm as the work of an enemy, though given in superstitious rather than scientific terms, is not far from literal truth. Such psychosomatic physical symptoms as the result of emotional tension are as well known in the annals of medicine as they are in literature. In Gertrude Lodge's case, the symptom could have arisen as the result of her own resentment of her husband's marrying her only for her beauty and of the veiled hostility she encounters in Rhoda Brook. Beginning with a slight discoloration of the skin, the withering of the limb comes about slowly, the blight spreading gradually into paralysis and accompanying neuroses over a period of six years as Gertrude's marriage lapses into "prosiness" as her husband's sexual attraction to her wanes with her loss of beauty. Seeking a quick cure in a superstitious brand of shock treatment, Gertrude receives a greater shock than she can bear in the combined traumatic experiences of touching the neck of the hanged man and of finding him to be the illegitimate son of her enemy and her husband. The shock which was supposed to turn her blood and change her consti-

tution accomplishes its purpose by ending her life.

Although the two principal characters in "The Withered Arm" are convincingly neurotic, "Macabre absurdity not macabre neurosis spins the plot."[23] As in much of Hardy's work, the "people are less astounding than the situations they find themselves in." These appalling predicaments, though occasionally a strain on the reader's credibility, arouse "Hardy's powers as a dramatist and stylist as nothing else" can.[24] Examples of such situations are found in some of Hardy's greatest work. In _Far from the Madding Crowd_, Bathsheba Everdene opens Fanny Robin's coffin and discovers the baby that Sergeant Troy has fathered. In _The Mayor of Casterbridge_, Michael Henchard sees his effigy in the weirhole after the cruel skimmity ride. In _Jude the Obscure_, Jude Fawley dies as the sounds of Remembrance Day games drift in from the river, and Arabella leaves him dead to go off to her flirtation with the obscene Vilbert. Such macabre situations are made the more believable through the atmospheric use of setting. Whereas material setting furnishes the physical background to the action, immaterial setting provides the more important emotional context of the story situation. Traditional Wessex superstition sets the emotional scene for character and action in "The Withered Arm." "Hardy's anti-realism . . . depends largely on the

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[23] Guerard, 87.

[24] Ibid.

half-belief in spectres, witches, and the like."[25] In <u>The Return of the Native</u>, Susan Nunsuch really believes in her own powers, and Eustacia Vye actually dies a few hours after Susan pricks, then melts, her wax image. Similarly, in "The Withered Arm," Rhoda Brook is convinced of her own malignant powers, and Gertrude Lodge's arm does begin to wither after Rhoda has her destructive dream. Both women believe firmly in the supersensory powers of Conjuror Trendle, and Gertrude sees in the conjuror's glass of beaten egg white an incubus of her enemy. Whether the incubus appears at the prompting of Conjuror Trendle, or at Gertrude's own subconscious suggestion, or as the result of a combination of the two is immaterial; the fact that it appears at all illustrates the importance of superstition in the lives of Wessex people. As in most instances of anti-realism in his work, Hardy leaves room for a natural explanation of events which seemingly support superstitious beliefs. Yet Hardy's half-belief in the supernatural is no more than a folk historian's love of local color and a dramatist's love of symbolism.[26]

In "The Withered Arm," Hardy shows his mastery of the technique of the short story. The events of the plot are logically related; the characters live as believable human beings; and the setting, in both its material and its immaterial aspects, provides the atmospheric emotional context

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[25] Ibid., 92.

[26] Ibid., 93.

of the story. The integration of the various elements into an artistically satisfying whole results in one of the most perfectly constructed short stories in the English language.

"The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion" elaborates more fully Hardy's views on misused parental authority, which were only suggested in "An Imaginative Woman" and "On the Western Circuit." The action begins when, with the arrival of the York Hussars, the King's German Legion, a disturbing current is projected into the mainstream of uneventful life on Bincombe Downs, where Dr. Grove and his daughter, Phyllis, live in lonely isolation. Even in her seclusion, Phyllis has been met and nominally won by Humphrey Gould, a follower of the King's court, who outranks her socially. Coming from an old but pecuniarily diminished family, Gould postpones the wedding first for financial reasons, then to stay with his elderly father in Bath. Phyllis, who shares the commonly held view that the York Hussars' "hearts [are] as gay as their accoutrements," is surprised one day to see one of the legionnaires walking past her garden wall reading a letter with downcast eyes and a melancholy expression. His sad features haunt Phyllis all day, and she returns subsequently to the wall, where she sees him again. Gradually over a period of several weeks, a friendship ripens between the two, although their meetings are always held in secret, she on her side of the wall, he on his. The nature of Matthaus Tina's melancholy is homesickness. Far from being happy in England, he longs only for his home in Saarbruck and his

mother. Gould's letters to Phyllis grow more infrequent and lacking in warmth, and Dr. Grove, seeing more than he says, forbids her to go outside the garden wall without his permission. After Tina is broken in rank from corporal to private for returning to camp late from a meeting with Phyllis, he asks her to elope with him to Germany. Phyllis, at first entertaining the idea only as a romantic notion, agrees to the plan when Dr. Grove decides to send her away to stay with her aunt until the York Hussars have left the downs. On the day of the carefully planned escape across the channel, however, Humphrey Gould returns. While waiting to meet Matthaus Tina, Phyllis overhears Gould tell a companion that he has brought her a present as a peace offering. Conscience stricken at her own faithlessness, yet vacillating still, Phyllis goes to the rendezvous with Tina to tell him that she cannot go with him. Without pressing her to go against her will, Tina leaves with his friend, Christoph Bless, in the waiting boat. The following day, Gould gives Phyllis her present, a silver framed mirror, and confesses that he is secretly married. His wife is not the kind of girl his father would have chosen for him, and he wants Phyllis to help him placate his father by saying that she could not have married Humphrey under any circumstances. Though she feels relieved at being freed of her obligation to marry Gould, Phyllis regrets that she had not gone with Tina. Returning by force of habit a few days later to the site of the trysts by the wall, she observes a strange martial ceremony in the camp below. In horror she

watches as Tina and Bless, who have been brought back as deserters, are executed by firing squad, then as their bodies are turned out of the coffins to be viewed as an example by the troops. Dr. Grove finds his daughter unconscious by the wall; for weeks she is without her reason. The action is ended. The reader's last glimpse of Phyllis Grove is as a grief stricken woman, tending the unmarked graves of the two deserters.

The younger characters in "The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion," though marked by individual differences, have in common frustrations arising from their relationships with their parents. Dr. Grove, the only parent whose character is delineated, lives in a seclusion even greater than that of his daughter, for "If her social condition was twilight, his was darkness," and he wants to keep it that way. A "professional man whose taste for lonely meditation over metaphysical questions [has] diminished his practice until it no longer [pays] him to keep it going," Dr. Grove has not only withdrawn himself from the world, but he has insisted on withdrawing Phyllis with him. At his isolated "half farm half manor-house," he stays "in his garden the greater part of the day, growing more and more irritable with the lapse of time, and the increasing perception that he [has] wasted his life in the pursuit of illusions." One of these illusions, which Dr. Grove may or may not have been conscious of, is that he can keep his daughter all to himself. As he sees other people less and less frequently, he becomes more and

more possessive of Phyllis. His ostensible reason for favoring her engagement to Gould is that socially it is a good match. His real reason may be that Gould is a dull, uninteresting fellow whom Phyllis cannot love, for such a "steady-going" young man is not likely to come between him and his daughter. Dr. Grove's deep distrust of love relationships is revealed not only in his action in isolating himself from people, but in his agreement with the old proverb of the Gould family, "'Love me little, love me long.'" If Gould does not threaten to disrupt his possessive relationship with Phyllis, Matthaus Tina does. Feeling himself under this threat, Dr. Grove forbids his daughter ever to "'set foot outside that garden-fence without [his] permission.'" As this situation becomes increasingly intolerable to Phyllis, who, in experiencing a more genuine love relationship with Tina, perceives that her father's "parental affection [seems] to be quite dried up," Dr. Grove feels his way of life so threatened that he determines to send Phyllis away to her aunt's house until the York Hussars depart. A victim of his own isolation, Dr. Grove is a frustrated, selfish man who can neither give nor accept love.

The effect that such a parent has on his child is evident in the character of Phyllis Grove. Growing up in the "twilight" social condition prescribed by her brooding father, she is awkward and shy in the presence of strangers. When Humphrey Gould offers her marriage, she accepts him, doing as any obedient child would do — just as her father

wishes. Since Gould is her father's representative, she naturally cannot "Love him in the true sense of the word." She can, however, respect him as she does her father and be pained by his neglect. As Hardy put it, "it is not to be wondered that the uncertainty of her position, linked with the fact that there [is] not much passion in her thoughts of Humphrey, [breeds] an indescribable dreariness in the heart of Phyllis Grove." It is not to be wondered, either, that since she has grown up without the love relationships of normal family life, Phyllis has difficulty in any love relationship. Having been made fearful of love, Phyllis is free to love Matthaus Tina largely because their developing relationship is hopeless of fulfillment and therefore safe from impossible demands. Hardy's symbolic meaning is unmistakable when, in commenting on the trysts at the garden wall, he says that "The stone wall of necessity [makes] anything like intimacy difficult." With Gould's increasing neglect and her father's growing possessiveness, however, Phyllis begins to assume more independence of feeling, if not of action. When Matthaus Tina asks her to elope with him, adding, "'I came here against my will; why should I not escape?'" he voices her feelings about her own life situation. She is already "infected . . . with his passionate longing for . . . mother, and home." When her father decides to send her to his sister's house, "a prison to Phyllis," she determines to take independent action and "escape" with Tina. The old fears are not gone, however, for though "Without him her life

[seems] a dreary prospect, yet the more she [looks] at his proposal the more she [fears] to accept it—so wild it [is], so vague, so venturesome." Vacillating indecisively to the end, she is at length conquered by her fears. Rejecting Tina, she returns to Gould and her father "in that wretched state of mind which leads a woman to move mechanically onward in what she conceives to be her allotted path." The fact of Gould's already being married to another woman is a relief to Phyllis, but the tragedy of Tina's being caught and executed is so traumatic to her that "for weeks they [despair] of her reason."

The two men with whom Phyllis Grove is linked romantically need be mentioned only briefly, for despite the title, "The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion" is really Phyllis Grove's story. Humphrey Gould, "an approximately fashionable man of a mild type" who is "Too steady-going to be 'a buck,'" is also under the paternal dominance of an aging parent. One of his excuses for not returning to Phyllis at the appointed time is that he cannot "very easily leave his father in the city of their sojourn, the elder having no other relative near him." When he finally does return, it is, ironically, to tell her that he has married another girl and to ask her help in placating his father. As he explains, "'. . . she is not quite the one that my father would have chose for me—you know the paternal idea as well as I—and I have kept it secret.'" Gould knows that Phyllis will understand his position since it is the same position that she has in relation

to her father.

Matthaus Tina, the melancholy German legionnaire, also has a close, though not unhappy, relationship with one of his parents. The closeness of the relationship is frustrating, however, for Tina's "dreamy musing nature [feels] the gloom of exile still more intensely from the fact that he [has] left a lonely mother at home with nobody to cheer her." It is the responsive melancholy of a kindred spirit which first attracts Matthaus Tina to Phyllis Grove. The two women in Tina's life prevent his being overcome by self-destructive urges, for he tells Phyllis, "'I should have disappeared from the world some time ago if it had not been for two persons— my beloved, here, and my mother in Saarbruck.'" One suspects, however, that of the two, his mother is the more important to him; for when Phyllis, still vacillating in indecision, tells him that she feels she cannot go with him, he makes no effort to induce her to change her mind. In trying to "escape" from the realities of life to the safety of his mother's home, Tina brings about his own destruction.

In "The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion," Hardy again makes good use of setting. Details of the material setting, the lonely downs, the garden wall, are used effectively as symbolic indices to character. Elements of the immaterial setting, society's view of unequal marriages "as a violation of the laws of nature," the reasonless glamour of the military, the extent of often misused parental authority, are used as focal points for Hardy's social criticism.

An artistically successful story, "The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion" owes its single dominant impression to a unity of parts. The ending, though it comes as something of a surprise, grows logically out of preceding action. Characters are consistent and clearly motivated. The setting symbolically illuminates action, character, and significance. The single effect achieved in the organic interrelationship of these various elements makes the story an artistically satisfying one.

A Group of Noble Dames

In A Group of Noble Dames, a collection of tales which appeared in its present form in 1891, Hardy examines the pedigrees of county families and fills into the framework of the geneologies "the motives, passions, and personal qualities which would appear to be the single explanation possible of some extraordinary conjunction in times, events, and personages that occasionally marks these reticent family records."[27] The book is no collection of mere character sketches, however; beyond Hardy's penetrating studies of character in these tales lies some of his sharpest social satire. Although generally the well motivated, rounded characters found in all good fiction rather than the flat, two-dimensional figures of parables, both the noble dames and their gentlemen must be

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[27]Thomas Hardy, "Preface," A Group of Noble Dames (London, 1952), v.

viewed chiefly as targets for Hardy's social criticism. In A Group of Noble Dames, as in nearly all of his work, Hardy dramatizes the evils of class feeling. In "The First Countess of Wessex," a mother gives her thirteen year old daughter in marriage to a baron because she fears the girl may grow up to select for herself a man of lower birth. In "Lady Mottisfont," a contessa, who has rejected her illegitimate child, reclaims her from the child's father and foster mother only to reject her again when she stands in the way of the contessa's making an advantageous second marriage. In "The Lady Icenway," a lady tries to get her gardener, to whom she had once been secretly and illegally married, to beget an heir for her titled but senile husband. In "Squire Petrick's Lady," a squire, believing his emotionally ill wife's fantasy that her son was fathered by a duke, takes pride in the child's noble lineage, but rejects him when he discovers that the boy is his own son. In "The Duchess of Hamptonshire," a rector banishes the young curate whom his daughter loves and forces the girl to marry a rich and prominent duke. In these stories, as in nearly all of his work, Hardy deplores the submergence of individuals into stratified classes and "decries the senseless passion for position in society."[28] As Harvey C. Webster says in his book, On a Darkling Plain, "Hardy's social protests, based upon a hope for ultimate amelioration, are as much . . . a part of his reading of

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[28]Webster, 131.

life as his emphasis upon the tragedy he regards to be inherent in the nature of things."[29] Although he disagrees with the Positivists, who think more ills remediable than he does, Hardy shares with them a belief that "the world is getting better and will continue to do so."[30] Such is the dominant impression of A Group of Noble Dames.

Two of the stories in A Group of Noble Dames, "Barbara of the House of Grebe" and "The Marchioness of Stonehenge," in addition to characterizations that are psychologically sound, contain Gothic elements of horror and criticize the problems of socially unequal marriages and parent-child relationships.

In the first story, the action begins as Lord Uplandtowers is attracted to Barbara Grebe, who, he is advised, neither loves him nor cares about making a good match. Uplandtowers dances with Barbara at a ball given by her father, Sir John; but the lady elopes that night with Edmond Willowes, the handsome but poorly born son of a local widow. The newlyweds' bliss descends gradually from the warmth of the "seventh heaven" to the chill of something below the first. Finally they write to Barbara's parents, who, welcoming them home, decide to make the best of a bad situation by sending Willowes on a year's educational tour of the Continent. While abroad, Willowes commissions a sculptor in Pisa to make a

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[29]Ibid., 171.

[30]Ibid., 198.

statue of him. Later, in a fire in a Florence opera house, he receives serious burns which irreparably disfigure his handsome features. On his return, he finds that Barbara, though she expects a change, is not prepared for the ghastly sight which meets her eyes when he takes off his mask. Visibly shaken, the lady flees the house in terror. The next morning, she finds a note from Edmond saying that he is leaving for one year, after which time, if Barbara still cannot accept him, he will go away forever. The year passes, and Willowes does not return. Presuming him dead, Barbara finally gives her hand, but not her heart, to Lord Uplandtowers. Although Uplandtowers has never minded Barbara's lack of warmth toward him before their marriage, he becomes increasingly irritated at it afterward, for he desires an heir for his title. Barbara receives a letter from the sculptor in Pisa, who offers to send her the statue he has made of Willowes. With the arrival of the statue, a handsome replica of Edmond in white marble, Barbara's passion for her first husband is renewed. She places the statue in a sealed alcove in her apartment, where she frequently steals from Lord Uplandtowers's bed at night to admire it, to murmur words of love to it, to clasp and kiss it fondly. Fearing that he will never have an heir, Lord Uplandtowers jealously has the statue mutilated to resemble Edmond's real life disfigurement. When Barbara discovers it, she shrieks and faints. That night, Uplandtowers brings the statue to his bedchamber to confront his wife again with the grisly sight. He con-

tinues this emotional torture until on the third night Barbara collapses in hysterics. Lord Uplandtowers keeps the statue there until Barbara vows that she loves him and hates Edmond. Turning from the maimed statue in fear and revulsion, she clings to her husband with parasitic dependency. During the following nine years, she bears him eleven children, all except one daughter dying without reaching maturity. The action ends as Barbara, wasted in mind and body, dies abroad. Lord Uplandtowers never remarries.

The characters in "Barbara of the House of Grebe" reveal sound, if limited, psychological truths. They must be viewed, however, chiefly as symbolic targets for Hardy's social criticism. Like many of Hardy's female characters, Barbara Grebe falls in love capriciously on the shallow basis of sexual selection. Her affection for her handsome but poorly born husband, Edmond Willowes, however, rapidly diminishes. After the honeymoon is over, she returns to a state of dependence on her parents. When Edmond's handsome features are disfigured in the fire, Barbara's waning love for him is replaced by abject terror. Conscience stricken at the shallowness of her love, she tries to mitigate her guilt by making lavish gifts to churches and charities. She weds Lord Uplandtowers, not out of love for him, but to gain the security of a socially advantageous marriage. Her dislike for Uplandtowers deepening to the point of estrangement, she turns almost pathologically to the fetish worship of her first husband's statue. When Uplandtowers brings her into submission by the

emotional torture of forcing her to view the mutilated statue, "the cure becomes so permanent as to be itself a new disease." She becomes parasitically dependent on him. The sexuality which she has not been able to express in love for him is released in a flood of fear. In rapid succession, she bears him eleven children, all but one of whom, significantly, die. A shallow impetuous woman who has married both a good man and a bad one for equally irrational reasons, Barbara dies abroad, wasted in mind and body.

Like many of Hardy's male characters, Edmond Willowes idealizes the woman he loves, projecting on her the virtues he wants her to have. So anxious is he to keep Barbara's love that he is willing to undergo the indignity of the "education" prescribed by her parents to make himself good enough for her. A basically good man who wants to prove his worth, he brings about his own ruin while heroically risking his life to save others from the fire. Edmond's final disillusionment comes when he realizes that Barbara's shallow human love, which he had thought divine, is not equal to the demands of his altered person. Having lost the will to live, Edmond Willowes dies abroad as a result of "the sufferings he [has] already undergone, coupled with much depression of spirit, which [causes] him to succumb to a slight ailment."

One of the most malevolent of Hardy's villains, Lord Uplandtowers is cruelly sadistic, but perversely intelligent. "His matured and cynical doggedness at the age of nineteen" leads him to pursue a woman he knows can never love him. His

true feelings for Barbara are revealed in his reaction to her elopement with Edmond Willowes. "'Damn her for a fool!" he says, "—which shows the kind of love he [bears] her," Hardy adds wryly. When he hears "of Barbara's terror and flight at her husband's return, and of the latter's prompt departure," he chuckles "like a caustic fogey of threescore." Although his "severity on the bench towards poachers, smugglers, and turnip-stealers" is already a "matter of common notoriety," Lord Uplandtowers shows the true colors of his villainy only after his marriage to Barbara. Blaming his wife for not immediately producing an heir, he cruelly asks her what she is good for. When he catches Barbara making love to the statue of Edmond, his jealousy goes from the extreme to the unlimited.

> 'Ha, ha!' says he to himself. 'This is where we evaporate—this is where my hopes of a successor in the title dissolve—ha! ha! This must be seen to, verily!'

"Seen to" it is! With "cynical doggedness" Lord Uplandtowers ferrets out the tutor who had accompanied Willowes on his ill-fated educational tour, learns from him the exact nature of Edmond's disfigurement, and has the statue chiseled to the mutilated likeness of the maimed man. With infinite sadistic patience, he subjects his wife to the emotional torture of viewing the disfigured statue until she knuckles under to him in hysteria and defeat. The poetic justice of Lord Uplandtowers's annoyance at Barbara's subsequent dependence on him and failure to produce a son and heir is less than adequate repayment for his brutality.

The immaterial setting in "Barbara of the House of Grebe"

reflects the society in which the characters act out their personal dramas. Products of a society in which arbitrary class divisions are more important than individual worth, the characters are, themselves, symbolic of such a society. Repeatedly throughout the story, Hardy reveals that this society is the real target for his criticism. When Barbara elopes with Edmond, Hardy deplores the social structure in which one person's blood is considered better than another's.

> Moreover, [Edmond's] blood was . . . of no distinction whatever, whilst [Barbara's], through her mother, was compounded of the best juices of ancient baronial distillation, containing tinctures of . . . Plantagenet, and York, and Lancaster, and God knows what besides, which it was a thousand pities to throw away.

When Edmond and Barbara return from their elopement, Hardy observes that the bride's parents

> were overjoyed to see their spoilt child return safe and sound—though she was only Mrs. Willowes, the wife of Edmond Willowes of nowhere.

When Sir John and Lady Grebe suggest a tour of the Continent for Edmond to fit him for his position as Barbara's husband, Hardy reveals his view that such motives for education are wrong. As he explains, Edmond

> was to apply himself to the study of languages, manners, history, society, ruins, and everything else that came under his eyes, till he should return to take his place without blushing by Barbara's side.

Money-grubbing practices in the church also come in for a share of Hardy's social criticism. When Barbara's "contrition for her unconquerable repugnance" for the mutilated Edmond leads her to try to mitigate her guilt through penitential gifts to the church, Hardy comments wryly that

> such was the lukewarm state of religion in those days, that not an aisle, steeple, porch, east window, Ten-Commandment board, lion-and-unicorn, or brass candlestick, was required anywhere at all in the neighbourhood as a votive offering from a distracted soul—the last century contrasting greatly in this respect with the happy times in which we live, when urgent appeals for contributions to such objects pour in by every morning's post, and nearly all churches have been made to look like new pennies.

Hardy returns to his main point again by showing the encroachment of society's attitude on the maturing individual. When Barbara decides to marry Lord Uplandtowers, Hardy comments,

> Now, too, she was older, and admitted to herself that a man whose ancestor had run scores of Saracens through and through in fighting for the site of the Holy Sepulchre was a more desirable husband, socially considered, than one who could only claim with certainty to know that his father and grandfather were respectable burgesses.

The real significance of the story, as revealed through the immaterial setting, is that social standards which rate one man better than another on the basis of his blood-line rather than on the basis of his worth as an individual are false.

Although the macabre absurdity of the plot and the ridiculous exaggeration of the characters are not realistic, "Barbara of the House of Grebe" is a suspenseful melodrama and an artistically successful social satire. Hardy's sense of form is apparent in the careful integration of plot, character, and setting around the unifying theme.

In "The Marchioness of Stonehenge," the action begins as Lady Caroline, satiated with the artificial flattery of men of social rank, falls in love with the assistant to the land steward on her father's estate. She marries him secretly, and remains ecstatically happy for a while, meeting him

on the sly or letting him climb through a window to her room. As he is leaving Lady Caroline's room one night, after a conversation which has revealed her growing dissatisfaction with the unequal marriage, the young man suddenly succumbs to a fatal heart attack. Wishing fervently that he had died at his own home rather than hers, Lady Caroline surreptitiously drags his body downstairs, across the lawn, through the wood, and to his father's doorstep, where she leaves it. When his scuffed clothing gives rise to rumors, Lady Caroline coaxes Milly, a village girl who had loved the dead man in vain, to take the blame. Lady Caroline gives Milly her wedding ring and other mementos. Milly gives out the story that, having married him secretly under Lady Caroline's name, she is the widow of the dead man. Milly plays her role so well that she wins the sympathy of the villagers and incurs the envy of Lady Caroline. When Lady Caroline discovers that she is pregnant, she pleads with Milly to call off the hoax, thus helping her to save her reputation. Milly refuses, but agrees to accept Lady Caroline's child as her own. Lady Caroline and her mother arrange for the child to be born in London, where Milly, who is supposedly resting at a watering-place "for the benefit of her health," joins them. Milly returns home with a baby boy to a cottage of her own on a comfortable allowance which Lady Caroline and her mother have settled on her for life. Lady Caroline marries the elderly Marquis of Stonehenge. Twenty years later, again a widow, the marchioness asks Milly to give up her son. The boy, now a dashing young

career soldier, is confronted with a choice between two mothers. Lady Caroline is smugly confident that she, his corporeal mother, will be his choice. Milly knows that love is more important than blood in motherhood. The action ends as the young man chooses to keep things as they are, reasoning that since Lady Caroline had rejected him when he was a helpless infant, he has no reason as an adult to accept her as his mother.

The characters in "The Marchioness of Stonehenge" serve as symbolic targets for Hardy's social criticism. Lady Caroline, like Barbara Grebe, marries a man to whom she is sexually attracted, but with whom she has nothing in common socially, only to regret her marriage later when she recognizes it as a threat to her social position. She is more fearful of social ruin than grief stricken at her husband's untimely death. "'Why not have died in your own cottage if you would die!'" she rails at his corpse. "'Then nobody would ever have known of our imprudent union . . .'" Lady Caroline averts possible discovery by persuading Milly to pose as the dead man's widow, but tries to get the girl to call off the hoax when the imminence of a child threatens to expose it anyway. When Milly refuses to co-operate, Lady Caroline is faced with a choice between her social position and the love of her child. Her decision requires no thought whatever. She readily gives up the child. The selfishness which prompts these actions in her youth remains Lady Caroline's dominant characteristic. As a middle-aged marchioness, she thinks of her own needs first in seeking to have the child she had rejected in infancy

returned to her in adulthood.

Milly, like Marty South in The Woodlanders, remains faithful to the man she loves despite his preference for another woman. Though never seriously noticed by him in life, she symbolically marries him in death. Her genuine grief for her dead "husband" not only wins her sympathetic attention in the village where she is a nobody, but it also becomes a source of sensual pleasure for her. Indulging "in sorrow which [is] a positive luxury to her," Milly enjoys in fantasy the love she has not had in reality. The boy becomes a symbol to her of his father. She nurtures his growth, tracing every day "more distinctly the lineaments of the man who had won her girlish heart, and kept it even in the tomb." Yet her love for the son, as for his father, remains unselfish. Her success as a mother is reflected in the young man himself, in his "exceptional attainments, his manly bearing, his steady conduct," his serious professional attitude toward the army. Secure in her position as the young man's emotional mother, Milly can reply with calm assurance to Lady Caroline's smug demand for his return to her as his corporeal mother, "'Flesh and blood's nothing!'"

The immaterial setting in "The Marchioness of Stonehenge" not only furnishes a background to character, but illuminates the theme that "honest human affection will become shamefaced and mean under the frost of class-division and social prejudices." The effect of stratified society on its members is seen in the characters of the story. The falsity of the

upper stratum of society is evident in Lady Caroline's dissatisfaction with the flattering attentions of the young noblemen and gentlemen who pay court to her. When Lady Caroline centers "her affection on quite a plain-looking young man of humble birth and no position at all," she is said to have "turned her regards absolutely netherward." Stratified society, however, is stronger than her most genuine feelings as an individual. She not only disavows her marriage contract to preserve her social position; she disowns her child to save her reputation. This adherence to social convention rather than to natural human instinct constitutes an emotional illness which runs throughout Lady Caroline's life. Hardy blames the condition on the society which produces people like Lady Caroline. His hope for ultimate amelioration, however, is seen in the emotionally more honest characters of Milly and her son. Despite the sorrows of her own life, Milly makes a good mother. The difference between Lady Caroline's tardy synthetic solicitousness and Milly's constant genuine devotion is readily recognized by the mature young man. To Lady Caroline's request that he come back to her, he replies,

> 'No, my lady,' . . . 'You see, my lady, you cared little for me when I was weak and helpless; why should I come to you now I am strong? She, dear devoted soul . . ., tended me from my birth, watched over me, nursed me when I was ill, and deprived herself of many a little comfort to push me on. I cannot love another mother as I love her. She is my mother, and I will always be her son!'

Hardy sees, in people who follow the dictates of their own hearts rather than those of stratified society, a hope for

a better world.

In "The Marchioness of Stonehenge," Hardy uses a socially significant idea as the focal point around which a logically developed plot, rounded characterization, and emotionally meaningful setting are unified to present a single dominant impression. Although the purpose of the story is social criticism, "The Marchioness of Stonehenge" is not merely a didactic parable. The theme, growing logically out of the story materials, is functionally integrated with other elements in the story to give a unified effect.

A Changed Man and Other Tales

Although several well-constructed stories are included in A Changed Man and Other Tales, the anthology, as a whole, does not measure up in quality to the other collected volumes of Hardy's short stories. Some of the tales, nevertheless, reveal Hardy's social philosophy, and all are written in the charming colloquial style that characterizes the author's best work. In "The Waiting Supper," one of Hardy's best stories, a young lady, influenced by her father to marry a rich young man rather than the poor country boy she loves, is deserted by her husband. Nine years later, on the eve of her proposed wedding to her first lover, a messenger brings her the news that her husband has returned. The disappointed lovers postpone their marriage indefinitely, but the husband, who has died in an accident, never returns. In "Enter a Dragoon," a young woman about to be married to a soldier

has to postpone her wedding when the young man's regiment is ordered into battle. Believing that he has been killed, she accepts the proposal of another man, although she has a child by her first lover. When her lover returns on the eve of her scheduled wedding, she accepts him again. When he dies suddenly that very evening, she dons widow's weeds and assumes his name, only to find years later that he already had a wife and child in the north. In "The Duke's Reappearance," a traditional Wessex legend is told of a villager's hiding a stranger believed to be the Duke of Monmouth, who is trying to escape capture during the battle at King's-Hintock. When the villager catches the stranger trying to kiss his daughter, he sends him away. Although the duke is supposedly beheaded, the stranger returns to the villager's house one night for his sword and snuffbox. Believing the stranger to be the duke, the villager accepts the rumors that one of Monmouth's officers was beheaded in his stead. The dozen stories in <u>A Changed Man and Other Tales</u> were collected and published in their present form in 1913.

In the title story, "A Changed Man," an invalid man sitting in the oriel window of his old substantial house near "Top o' Town" sees the beginning of the action as the colorful Hussars arrive at Casterbridge barracks. Rumor has it that the regiment is haunted. Captain John Maumbry slyly confirms the report, thus adding further glamour to his regiment and to his own romantic dash of wickedness, which has already made him a favorite with the ladies. The Hussars,

who bring gaiety to the town with their frequent presentations of band concerts, comedies, and other entertainments, soon become the center of Casterbridge society. Captain Maumbry, though he has never been serious in his flirtations, is finally captured by Laura, a belle as skilled as he in "the game of hearts." After their marriage, the two young people continue their leadership in community festivities. The new parson, Mr. Sainway, a preacher who lures members from other congregations with his eloquence, asks Captain Maumbry to stop the military band concerts on Sunday afternoons since they often keep people from church. The captain angrily refers to Sainway as "'this cursed new lath in a sheet,'" but in time the two men become inseparable friends. Sainway is given a living in another town, but shortly after taking it, he dies of inflamation of the lungs. Grief stricken, Captain Maumbry feels called by God to follow his friend's example by becoming a minister. Although Laura opposes the plan, he resigns his commission and enters a theological college. Ultimately he returns to Casterbridge as curate of a church in the Durnover Lane slums, where he ministers to his flock by preaching dull and over-long sermons. Laura confides to the invalid in the oriel window her dissatisfaction with the new mode of living. When the cholera plague strikes Casterbridge, the slum sections are the hardest hit. Maumbry sends his wife to the comparative safety of Creston, which, though only six miles distant, is protected by a small mountain range. There Laura has a reckless love affair with

Lieutenant Vannicock, a local infantry officer with whom she plays one of the leading roles in a romantic comedy performed for the benefit of Casterbridge plague victims. Laura writes Maumbry a note telling him that she is going away with the lieutenant. On their way to catch the fly, however, Laura and Vannicock see Maumbry working tirelessly, burning the germ ridden belongings of cholera victims. Unwilling to leave him under the circumstances, Laura stops to assist her husband in his work. That evening Maumbry collapses and dies of cholera. Laura returns to her old home in Durnover Lane. When Lieutenant Vannicock returns six months later to ask her to marry him, she recognizes his proposal as only a half-hearted attempt to fulfill an obligation. No longer in love with Vannicock, she declines his proposal and remains a widow for the rest of her life. The invalid man in the oriel window has seen the end of the action.

The plot of "A Changed Man" shows Hardy's sense of form. The story is seen through the eyes of the invalid man in the oriel window. The action begins and ends with his observation, and Laura's discussion with him as an objective outsider relates the events in the middle of the story to each other and to the beginning and end.

Although the characters in "A Changed Man" are not flat and unbelievable, characterization is weakened by lack of clarity in motivation. The change in John Maumbry's character comes about for logical, but not clearly explained, reasons. A colorful career soldier, he first appears as a

dashing young blade with an attractive suggestion of wickedness in his eyes. His first reaction to Sainway is resentment of the parson's attempt to curb the social festivities of the town. Like everyone else, however, Maumbry falls under the spell of Sainway's eloquence. The two men, although they have little in common, become inseparable friends. After Sainway's death, Maumbry feels directed by the Hand of God to give up his military career and become a minister. As a preacher, Maumbry lacks Sainway's eloquence; but as a sincere Christian, he shows his devotion to duty in the interests of his parishioners during the cholera plague. It is understandable that a close association with so dynamic a person as Sainway could motivate a radical change in Maumbry's character, but it is not made clear in the story why two men who have so little in common become friends in the first place. Although this defect in characterization detracts from the quality of "A Changed Man," it does not stamp the story as ineffective and false.

Laura Maumbry whimsically falls in love on the basis of sexual selection. In this respect, she follows the traditional pattern of many of Hardy's female characters such as Bathsheba Everdene in Far from the Madding Crowd and Grace Melbury in The Woodlanders. Her immediate reason for being disappointed in love, however, is not the usual one. Whereas Bathsheba Everdene and Grace Melbury discover that the objects of their affections are not worthy of their love, Laura Maumbry finds her husband to be a greater man than she has

bargained for. Having married him for the glamourous military figure he cuts and for the festive social life he leads, she is unprepared to accept him as a sober parson or to accept the life of duty and responsibility that he offers her. The slight change in Laura's character at the end of the story is not inconsistent with her character at the beginning. Motivated by her feeling of guilt for leaving her husband in such dire circumstances, her rejection of Vannicock proves that her love for him, like her love for Maumbry, is based on a shallow sexual attraction.

The town of Casterbridge, which figures in much of Hardy's work, is the familiar material setting of "A Changed Man." The glamour attached to the military, the rising importance of the preacher in religious services, and the cholera plague are the motivating forces in the immaterial setting. Military glamour arouses Laura's sexuality as nothing else does. Sainway's eloquence in preaching influences the townspeople, and his dynamic personality motivates a change in Maumbry's character. The cholera plague gives Maumbry a greater sense of responsibility and indirectly influences Laura's decision not to run away with her lover.

The plot of "A Changed Man" has continuity, and the setting effectively motivates character and illuminates the general significance that radical changes in character are possible. The story, nevertheless, loses some of its credibility by the lack of clarity in the motivation of Maumbry's change in character. "A Changed Man," therefore, is not one

of Hardy's most artistically successful stories.

Implications of the Study

On the basis of the stories evaluated, it may be concluded that Hardy's work in the short story, both in quality and quantity, cannot be ignored in evaluating his work as a whole. The subject matter of Hardy's short stories is significantly related to that of his novels and poetry, and the same philosophy is found in all three parts of his work. There can be little doubt that the craftsmanship which distinguished the novels is found in the short stories — in carefully formulated plots; in a wide range of characters who are consistent, well motivated, and drawn in the round; in settings which are clearly seen and felt; in significant themes; and in the functional integration of these various elements to present unified effects. The care with which Hardy classified the best of his short stories in the four volumes in which he published them is justified. Although not of the magnitude of his novels and poetry, Hardy's short stories form a third part of his work that is comparable to, if smaller in scope than, his greater work. As in Lascelles Abercrombie's cathedral simile, Hardy's stories are not a part of the main building. But if the six principal novels can be seen as the pillared nave and <u>The Dynasts</u> as the intricately carved quire, then the short stories can be viewed as a charming and impressive chapel in the cathedral of Thomas Hardy's work.

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