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DRAMATIC IRONY: SOME
VIEWS OF ITS USES IN
THE NOVELS OF
THOMAS HARDY

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DRAMATIC IRONY: SOME VIEWS
OF ITS USES IN THE NOVELS
OF THOMAS HARDY

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PREFATORY NOTE

The work required for this investigation has been both fascinating and profitable. Entailing the reading of Thomas Hardy's novels, together with a number of critical references, it has enriched my knowledge of a first-rate writer. As a result of this study, mine will be an abiding interest in this eminent man of letters.

It is with sincere appreciation that I acknowledge the assistance given me by the faculty members of the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College: Dr. Agnes Berrigan, whose courses in the novel first directed my attention to the study and whose list of thesis topics suggested the subject of this dissertation; and Dr. Hans Andersen, whose able direction and constructive criticism during the initial stages of this investigation have been a source of real inspiration.

G. M. S.

I. INTRODUCTION

The last decade has witnessed an increase in the popularity of Thomas Hardy's novels. Distinguished by a pervading spirit of gloom and an overshadowing sense of determinism, they have found a ready host of admirers in this post-war period. Their future reputation, however, will probably not rest upon this pessimistic philosophy. Rather, a symmetry of structure, a richness of characterization, and a vigor of style will insure them a lasting place among the best works of English fiction.

In the effective structural designs created by Hardy, dramatic irony occupies a prominent place. By supplying frequent reminders of a character's pathetic blindness, it helps to intensify one's consciousness of impending disaster. How skilfully the novelist uses this device in preparing for tragic denouements, we shall learn in the succeeding chapters of this thesis. Before we proceed, however, it will be well for us to define the term with which, primarily, we shall be concerned throughout this dissertation.

"Dramatic irony is the irony resulting from a strong contrast, unperceived by a character in the story, between the surface meaning of his words or deeds and something else happening in the same story."¹ The reader, who senses the full import of this contrast, grasps the more fundamental

¹

Germaine Dempster, Dramatic Irony in Chaucer, p. 7.

meaning intended for him by the author.

As suggested by our definition, there are two possible mediums through which dramatic irony operates -- 1. speeches and 2. incidents. Of the first we may note three varieties: (a) double-edged language which is apparent to the speaker, but misinterpreted by the listener; (b) language whose true significance is not apparent to the speaker himself; (c) language in which the speaker's exuberance or blind confidence precedes disaster. For an explanation of the second medium, we turn to a quotation from Aristotle's *Poetics*, XI: "... a change by which a line of action intended to produce a certain effect produces the opposite."² To elucidate these varieties and sub-varieties, we shall consider some representative examples from Thomas Hardy's short stories.³ Using these lesser works merely for illustrative material, we shall not make a detailed study of them.

1. Dramatic Irony through the Medium of Speeches

(a) Double-edged language which is apparent to the speaker, but misinterpreted by the listener.

In Hardy's "An Imaginative Woman," one of the tales in Life's Little Ironies, the heroine, Mrs. William Marchmill, conceives an ardent fondness for Robert Trewe, a poet whom she knows only through having read his works. An over-

²

Cf. Butcher, pp. 323-4

³ This classification of varieties and sub-varieties is based partly upon the discussion in S. K. Johnson's "Some Aspects of Dramatic Irony in Sophoclean Drama."

mastering desire to meet this writer preys upon her mind until even her husband, who suspects nothing of this infatuation, notices her curious moodiness. This dialogue ensues:

'Sure you're not ill?' he asked.
'No, only wicked.'⁴

Mistaking her answer for the outgrowth of a playful whim, the husband fails to grasp the deeper import of this reply.

(b) Language whose true significance is not apparent to the speaker himself.

An instance of a character's failure to comprehend the full implications of his own speech is seen in Hardy's "A Tragedy of Two Ambitions", another story in Life's Little Ironies. In this narrative two brothers, Joshua and Cornelius Halborough, strive valiantly to rise above the muck and mire of their background. Their persistent efforts earn for them a liberal education and comfortable positions as clerics. At crucial times, however, their inebriated father appears and threatens to endanger their social standing. Finally, on a certain occasion, after they have effected a desirable match between their sister Rosa and a wealthy parishioner, under the influence of liquor, this man voices his intention of revealing his indentity to his prospective son-in-law. On his way to the squire's estate to carry out this threat, he falls into a stream. His sons, hearing his calls for help, have the power to save him.

⁴

Life's Little Ironies, p. 18.

However, because of prolonged hesitation, during which time they entertain ideas of release from former humiliating circumstances, they reach the scene too late. Heavy rains and flood waters temporarily remove all evidence of the disaster. When, after many months, the body is recovered in a condition past recognition, no one besides the two brothers, not even Rosa, suspects either what has happened or the identity of the dead man. The day of her father's pauper funeral, the sister makes a startling revelation to Joshua and Cornelisu:

'I forgot to tell you,' she said, 'of a curious thing which happened to me a month or two before my marriage--something which I thought may have had a connection with the accident of the poor man you have buried today.'⁵

She continues, unaware that she is inflicting mental anguish upon the two men, relating how she had heard cries for help. What had startled her most at the time was the recognition of her name among the calls. But she dismisses the matter, saying that she may have been mistaken or that the deceased probably knew someone by that name. Little does she dream how vitally these observations concern her.

(c) Language in which the speaker's exuberance or blind confidence precedes disaster.

In Hardy's "On the Western Circuit", one of the series, Life's Little Ironies, Charles Bradford, a man of the world, has just married a pretty peasant girl. Her letters to him,

⁵

Life's Little Ironies. p. 103.

full of quaint and appealing sentiments, have lured him into this union. That his attractive wife is illiterate, that all of her correspondence has been conducted by her mistress, Mrs. Harnham, he does not suspect. On the eve of his wedding, shortly before his bitter disillusionment, he remarks upon seeing his bride ill at ease:

'Mrs. Harnham, my darling is so flurried that she doesn't know what she is doing or saying. I see that after this event a little quietude will be necessary before she gives tongue to that tender philosophy which she used to treat me to in her letters.'⁶

2. Dramatic Irony through the Medium of Reversals in Incidents.

Of the contrast between aim and achievement, between expectations and realizations, Hardy's The Withered Arm furnishes a striking example. In this story Gertrude Lodge has learned from Conjuror Trendle a means of curing her afflicted arm: She must place the diseased portion upon the neck of a corpse just taken from the gallows. This contact with the dead will turn her blood, an essential to her recovery. Summoning up the necessary courage, she awaits her opportunity at a public execution. After the body has been lowered, she follows Trendle's instructions, only to recognize immediately afterward the face of the victim--her husband's illegitimate son. Of this contrast between anticipations and results Hardy says: "Her blood had been

⁶

Life's Little Ironies, p. 133.

'turned' indeed--too far. Her death took place in town three days after."⁷

In the ensuing chapters Hardy's own classification of his novels will be followed as useful for our purpose. Accordingly, we shall build the results of our investigation around three main groups of his novels: novels of ingenuity--Desperate Remedies, A Laodicean, and The Hand of Ethelberta; romances and fantasies--A Pair of Blue Eyes, The Trumpet-Major, Two on a Tower, and The Well-Beloved; novels of character and environment--Under the Greenwood Tree, Far from the Madding Crowd, The Return of the Native, The Mayor of Casterbridge, The Woodlanders, Tess of the d'Urbervilles, and Jude the Obscure. As the last two works mentioned present a wealth of material to illustrate our subject, a chapter will be devoted to a particular study of each. No attempt will be made to introduce all the instances of dramatic irony found in all these novels. Rather, we shall select a sufficient number of the most interesting and characteristic examples to reveal the author's artistic technique in their use. Underlining will serve to emphasize the especially significant portions of quoted matter. Only in so far as they clarify the illustrations will the plots be summarized.

⁷

Wessex Tales, p. 107.

II. NOVELS OF INGENUITY

Characterized by a preponderance of surprise, coincidence, and intrigue, these novels suggest but slightly the worthier efforts of Thomas Hardy. The structure is often weak; frequently the narrative appears strained; and at times the treatment seems superficial. Common to this group is the use of mistaken identity; Aeneas Manston,¹ Miss Aldelyffe's illegitimate son, finds employment as his mother's steward; William Dare,² the fruit of Captain de Stancy's unfortunate liaison, poses as a cosmopolitan; Ethelberta Petherwin,³ the daughter of a butler, after a propitious marriage, preserves the secret of her humble origin and wins distinction as a writer. Against such a background there is a piling up of misunderstandings and ironical contrasts. However, the fatalistic atmosphere which Hardy develops in creating his best instances of dramatic irony is lacking here.

Desperate Remedies

"Immature and melodramatic,"⁴ this early work abounds in mystery, suspense, and ingenious discovery. Into a compli-

¹
Desperate Remedies.

²
A Laodicean.

³
The Hand of Ethelberta.

⁴
Herbert B. Grimsditch, Character and Environment in the Novels of Thomas Hardy, p. 12.

cated plot are woven a blighted romance, a disastrous fire, an accidental murder, an attempt to defeat justice, a marriage contrived through strategy, a suicide, and a death-bed confession. The dramatic irony may be attributed to three motifs: (1) Miss Aldclyffe's efforts to unite her illegitimate son, Aeneas Manston, and Cytherea Graye; (2) the complications growing out of Cytherea's love for Edward Springrove; and (3) Manston's attempts to extricate himself from damaging entanglements.

By a quirk of circumstances, Cytherea Graye, orphaned in early womanhood, becomes a lady's maid to her father's first love, Cytherea Aldclyffe, after whom she has been named. One of the first objects to impress the girl in her new environment is a vacant manor house. Asked whether any 'horrid stories'⁵ have been told about it, the coachman replies:

' 'Tis jest the house for a ghastly hair-on-end story, that would make the parish religious. Perhaps it will have one some day to make it complete.'⁶

How vividly one recalls these words when, in the same setting, Manston later exhumes the body of his murdered wife!

Cytherea's first night with Miss Aldclyffe is an eventful one. Through the medium of a dream, it enhances the feeling of mystery and impending disaster. Frightened

⁵
Desperate Remedies, p. 66.

⁶
Ibid., p. 66.

to the limit of her endurance, the maid flees to her mistress' bedroom for protection, relating her vision of 'Time, with his wings, hour-glass, and scythe.'⁷

'...But I can't tell you. I can't bear to think of it. How the dogs howl! People say it means death.'⁸

What a singular coincidence that Miss Aldclyffe's father should be discovered dead in his bed the next morning!

When Miss Aldclyffe learns the identity of her new lady's maid, she entertains fond hopes of uniting the daughter of her only lover, and Manston, her illegitimate son. Her own romance with Ambrose Craye, Cytherea's father, had not been consummated because of her conscientious scruples about the past. Now the secret of her youthful indiscretion is most carefully guarded. Not even her son suspects the facts of his parentage, having been left in infancy on the doorsteps of a strange family. To bring Manston to the scene, Miss Aldclyffe advertises for a steward, carefully examining all signatures of replies until she finds the desired one. Then, despite the counsel of her lawyers, she appoints Manston. Mistaking her motives, these legal advisers furnish a startling example of dramatic irony.

'...if ever a woman's face spoke out plainly that she was in love with a man, hers did that she was in love with (Manston). Poor old maid, she's almost old enough to be his mother.'⁹

⁷

Ibid., p. 100.

⁸

Desperate Remedies, p. 100.

⁹

Ibid., p. 127.

Not content with one such thunderclap, Hardy hurls another at his readers. This time it comes from the lips of Mr. Springrove, Edward's father, when he discusses with the parish clerk Miss Aldclyffe's mysterious interest in the new steward.

'...She's in love wi' the man, that's what she is.'
'Then she's a bigger stumpoll than I took her for,'
said Mr. Springrove. 'Why, she's old enough to be his
mother.'¹⁰

That Edward Springrove should have assisted Cytherea in obtaining her situation with Miss Aldclyffe constitutes another ironic stroke. Unwittingly he has placed two serious obstacles in the course of his love. The first, Miss Aldclyffe's marital plans for Cytherea and Manston, has already been mentioned. The second comes with Miss Hinton's revelation of the past. Unconscious of addressing the girl who has replaced her in Edward's affections, she confides in Cytherea.

'He used to live at Budmouth as an assistant-architect, and I found out that a young giddy thing (Cytherea) who lives there somewhere took his fancy for a day or two. But I don't feel jealous at all--our engagement is so matter-of-fact neither of us can be jealous. And it was a mere flirtation--she was too silly for him.'¹¹

Noticing Cytherea's warmth of feeling, Miss Hinton looks suspiciously at her.

¹⁰
Desperate Remedies, p. 142.

¹¹
Ibid., p. 136.

'Do you know her or him?' said Miss Hinton. Cytherea caught at the chance afforded her of not betraying herself.
'Yes, I know her,' she said.¹²

Had Miss Hinton comprehended the full import of these words, what later catastrophe might not have been averted!

Miss Hinton's engagement to Edward is approached from another angle by Mr. Springrove, the elder. As yet unaware of his son's love for Cytherea, he recalls the past in a manner that almost makes the informed reader gasp at the incongruity.

'...When he used to write her (Miss Hinton) she'd creep up the lane and look back over her shoulder, and slide out the letter, and read a word and stand in thought looking at the hills and seeing none. Then the cuckoo would cry-- and away the letter would slip, and she'd start wi' fright at the mere bird....'¹³

The cuckoo's song, a symbol of unfaithfulness in love or marriage, illustrates Hardy's not infrequent parallels between natural phenomena and the corresponding affairs of deluded human beings.

Quick to take advantage of Edward's earlier engagement, Miss Aldclyffe makes Cytherea feel that the young man has trifled with her love. Most assiduously she pursues her argument, constantly referring to Manston as a worthy prospective husband. But her enthusiasm throws her off her guard, bringing a reference to her mysterious past from the

¹²

Idem.

¹³

Desperate Remedies, p. 146.

unsuspecting Cytherea.

'In refusing a man there is always the risk that you may never get another offer.'

'Why didn't you win the trick when you were a girl?' said Cytherea.

'...I'm not the text,' said Miss Aldclyffe, her face glowing like fire.¹⁴

Still the determined woman perseveres, undaunted by this rebuff, adding, 'you will please me very much by giving him some encouragement.'¹⁵

After his serious losses by fire, Edward's marriage to Miss Hinton is urged as financial expediency. Miss Aldclyffe, at the instigation of Manston, promises that Mr. Springrove need not rebuild on her freeholdings if Edward forgets Cytherea, who, it is insisted, already has interests elsewhere. Little does Mr. Springrove realize that his son's happiness has been the price paid for a release from the terms of Miss Aldclyffe's contract. Fate must be smiling sardonically as the father only superficially hints at the facts.

'I don't know what we should have done if Miss Aldclyffe had insisted upon the leases.... the steward had a hand in making it light for us, I know, and I heartily thank him for it.'¹⁶

The serious illness of her brother Owne precipitates Cytherea's marriage to Manston. In changing the time of her wedding from Christmas Day to Christmas Eve, the superstitious girl makes a serious mistake by not consulting her calendar,

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 249.

¹⁵ Desperate Remedies, p. 249.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 287.

choosing the very Friday she would have avoided. The dreaded event arrives all too soon, omens and premonitions predicting an ill-starred union. She endures the ordeal, only to learn immediately after the vows are solemnized that Edward is free to love her, Miss Hinton having unexpectedly married someone else. Here is apparent Hardy's unbounded delight in playing upon the tricks of circumstance, a contrast between expectations and results.

Forebodings which are not seriously considered often call for ironical contrasts. Such is Owen's experience immediately after Cytherea's marriage, when he comments:

'If there is ever any meaning in those heavy feelings which are called presentiments--and I don't believe there is--there will be in mine today....
Poor Little Cytherea!'¹⁷

What a pathetic situation! Himself uttering a verbal truth, he fails to grasp its full import.

To heighten this sense of impending disaster, Hardy again resorts to coincidence by having Manston and Cytherea assigned to room 13 at the Southampton Hotel. What a grim concurrence when viewed in the events of that fateful night! It is here the bride learns that the first Mrs. Manston, reported as perished in the fire at Springrove's inn, has been seen by a porter. This discovery strangely excites Manston. Later we learn why. He had accidentally killed his wife in a fit of anger after seeing her alive following the fire.

¹⁷

Desperate Remedies, p. 286.

Then, to cover all evidence of his crime, he had hidden her body in an old-fashioned brick oven near the manor house, throwing her watch and keys, together with some bones from the pile near the cemetery, into the ashes of the burning inn. Now, with the gallows looming in the future, he daringly advertises for his missing wife to escape suspicion. Strangely enough, he receives a reply (forged, of course). This letter, read to Mr. Dickinson, a bachelor friend, meets with a reaction quite different from the one intended for it by Manston.

'Well, that's a rum story,' said Mr. Dickinson, interrupting.

'What's a rum story?' said Manston hastily, and flushing in the face.

'Forgetting her watch and dropping her keys in her hurry.'¹⁸

Anne Seaway enters the story at this point. Persuaded to play the role of the first Mrs. Manston, she lives in ignorance of the crime she helps to cover. Nevertheless, she has a presentiment that all is not well. At last, when she can contain her curiosity no longer, she demands an explanation of her position. Manston tries to satisfy her with this enigma:

'...You must know that you are body and soul united with me, though you are but my housekeeper.'¹⁹

He has used fatal words in speaking so deprecatingly to a fallen woman. The thrust that follows stings him with its

¹⁸

Desperate Remedies, p. 319.

¹⁹

Ibid., p. 382.

deeper implications:

She bridled at the remark. 'Wife,' she said, 'most certainly wife, since you cannot dismiss me without losing your character and position, and incurring heavy penalties.'

'I own it--it is well said, though mistakenly--very mistakenly.'²⁰

Such is the novel of mystery and suspense, terminated after many pages of harrowing incidents by Manston's suicide and Miss Aldclyffe's death-bed confession. Other instances of dramatic irony might be cited, but those already listed show adequately Hardy's early fondness for sensational contrasts and misunderstandings. Compared with his later novels, in which tragic incongruities are the outgrowth of a skillfully-created fatalistic background, this first-published venture in fiction is decidedly inferior. There is too much concentration on the material circumstances of plot and counterplot.

A Laodicean

On the surface, a theme based upon the flux of a woman's fancies would give promise of a charming and delightful tale. The reader is doomed to disappointment, however, for this story, begun in a magazine, had to "be strung out to its five hundred pages. The obvious thing to do was to introduce a villain (or several villains), a mystery (or several mysteries), and to set going complications and misunder-

20

Idem.

standings which should take time for clearing up and duly put off the hour of the happy ending."²¹

The opening incident presents the luke-warm and vacillating heroine, Paula Power. On the occasion of her repudiation of her father's faith, George Somerset, a young architect, enters her life. He has come to inspect the de Stancy Castle, which has passed from an ancient, but impoverished, family into the hands of Paula's wealthy father, now deceased. Little does Charlotte de Stancy, Paula's dearest friend, realize the bearing her words may have when, in her conversation with the newly-arrived Somerset, Miss Power becomes the topic of discussion:

'You are her good friend, I am sure,' he remarked.

She looked into the air with tacit admission of the impeachment. 'So would you be if you knew her.'²²

These words are significant in that they presage the young man's love for Paula.

When Somerset is growing in favor with the heroine, the introduction of William Dare, the mysterious wise boy, comes as a check to his progress. An illegitimate son of Charlotte's brother, Captain de Stancy, Dare visualizes the benefits accruing to himself from a marriage between his father and Paula. Consequently, he haunts Somerset's steps, seeking opportunities to perpetrate his villainies. As no

²¹

J. W. Beach, The Technique of Thomas Hardy, p. 119.

²²

A Laodicean, p. 371.

one suspects his connection with de Stancy, frequent ironical situations arise. One is occasioned by Paula's joking reference to a fancied resemblance between Charlotte and Dare:

'He is something like you, Charlotte,' said Paula, smiling playfully at her companion.

All the men looked at Charlotte, on whose face a delicate nervous blush thereupon made its appearance.

' 'Pon my word there is a likeness, now I think of it,' said Havill.²³

Nor is Hardy content with a single stroke of irony of this subject. Dare himself must be made to emphasize the anomalous connection with de Stancy in a discussion with Havill, Somerset's rival architect. In answer to a query about his birthplace, the extraordinary lad has this to say:

'It would be a fact worth the telling. The secret of my birth lies here.' And Dare slapped his breast with his right hand.²⁴

That these words will be taken literally, Dare does not anticipate. His double-edged language, uttered with an intention to deceive, does not mislead Havill, who uncovers the breast of the sleeping boy one night and discovers de Stancy's name in tattooing.

Once our novelist has begun to stress such incongruities, he continues with overwhelming frequency. Not for a moment is the reader allowed to forget the delicate situation

²³

Ibid., p. 80.

²⁴

A Laodicean, p. 158.

in which Dare is placed by the mystery of his birth. One has a feeling that Hardy goes out of his way to create startling contrasts.

Adroitly is de Stancy's early indifference towards Paula developed into an instance of dramatic irony. When Charlotte first suggests an acquaintance between Miss Power and the captain, the latter's disapproval is most positive:

'No, thank you,' said de Stancy grimly. 'I prefer to remain a stranger to Miss Power--Miss Steam-Power, she ought to be called--and to all her possessions.'²⁵

His reaction towards Paula is vastly different after he has secretly watched her performances in the private gymnasium. Accordingly he tells Charlotte that 'the castle and what it contains have a keen interest' for him now.²⁶

It is a bitter moment when de Stancy learns from his sister that his former aloofness has been to his detriment.

'.....What does she know about me--do you ever speak to her of me?'
 'Only in general terms.'
 'What general terms?'
 'You know well enough, William; of your idiosyncrasies and so on--that you are a bit of a woman-hater, or at least a confirmed bachelor.'²⁷

Miss Power's interest in Mr. Somerset seriously interferes with Dare's plans for de Stancy. This difficulty can be overcome if Mr. Havill gets the commission to restore

²⁵ Ibid., p. 171.

²⁶ One cannot help remembering a similar instance in Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde. The hero, before succumbing to the charms of love, boasts of his freedom. His change of heart, occasioned by his sudden passion for Criseyde, brings about an incongruous reversal.

²⁷ A Laodicean, p. 204

de Stancy Castle, Mr. Somerset then having no further reason for remaining in the locality. But the scheming villain's wish is not gratified, as he discovers one morning upon entering with de Stancy Paula's quarters:

'She's at the telegraph,' said Dare, throwing forward his voice softly to the captain.
'What can that be for so early? That wire is a nuisance to my mind; such constant intercourse with the outside world is bad for our romance.'²⁸

The truth of this concluding remark he soon learns. Havill, having suffered pangs of conscience because of his unprofessional act in secretly examining Somerset's drawing--Dare had arranged this treachery--has definitely removed himself from the competition. Paula's telegraphing has been to notify Somerset of appointment.

Havill's unethical conduct furnishes additional material for dramatic irony. Parson Woodwell creates this strong contrast through his sympathy for the troubled Havill, of whose misbehavior he is ignorant.

'... he seems to have something on his mind--some trouble which words will not reach. If ever you are passing his door, please give him a look in. He fears calling on you might be an intrusion.'²⁹

Dare refuses to accept defeat. Through brazen artifices this scoundrel misrepresents Somerset to Paula, gaining for de Stancy an ascendancy in the lady's good will. When the

28

Ibid., p. 203.

29

A Laodicean, p. 291.

architect finds himself out of favor with his loved one, he hears her denounced by Mr. Woodwell for succumbing to the worldly ways of the de Stancies. Still loyal to her, he rises to her defense:

'You mistake her,' murmured Somerset
 'Miss Power has some very rare and beautiful qualities in her nature, though I confess I tremble--fear lest the de Stancy influence be too strong.'³⁰

The import of these words is lost to Mr. Woodwell, who is unaware of Somerset's personal objection to de Stancy.

Several misunderstandings attend de Stancy's intrusion into the architect's relations with Miss Power. Especially arresting is the one which grows out of the conversation between Somerset and Sir William de Stancy, the captain's father, who looks with pleasure at a prospective union between his son and the heiress.

'My son has skill in gallantry, and now he is about to exercise it profitably.'

'May nobody wish him more harm in that exercise than I do!' said Somerset fervently.³¹

The old gentlemen's complacent nature would have been greatly perturbed had he caught the subtle undertone of Somerset's voice.

Grim dramatic irony follows one of de Stancy's unreciprocated advances towards Paula. In dejection he re-

³⁰

Idem.

³¹

A Laodicean, p. 309.

marks:

'Well, mine is a fallen family, and we must abide caprices. Would to heaven it were extinguished!'³²

That this very moment an unopened telegram with the message of his father's death awaits him in his room is an amazing coincidence.

The conclusion of this novel brings poetic justice and corresponding instances of dramatic irony. These two often cover different grounds, dramatic irony being independent of merit and demerit,³³ but here they coincide. Mr. Power, Paula's uncle, and Dare cross swords. The former threatens to expose the boy's criminal misrepresentations of Somerset if he does not leave the country, considering his presence a possible source of embarrassment in the event of Paula's marriage to de Stancy. Power's efforts, instead of producing the expected results, place him in an uncomfortable position. Dare, it appears, is familiar with Power's criminal record and the reward that would be paid by several countries for his capture. So it is the older man himself who must leave England, caught in the very trap he had set for Dare.

But the young rascal does not go unscathed. On the morning of her proposed wedding, Paula learns from Charlotte of Dare's villainy towards Somerset. When de Stancy comes to take her to the altar, a dramatic scene ensues: she insists that a criminal must first be apprehended.

³²

Ibid, pp. 400

³³

Germaine Dempster, Dramatic Irony in Chaucer, pp. 9

'But my dear Paula, who is it?--What has he done?'
 'It is Dare--that young man you see there against
 the sky.'³⁴

Caught in this extremity, de Stancy identifies his illegitimate son and loses Paula. The artifices which should have won him his bride have proved his undoing. Realizing the fallacy of his dishonest methods, he breaks with Dare. His son, the thorn in his flesh, responds in ambiguous terms:

'Part we will then--till we meet again. It will be a light night hereabouts, I think this evening.'

'A very dark one for me.'

'Nevertheless, I think it will be a light night.'³⁵

De Stancy is so much engrossed in his own troubles that he fails to catch the deeper significance of Dare's words. Perhaps he recalls his son's statements later that night when a fire of incendiary origin burns de Stancy Castle.

The Hand of Ethelberta

That the author of the deeply tragic *Jude* could have written a slight and humorous novel like The Hand of Ethelberta can not fail to puzzle the reader. The ludicrous contrasts occasioned by the ambitions of a social climber constitute material quite foreign to that of the later works which have established Hardy's fame. Examples of dramatic irony in The Hand of Ethelberta obviously are lighter and more superficial than those to be studied in the other chapters of this thesis.

Incongruous contrasts materialize when *Ethelberta*, a

34

A Laodicean, pp. 431

35

A Laodicean, pp. 473

butler's daughter, withholds her identity after her marriage to a man of a higher social sphere. Following the death of her husband, she aspires to recognition from the exclusive circles. By utilizing her poetic and histrionic talents, she achieves the coveted distinction. One day, after she has been entertained as the guest of honor in the home of her father's employment, the topic of conversation unexpectedly turns to the butler. Here Hardy deftly manipulates the situation for a strangely satirical contrast. One of the guests has remarked that the butler must be a very extra-ordinary man.

'...He reads a great deal, I dare say?'

'I don't think so.'

'I noticed how wonderfully his face kindled when we began talking about the poems (Ethelberta's) during dinner. Perhaps he is poet in disguise.'³⁶

Who does not relish such delusions when a member of the upper social strata becomes the victim?

Often the facetious speeches made by the character in an idle moment are converted by Hardy into dramatic irony. For example, when Ethelberta's father advises her to maintain her social superiority, she replies that the only way is by marriage.

'Marriage? Who are you going to marry?'

'God knows. Perhaps Lord Mountclere. Stranger things have happened.'³⁷

What playful imp might have prompted her to speak so imprudently? She scarcely knows Lord Mountclere as yet. These words

³⁶

The Hand of Ethelberta, pp 59

³⁷

Ibid., pp 232

become amusing when one learns that she later marries the nobleman.

As additional irony growing out of remarks without any idea of their seriousness, the almost pathetic Christopher Julian affords an illustration. Of a good but poor family, he wastes his affections on the ambitious Ethelberta, whose sister Picotee loves him unobserved. It is after he has been refused a second time that Ethelberta, knowing Picotee's secret, tells him:

'Care for us both equally!'
'I will,'³⁸ said Christopher, scarcely knowing what he said.

Finally, after Ethelberta is lost to him, he becomes conscious of Picotee's affections and marries her.

The connection between Ethelberta and Picotee, carefully kept under cover, calls for another bit of dramatic irony. Hardy's pleasure in harping on mistaken identity crops out at every turn. This time Picotee, in refuting a deprecatory story about her sister, finds herself in a trying situation.

'Tell us all about it, do,' said Menlove (a lady's maid).
'O no,' said Picotee. 'I promised not to say a word'
'It is your mistress, I expect.'
'You may think what you like; but the lady is anything but a mistress of mine.'³⁹

Ethelberta's capture of Lord Mountclere meets with hearty protests from members of her family. Her brother Sol counsels her thus:

³⁸

The Hand of Ethelberta, pp. 187.

³⁹

Ibid., pp 246.

'Of course there's something wrong in it, or he wouldn't have married you--something which won't be righted without terrible suffering.'⁴⁰

But Sol himself little suspects how accurately he has summed up the situation. Within a short time Ethelberta discovers the existence of Mountclere's mistress. As Sol had predicted, the wrong is not 'righted without terrible suffering.' However, the ingenious Ethelberta soon gains the sovereignty, and all is well.

Thus Hardy concludes one of his few essays at comedy. Dramatic irony, as we have seen, is present in this novel, though barely suggesting the skill with which the novelist uses it in his tragic stories. In this work the emphasis is on the humorously satirical episodes; in his major novels it rests upon the sad and inevitable misfortunes of erring humanity.

40

Ibid., pp.424.

III. ROMANCES AND FANTASIES

Leaving the novels of excessive intrigue, we turn to the works in which Hardy's fondness for the bizarre is apparent. In this group of romances and fantasies a philosophical tone, provocative of thoughtful contemplation, replaces extravagant ingenuity of plot. The desired ironical contrasts are achieved through a masterful interplay between character and circumstance.¹ The reader follows with interest the affairs of Elfride Swancourt, Stephen Smith, and Henry Knight,² fascinated by the startling dramatic irony of the denouement. Similarly, the psychological approach to the incongruous incidents growing out of Lady Constantin's love for Swithin St. Cleve³ does not fail of pleasurable acceptance with the student of literature. Except in The Well-Beloved, the concentration upon the force of coincidence, though ever paramount, becomes more convincing than in the earlier Desperate Remedies, for example.

A Pair of Blue Eyes

Slight in plot, this novel creates dramatic irony through the fickleness of its appealing heroine, Elfride Swancourt. It is the story of a girl who first loves someone in the social scale beneath hers, attempts an elopment, changes her mind at

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Based upon the discussion in the introduction to H. B. Grimsditch's Character and Environment in Thomas Hardy.

²

A Pair of Blue Eyes.

³

Two on a Tower.

the crucial moment, and later, in the absence of her betrothed, reciprocates the affections of his closest friend. Her failure to make certain confessions at the proper time leads to grave misunderstandings and a truly dramatic conclusion.

The first to ruffle the even tenor of Elfride's uneventful life with her clergyman father is Stephen Smith, a young architect who has come to submit plans for the restoration of a country church. Although he had once been a resident of this rural community, his long sojourn in London has obscured the facts concerning his family connections. It is with a bold hand that Hardy lays on the irony at the early stage. An ardent respecter of 'blue blood,' Parson Swancourt tries to link Stephen's ancestry with that of an ancient family. Since the young man's father is merely a stone mason within the vicar's parish, the situation grows quite amusing.

'. . .but it is as plain as the nose in your face that there's your origin! And, Mr. Smith, I congratulate you upon your blood; blue blood, sir; and, upon my life, a very desirable colour as the world goes.'⁴

When Swancourt later learns the identity of his visitor, he has every reason to rue these words. Especially humiliating to the father is his daughter's affection for the young architect. Dogmatically the deluded vicar orders the girl to break all connections with this acquaintance.

Finding her romance opposed, Elfride agrees to Smith's plans for an elopement and a secret marriage. Once arrived in London, she repents her rashness and decides to hasten home

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A Pair of Blue Eyes, pp. 16.

before her folly is discovered. By rushing frantically, she and her companion barely catch the train, overhearing these words from station spectators: 'Those two youngsters had a near run for it, and no mistake!'⁵ What a thrust to sear the conscience of the already-troubled Elfride, who must have given her individual construction to this passing stroke!

His romance temporarily halted, Smith accepts an appointment to a post in India. His closest friend, Henry Knight, a man of letters, now makes Elfride's acquaintance. Superbly does Hardy weave ironies into the resulting situations. It is with sheer delight, though somewhat of a shock, that the reader observes the similarity between Elfride's actions with Knight, now secretly an aspirant for her hand, and her former trysts with Smith. The game of chess, now reversed in the heroine's defeat and Knight's bad plays to humor his opponent; the ecstatic love scenes on the rock ledge overlooking the sea--all forcibly recall occurrences in earlier chapters. An admirable symmetry does Hardy attain here, a method to be studied later in connection with The Woodlanders. That the author definitely plans such reduplicating incidents is typical of his method.

Not content with these ironical recurrences, Hardy must return Smith to the scene. Unaware of Elfride's change in heart, the young architect hopes to override Swancourt's objections and lead his bride to the altar. What bitter despair is his when he learns she belongs to him no longer!

5

A Pair of Blue Eyes, p. 126.

But the most painful discovery, that his best friend has unwittingly replaced him, must yet be made. It follows under singular circumstances, at the newly-prepared tomb of Lady luxelian, where, by a twist of fate, Elfride and Knight meet Smith. Suspecting nothing of his fiancée's earlier intimacies with the architect, Knight makes an introduction, adding in a lower tone, an announcement of his engagement. Moments tense with emotion follow for two persons.

'I congratulate you,' Stephen whispered; and said aloud, 'I know Miss Swancourt--a little. You must remember that my father is a parishioner of Mr. Swancourt's'

'I have seen Mr. Smith,' faltered Elfride.⁶

With vehemence Hardy lays on further strokes of dramatic irony, sedulously seizing every possibility the occasion affords. Almost pathetic is Knight's blindness as he says:

'...Miss Swancourt, you are particularly silent. You mustn't mind Smith. I have known him for years, as I have told you.'⁷

Noticing Smith's apparent reserve, Knight comments upon it, inviting his friend to a return of their former intimacy and confidence. Then with a sudden turn, he adds:

'I have not forgotten the attachment you spoke of as your reason for going away to India. A London young lady, was it not? I hope all is prosperous?'⁸

Such are the misunderstandings upon which Hardy dwells, incongruities cropping out at every turn. So markedly does

6

A Pair of Blue Eyes, p. 300.

7

Idem.

8

Ibid., p 301.

the novelist continue to play up Knight's ignorance of Elfride's past that the reader starts in amazement. Inexperienced in the art of love-making, the man of letters expects to find the impossible in his choice--a girl without any former attachments, one from whose lips a kiss has never stolen the virgin bloom. The prototype of veracity, she must confide implicitly in her betrothed.

'. . . this is one thing I do love to see in a woman--that is, a soul truthful and clear as heaven's light. I could put up with anything if I had that--forgive nothing if I had it not. Elfride, you have such a soul if woman ever had. . . .'⁹

What must be the sensitive girl's qualms when these stinging words are flung at her? Still harboring the secret of her runaway escapade, she lacks the necessary courage to confess. She can only sit transfixed, conscious of the further cruelly-humorous irony Knight heaps upon himself. Such is the case when he naively expresses no regret at being a novice in the art of philandering 'Because you (Elfride) know less of love-making and matrimonial prearrangement than I do, and so you can't draw invidious comparisons if I do my engaging improperly.'¹⁰

Elfride's inhibitions finally lead to disastrous consequences. The first blow descends while she and Knight are sitting on the ledge she once occupied with Smith. Her companion's words take a precarious turn.

9

A Pair of Blue Eyes, p 307.

10

Ibid., p. 332.

'I wonder if any lovers in past years ever sat here with arms locked, as we do now. Probably they have, for the place seems formed for a seat.'¹¹

Knight has not long to wait for an answer, for an evil fate soon makes Elfride its victim. The sunlight, which falls upon this alcove only a few minutes each day, now reveals in a crevice the ornament she once had lost while with Smith. This disclosure has given her away. By degrees Knight worms from her fragmentary stories of the past, the rift coming at a later date. With master strokes Hardy lays on the irony as he takes these lovers to the grave over which Elfride and Smith once kissed. Grim is this setting in that a still earlier lover, Felix Jethway, lies beneath the tombstone. His untimely death has been attributed by his mother to a lack of encouragement on Elfride's part. It is the mother of the deceased who finally apprises Knight of the details of Elfride's attempted elopement with Smith. The shaft has hit its mark; Knight severs all connections with his beloved; Mrs. Jethway has been revenged.

Her romance blasted, Elfride resigns herself to a passive existence. When Lord Luxelian, a widower with two children, asks for her hand, her acceptance follows with a little urging from Swancourt. This development is certainly another link in Hardy's chain of contrasts, as becomes apparent when one remembers it was Lady Luxelian's tomb before which the heroine had once paused with her lovers. Additional irony

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A Pair of Blue Eyes, p. 352.

arises from the fact that Luxelian's daughters had called her 'little mamma' when their own mother still lived.

Knowing nothing of this recent marriage, Knight cannot dismiss the blue eyes from his mind. When he learns it is Smith who first loved Elfride, a fact not included in Mrs. Jethway's story, bitter remorse smites him for his unmerciful harshness. The architect, on the other hand, considering Elfride unattached, entertains hopes of reinstating himself in her favor. A most ironical scene does Hardy stage when the two men meet in a railway coach, their destination Endelstow, the home of the woman they both love. Wrangling over the prospect of success in their proposed suits, they little suspect that this very train carries Elfride's coffin!

Great is their distress when they reach Endelstow and learn of their fair one's death. A second time we follow our two rivals to the Luxelian vault, a visit made auspicious by the preparation of a new tomb. We visualize a similar occasion in this place when Elfride, asked by Knight to continue a passage from the Hundred-and-Second Psalm shortly before the first Lady Luxelian's interment, quoted in a voice quivering emotionally at the unexpected meeting with Smith:

"My days, just hastening to their end,
Are like an evening shade;
My beauty doth, loke withered grass,
With waning lustre fade."¹²

As the disconsolate comrades, now wholly reconciled,

12

A Pair of Blue Eyes, p. 143

leave the tomb, one wonders whether they are conscious of the irony which has been played at their expense. It is just a pair of blue eyes that caused all their past misunderstandings, just a winsome bit of womanhood that stirred to the quick their hitherto uneventful lives. It is a mere bit of femininity that excited their fancies, only to end all in keen disappointment.

The Trumpet-Major

This essay in comedy presents another plot with the paths of the heroine and her two admirers crossing in curious patterns. Its setting is a Dorsetshire coast village in the early nineteenth century, when anticipated invasions by Napoleon were causing considerable excitement. Against this historical background, Hardy, with lightness of touch, unfolds a rather tender story. Anne Hamilton, a widow's daughter; Hohn Loveday, the trumpet-major; and Robert Loveday, a sailor, are the principals. Appealing is the portrayal of the admirable soldier whose unstinted generosity towards his younger brother promotes the important incongruities in this novel.

An early instance of dramatic irony attends the introduction of Matilda Johnson, Robert Loveday's fiancée of recent acquaintance. Carefree and irresponsible by nature, the sailor has made no inquires about her mottled past. That she has been an actress who surrendered herself to improprieties with companies of dragoons is a fact he does not divine. It is an alarming moment that follows her accidental allusion to salaries now paid to actresses. His interest aroused,

Robert asks what she knows about the theater. When she weakly refers to the newspapers as her source of information, the deceived boy innocently continues:

' . . . I'll take you there (the theater) some day.
Would it be a treat to you?'

'O, an amazing treat,' said Miss Johnson, with an ecstasy in which a close observer might have discovered a tinge of ghastliness.

'You've never been into one perhaps, dear?'
'N-never,' said Matilda flatly.¹³

With discovery thus brazenly evaded, Matilda feels herself secure. But her equanimity is decidedly disturbed when she finds that Robert's brother John possesses the secret of her indiscretions. The noble trumpet-major, wishing to save the happy sailor's feelings, quietly takes upon himself the responsibility of sending Matilda on her way, not realizing what an evil turn he has served himself. He soon recognizes his error, however. Robert, after the jolting disillusionment, seeks refuge with Anne, whose tender feelings towards John he does not suspect. When the young lady shortly afterwards responds to the sailor's attentions, the trumpet-major becomes the victim of dramatic irony through this reversal in his own happiness.

A further contrast results through Robert's ignorance of this encroachment. Being misled by John's subterfuge-- a fabricated story of the trumpet-major's infatuation for an actress--he disregards all signs that might enlighten him.

13

The Trumpet-Major, p.143.

To Anne he comments, not once perceiving his brother's gallant unselfishness:

' . . . Do you know, Anne, I half thought it was you John cared about; and it was a weight off my heart when he said he didn't.'¹⁴

Pathetic is his blindness as he continues with a statement about John's supposed love for an actress:

'I would rather it had been one of our own neighbor's girls, whose birth and breeding we know of. How very quick he has been! I certainly wish we could see her!'¹⁵

With yet more gusto does Hardy accentuate the irony of this misunderstanding. It reaches considerable proportions when Robert supposes Matilda Johnson to be the actress to whom John alluded as a sweetheart. Astonishing is the incongruity as the erring sailor laughingly remarks:

'A sly rascal! . . . 'Pretending on the day she came to be married that she was not good enough for me, when it was only that he wanted her himself.'¹⁶

Then, considering himself most generous and forgiving, he voices his intention of presenting John with a lock of Matilda's hair.

'I am going to give it to Jack--he'll jump for joy to get it! And it will show how willing I am to give her up to him, fine piece as she is.'¹⁷

This state of affairs continues until Robert accidentally

¹⁴

The Trumpet-Major, p. 260.

¹⁵

Idem.

¹⁶

Idem.

¹⁷

The Trumpet-Major, p. 292.

catches glimpses of the truth. With a violent reaction he senses his mistake. To correct matters, he enters the king's naval service, leaving Anne for John. Once away from Dorsetshire, he yields to a sporadic fancy for a young woman in another port. Information of this development is brought the Lovedays by a sailor, a stranger to the family. Unobserved, Anne overhears the story. At last she interrupts the conversation:

'Do you speak of Robert Loveday as courting a wife?' she asked, without the least betrayal of emotion.

'I didn't see you, Moss,' replied Cornick, turning.

'Yes, your brother (he mistakes her identity) hev' his eye on a wife, and he deserves one. I hope you don't mind?'

'Not in the least,' she said, with a stage laugh. 'I am interested, naturally.'¹⁸

Had the narrator realized the extent of Anne's interest, his comments might have been greatly modified.

With Robert's return to Dorsetshire and his ultimate marriage to Anne--the temporary fascination for the other girl had soon subsided--Hardy concludes this coil of misunderstandings and incongruities. John Loveday's sacrifices have adequately illustrated the author's method of playing upon disappointments and unrealized desires. Here, as elsewhere in Hardy's novels, the dramatic irony hinges upon a principal character's failure to disclose certain vital secrets.

¹⁸

Ibid., p. 319.

Two on a Tower

As Hardy states in his preface, this psychological study of a woman's passion for a young man some years her junior "was the outcome of a wish to set the emotional history of two infinitesimal lives against the stupendous background of the stellar universe."¹⁹ Staged in this unusual setting, the romance between Lady Constantine and Swithin St. Cleeve sometimes approaches the sublimity of poetry. Notwithstanding the ecstasy experienced during these idyllic passages, the reader is ever reminded by an extraordinary concatenation of events that ironic flourishes are inevitable.

The first intimation of these unavoidable contrasts is suggested by an early conversation between the two principal characters--Swithin St. Cleeve, a scientist with an overmastering ambition to become astronomer royal, and Lady Constantine, whose old stone tower on the estate furnishes a base for the young man's nocturnal observations. At an unexpected meeting in this improvised observatory, Swithin sounds a warning:

'If you are cheerful and wish to remain so, leave the study of astronomy alone. Of all the sciences, it alone deserves the character of the terrible.'²⁰

Her disregarding this timely advice--she archly professes an interest in the heavens as an excuse for her frequent visits to the tower--later proves disastrous.

19

Preface to Two on a Tower, vii.

20

Two on a Tower, p. 35.

The fires of desire kindled, the capricious Viviette Constantine steals to her youthful friend many an evening, cautiously avoiding witnesses to her activities, as her jealous husband, Sir Blount, may return unexpectedly from a hunting expedition to Africe. Since Swithin's astronomical facilities are inadequate, she overjoys the scientist with the promise of an equatorial. This purchase will help her develop a hobby, she roguishly explains.

'And I shall let you have the use of it whenever you choose. In brief, Swithin St. Cleeve shall be Lady Constantine's Astronomer Royal; and she--and she--',²¹

The situation becomes arresting as the innocent boy naively supplies, 'Shall be his Queen.'²¹

A deeper interpretation of this chance remark flashes upon Swithin later, but not until he has unconsciously subjected himself to further ironical contrasts. Notable among them is one following the announcement of Sir Blount's death. Viviette has come to explain her poverty, which has been newly created by her widowhood. When she expresses her intention of remaining in this locality by living unpretentiously in a small part of her present abode, the enthusiastic scientist misconstrues her motive. His observation amusingly shows his ignorance:

'Your love of astronomy is getting as strong as mine!' he said ardently. 'You could not tear yourself away from the observatory!'²²

Her husband's decease, he says, will leave her free to follow

²¹

Two on a Tower, p. 56.

²²

Two on a Tower, p. 92.

her hobby. Quickly he adds regretfully that she may spoil all by entering into a union with some 'Uninteresting squire.' The significance of the following very pointed remark by Viviette he fails to grasp:

'If I fall a prey to any man, it will not be to a country squire.'²³

An untoward incident finally opens his eyes. Several villagers, whom he has promised an observation from the telescope, select this particular evening for the novel experience. Trapped in the tower with Lady Constantine, Swithin locks the entrance. As he pauses on the steps, he overhears the men jocosely discussing Viviette's life with the late Sir Blount. That the dead man has bequeathed her little impresses them. Then, with the surge of a tidal wave comes the turning point in St. Cleeve's life as one of the speakers makes the rejoinder:

'. . . He ought to have bequeathed to her our young gent, Mr. St. Cleeve, as some sort of amends. I'd up and marry en, if I were she; since her downfall has brought 'em quite near together, and made him as good as she in rank.'²⁴

This revelation coming like a bolt out of the clear, brings results. Once aware of his 'Queen's' love, Swithin secretly marries her.

Up to this point in the story, Hardy's dramatic irony has been characterized more or less by its amusing twists and

²³

Ibid., p. 93.

²⁴

Ibid., p. 96.

harmless humor. After this stage of the plot, however, the instances become more caustic; they are frequently loaded with stinging thrusts. Especially is the reader aware of these biting contrasts after the introduction of the Bishop of Melchester. How the good-natured and amusing turns give way to the mordant onslaughts, we shall let representative quotations illustrate.

When the Bishop comes to the parish for a special confirmation ceremony, complications arise. Almost immediately he evinces a fondness for Lady Constantine, the secret of her marriage to the astronomer still being preserved, of course. Yet greater becomes the maze of complexities when Tabitha Lark, the church organist, grows quite affable towards Swithin. This strange combination of circumstances Hardy repeatedly converts into instances of dramatic irony. Such is an example afforded by Tabith's casually remarking to St. Cleeve that the Bishop seems devoted to Viviette. Then she takes her companion unaware with her surprisingly-accurate analysis of the case:

'I don't think she cares much for him' added Tabitha judiciously. 'Or, even if she does, she could be got away from him in no time by a younger man.'²⁵

An additional ironical stroke is achieved with the clergyman as the medium. Since the Bishop had formerly known Swithin's father and now has just recently confirmed the son, he follows with kindly interest the scientist's

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Two on a Tower, p. 97.

activities. But on a visit to the tower, he experiences a reversion of feeling, for he glimpses evidences of a woman's hasty retreat. Not knowing it is Lady Constantine, naturally, he sternly reprimands Swithin the next day for unseemly conduct. Tensely dramatic is this incident in that it takes place outside the church, just a few yards from where, but a moment ago, the Bishop was happily chatting with Viviette and her brother Louis. His Christian admonitions administered, the deluded cleric returns to his hostess, paying her his urbane attentions with much less authority than the man whom he has chastised.

It is Louis, who, for financial and social reasons, encourages his guest in a fruitless suit. To his sister he advocates this coveted match with much insistence. Not understanding her protests, he descends upon her with the clap of doom:

'I said it was no use to think of young men; they won't look at you much longer; or if they do, it will be to look away again very quickly.'

'You imply that if I were to marry a man younger than myself he would speedily acquire a contempt for me? How much younger must a man be than his wife--to get that feeling for her?'

'An exceedingly small number of years,' said Louis drily.²⁶

To Viviette, who already entertains fears of Swithin's disillusionment, these words come like a judgment.

But her sensitive nature must be taxed with yet more anguish. This time the cruel blast comes as the result of

an official communication to the effect that Sir Blound had died at a later date than the one first indicated. The news overwhelms her, for it means that her first husband was still living at least six weeks after her marriage to Swithin. The executors of the will, having been misinformed, had falsely sworn to Blount's death.

'They little think what they have done to me by being so ready to swear!' she murmured.

Mr. Cecil (the messenger), supposing her to allude only to the pecuniary straits in which she had been prematurely placed by the will taking effect a year before its due time, said, 'True. It has been your ladyship's loss and their gain.'²⁷

This attempt at sympathy must have penetrated with the force of a gimlet. It has been her loss, but to what inestimable extent Mr. Cecil far from suspects.

Her attempt to legalize her relations with St. Cleeve are suddenly terminated by another of Hardy's tricks of coincidence. She accidentally learns that the will of the astronomer's wealthy uncle provides a substantial annuity to be paid the nephew if he is still unmarried at the age of twenty-five. Here is his opportunity to go abroad and advance in his scientific studies. Overruling all his objections, she sends him off, an unattached man. Her grave error soon after makes itself manifest when she learns she is with child. But it is too late to recall Swithin; her letter does not reach him in time, he having changed

²⁷

Two on a Tower, p. 238.

his course by going directly to Cape Town. What a spectacular coincidence--that he should have gone to Africa, the place of Sir Blount's expedition! Hardy has again illustrated his fondness for dwelling on curious recurrences.

In her plight Lady Constantine turns to her brother, imparting the full details of her dilemma. The resourceful Louis immediately decides upon the Bishop as a means of legitimizing the child. Cunning is his artifice in renewing activities. Half apologetically he approaches the clergyman, suggesting that the reverend gentleman will probably make some sacrifice in allying himself with a woman of Viviette's retiring nature. The duped Bishop, happy his suit is finding favor, plunges headlong into the trap set for him. Grimly ironic is his speech:

'O, there is no sacrifice! Quite otherwise . . . I am induced to think that an early settlement of the question--an immediate coming to the point--which might be called early in the majority of cases (he refers to the recency of Viviette's widowhood), would be a right and considerate tenderness here.'²⁸

In supposing he will help to soften the grief of a recent bereavement, he errs hopelessly. Still more astounding is the contrast after he has been accepted:

' . . . Sheer weariness and distraction have driven her to me . . . A good and wise woman, she perceived what a true shelter from sadness was offered in this, and was not one to despise heaven's gift.'²⁹

²⁸ Two on a Tower, p. 287.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 290.

This strange sequence of events finally approaches a superbly ironic denouement. Soon after the Bishop's untimely death, St. Cleeve, now past twenty-five, returns to claim his wife and child. Very appropriately does Hardy place this closing episode on the tower, where Lady Constantine, accompanied by her flaxon-haired son, almost anxiously awaits Swithin, fearing the effects of her advanced years. Her child, wanting for diversion, suggests saying his prayers. This is the conversation the astronomer overhears as he approaches:

'Who shall I pray for?'

'Pray for Father.'

'But he is gone to heaven?'

A sigh from Viviette was distinctly audible.

'You made a mistake, didn' you, mother?' continued the little one.

'I must have. The strangest mistake a woman ever made!'³⁰

St. Cleeves's first look at Viviette shocks him irreparably. She has changed--changed almost unbelievably. She, quick to divine the workings of his mind, tells him marriage is impossible. Taking her literally--after all, he is a scientist--he is about to leave. But, yielding to a magnanimous impulse, he returns, embraces her, and insists upon marriage. The sudden happiness after the great suspense is too much for Viviette. She dies in his arms. And, with remarkable skill, Hardy climaxes this closing picture with the approach of Tabitha Lark, now an accomplished and beautiful lady. Of all persons, why must she alone come

³⁰

Two on a Tower, p. 310.

to the scene? The answer is an index to Hardy's method: here is a fitting conclusion to the succession of ironies. At the very moment of supreme joy Lady Constantine has made room for Tabitha Lark!

The Well-Beloved

Coming, in its first-published form, between two of Hardy's major works, Tess of the D'Urbervilles and Jude the Obscure, The Well-Beloved seems wanting in depth by comparison. In nature more like a poetic fantasy than a novel, it is built around an artist's quest for the elusive ideal of beauty. Rather far-fetched incongruities follow the platonic seeker's mistakes and reverses. Of these contrasts we shall consider only a few representative examples in the short space allotted this minor novel.

The basic irony of the plot--the mutation of the Well-Beloved through three generations to plague the central character for his youthful instability--rather taxes the reader's credulity. In a tone of levity Hardy delineates Jocelyn Pierston's besetting obsession through the successive philanderings with Avice the first, the second, and the third. The fickle man, already having loved promiscuously a dozen different women before he had reached the age of twenty, finally lights upon Avice Caro as the embodiment of his nymph. Because, following a slight difference, he deserts her for Marcia Bencomb, he falls a victim to a first ironic stroke. His new attraction, before he can complete arrangements for their marriage, suffers a change of heart

and pays him in his own coin.

The second stage in love's retaliation against the offender comes twenty years later when Pierston, having been absent all this time, returns for Avice's funeral. There he meets the beautiful daughter, also named Avice, the image of her mother. His overmastering love for the girl creates an arresting situation. Follows a gripping scene when, during one of his frequent walks with her, she speaks of her mother's youthful disappointment in love. Tense is the moment that brings this thrust:

'Her young man proved false to her because she wouldn't agree to meet him one night, and it grieved Mother almost all her life. I wouldn't ha' fretted about him, if I'd been she. She would never name his name, but I know he was wicked; and I hate to think of him.'³¹

Through a further jolt Pierston catches the irony which has played him a cruel joke. It is after he has taken Avice the second to his London apartments, hoping shortly to marry her, that her confession reveals to him his feminine counterpart. She, too, has been flippant, already having wrung the hearts of at least fifteen distraught men. At present, her caprices have temporarily ruptured the relationship with her husband. Her husband! Ah, bitter fate! Pierston sends her home, making what domestic reparations he can.

After another period of twenty years has elapsed, Pierston, now a 'young man of sixty,' is still seeking his

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The Well-Beloved, p. 101.

ideal of beauty. Called to the home of the widowed Avice II, he succumbs to the charms of Avice III, who, in spiritual and intellectual attributes, is even more like her grandmother than her mother. Still youthful in appearance, he aspires to win the young woman's devotion, assisted in this pursuit by Avice II. Expertly does Hardy manipulate the dramatic irony by keeping the young lady in ignorance of her admirer's age. Delightfully humorous is the contrast ushered in by her surprise on being told of Pierston's earlier visit to this locality. Her conjectures are most entertaining.

'It must have been when I was away--or when I was very little?'

'I don't think you were away.'

'But I don't think I could have been here.'
(Naturally, she had not yet been born).

'I think she was hiding in the parsley-bed,'
said Avice's mother blandly.³²

To complete the reversal and to squeeze out the last drop of irony, Hardy resorts to another use of coincidence. It is called to our attention by Avice III, who, after having promised her dying mother to marry Pierston, elopes with a former lover. This youthful devotee, to the reader's amazement, is the stepson of Marcia Bencomb, the woman who once replaced Avice I in Pierston's affections. Still more astounding is the incongruity in that the artist, the evening of the elopment, assists a stranger, who apparently is weak after a long illness, up a steep pass. It is his

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The Well-Beloved, p. 165.

rival whom he unconsciously helps to the secret trysting place. Yet bolder grows the irony when the young man, unobserved by the household, is admitted by Avice III and permitted to spend the night in the bridegroom chamber intended for Pierston! The tricked lover of sixty later finds his deceiver's cane in the room.

This rather forced combination of recurring similar situations draws to a close with Pierston's marriage to Marcia. His quest is ended, as he no longer has appreciations for the aesthetic, having suddenly lost all of his artistic faculties. With this settlement Hardy leaves the weakest novel in this group of romances and fantasies. As has already been intimated, it is the least convincing in its handling of coincidence. May we not attribute this deficiency to the fact that Hardy wrote the novel in his breathing spell between two masterpieces?

IV. NOVELS OF CHARACTER AND ENVIRONMENT

In the novels of character and environment, Hardy's artistry reaches its zenith. For the most part, an undue emphasis on artifice and machination, particularly typical of the first group treated in this thesis, gives way to a dignified simplicity in plots. Selecting a character from the common walks of life, the novelist, with remarkable proficiency, weaves about him a closely-knit web of circumstances. In trying to extricate himself from this entanglement, the victim struggles hopelessly against an inescapable necessity. This fatalistic background created, the author unflinchingly plies his strokes of dramatic irony.

Under a Greenwood Tree

Quite unlike the other novels belonging to this general division, the simple but charming story based on the courtship of Dick Dewy and Fancy Day is devoid of any profound philosophy or tragic grandeur. Hence the incongruities, so lightly touched upon as to escape the reader's attention, are less characteristic of Hardy's general treatment. Accordingly, for our purpose, we shall devote but a short space to this work and confine ourselves to the mere mention of a few contrasts.

Briefly, the dramatic irony is afforded by Fancy's capture of Dick and her subsequent pranks. A comely new teacher in the parish, she quickly infatuates the un-

sophisticated boy. Before the inception of their courtship, however she casually says to her companion:

'I'll warrant you'll care for somebody very much indeed another day, won't you, Mr. Dewy?'¹

Almost immediately thereafter she becomes the subject of the devotion she has predicted for Dick.

Once the young man is her ardent adorer, she coquetishly encourages other masculine attention. On one such occasion--she is working on a dress which will set off her charms in Dick's absence--he, greatly provoked, abruptly leaves her and goes nutting by himself. When, after some frantic searching, she finds him, the reconciliation is affecting.

Nor is it necessary to describe in detail how the bag of nuts was quite forgotten until three days later, when it was found among the brambles and restored empty to Mrs. Dewy, her initials being marked thereon in red cotton; and how she puzzled herself till her head ached upon the question of how on earth her meal-bag could have got into Cuckoo-Lane.²

As in Desperate Remedies, we find another example of Hardy's fondness for alluding to the cuckoo as a symbol of lovers' fickleness. The reader is asked to remember this incident in connection with the conclusion of the novel, when the bride withholds from her fiance the secret of her contemplated desertion.

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Under the Greenwood Tree, p. 110.

²

Ibid., p. 153.

When Fancy wavers in her affection for Dick Dewy and secretly accepts the proposal of Mr. Maybold, the vicar, further ironical contrasts follow. Of interest is the conversation between Dewy and the parson, each one thinking of the school mistress as his own. The cleric is finally enlightened on the fact of the woman's duplicity; and, as a consequence, Miss Day returns to her first lover. Shortly afterward Dick speaks to his betrothed about the vicar's strange aloofness towards him since the announcement of the coming marriage.

' . . . I just hinted to him when I put in the banns, but he didn't seem to take kindly to the notion now, and so I said no more. I wonder how it was.'

'I wonder!' said Fancy, looking into vacancy with those beautiful eyes of hers--too refined and beautiful for a tranter's wife; but, perhaps, not too good.³

Following the wedding, a candid discourse from Dick brings the concluding instance of dramatic irony. The elated bridegroom praises his wife's commendable confidence. He alludes to her earlier dutiful confession of an unimportant flirtation with a neighboring farmer. That the story was invented at the time to arouse his jealousy, he does not suspect. His artlessness becomes highly amusing as the dialogue continues:

' . . . We'll have no secrets from each other, darling, will er ever? --no secret at all.'

'None from today,' said Fancy.⁴

³Under the Greenwood Tree, p. 201.

⁴Ibid., p. 211.

Far From the Madding Crowd

This work, Hardy's first great novel, exhibits adequately the author's matured technique in effective handling of dramatic irony. The logical sequence of events, the likely probability of coincidence, and the touching poignancy of mental anguish--all are here in evidence and contribute to the striking episodes. Throughout, simplicity predominates. Set against a bas-relief of pastoral life, the story portrays, for the most part, rustic characters impelled by human emotions and trapped in the maze of circumstance. To an examination of the resulting contrasts, we now direct our attention.

Soon after the two principal personages, Bathsheba Everdene, a bonny milkmaid, and Gabriel Oak, a respectable shepherd, have made each other's acquaintance, the ball of complications starts rolling. A first instance follows the young man's attempt at a bucolic courtship. Somewhat abashed at his early proposal, the impulsive girl momentarily hesitates, then quickly declines, saying:

'It wouldn't do, Mr. Oak. I want somebody to tame me; and you would never be able to, I know.'⁵

The tragic import of these words, in that it is lost upon her now, makes for effective dramatic irony. A disastrous marriage, together with some painful experiences, does later

subdue her spirit.

Despite the rebuff received at the hands of his beloved, Gabriel is soon to become indispensable to Bathsheba. This development, true to the Hardy form, is actualized by sheer coincidence. The shepherd, reduced by the loss of his sheep to the position of a common day laborer, reaches Weatherbury one night just in time to save some burning wheat ricks. As a reward for his services, he is engaged by the owner--Miss Everdene, to his surprise--on her newly-acquired farm. Here he later becomes the bailiff and assumes an advisory position, on matters personal as well as agricultural. His suggestions, however, are not always well received.

In their new relationship of mistress and chief executive, the first serious difference between the two is the outcome of Oak's candidly reprimanding Bathsheba for reprehensible conduct. In effect, her misdemeanor has been imprudently sending Boldwood, a bachelor farmer, a valentine with the love missive, "Marry me," inscribed. Conceived as a joke, but later reaping grave consequences, this indiscretion calls for an ironical contrast. We turn to Hardy's own explanation for illumination on this point:

Bathsheba was far from dreaming that the dark and silent shape upon which she had so carelessly thrown a seed was a hotbed of tropic intensity. Had she known Boldwood's mood her blame would have been fearful, and the strain upon her heart ineradicable. Moreover, had she known her present power for good or evil over this man, she would have trembled at her responsibility. Luckily for the present, unluckily for her future tranquility, her understanding had not yet told her what Boldwood was.⁶

⁶Far from the Madding Crowd, p. 138.

Boldwood, mistaking the valentine for a sigh of encouragement, adores the flighty girl with a vehemence that points unerringly to impending disaster in the case of his disappointment. Humorously incongruous is this sudden transport of love, as formerly the bachelor had been the only man not to look admiringly at Bathsheba during her business visits to the Casterbridge corn market.

As a contrast to this novice in love-making, Sergeant Troy represents the worldly ladies' man. Already having seduced Fanny Robin, a girl formerly in Bathsheba's employ, he now looks to the mistress for a future conquest. Though receiving little encouragement at first, he persists until he wins her admiration. Bathsheba, we might add, has never been told about Troy's earlier escapades. Probably the decisive factor in this suit is his gift of a gold watch to her. On the occasion of its presentation, she is instructed to press a spring and open the treasure. Doing so, she bares a crest and a motto, Cedit amor rebus--"Love yields to circumstance." But it is not a matter of true love with the wooer, and therein lies another ironic contrast: of her three admirers--Oak, Boldwood, and Troy--she marries the one with the least genuine affection towards her. She has found a man to 'tame her will,' but in a manner quite different from what she had expected.

After the nuptials, secretly performed away from home, the blundering Boldwood falls a prey to an egregious stratagem. Hoping to get his rival out of the running, he gives Troy fifty pounds for the latter's promise to marry Fanny

Robin. Then, finding the officer has already enjoyed intimacies with Bathsheba and fearing her ruin, the pathetic bachelor pleads with the sergeant to legalize the union and save the farm woman from disgrace. For a promise to this effect he offers twenty pounds. A few minutes after the transaction, when informed that Troy and Bathsheba are already man and wife, Boldwood is exasperated by this treachery. He finally degenerates from a prosperous to a shiftless farmer. His disappointment has been too great.

Before long Troy's marital relationships become strained. Just when the glamor of romance has worn off, a tragic incident culminates in an irreparable breach: Fanny Robin, on her way to Casterbridge Union-house to bear Troy's child, by chance meets her betrayer and his wife on the road. Bathsheba, quick to catch her husband's look of recognition, makes queries which result in this incongruity:

'Do you know who that woman was?' said
 Bathsheba, looking searchingly into his face.
 'I do.' he said, looking boldly back into
 hers.
 'What is her name?'
 'How should I know her name?'
 'I think you do.'⁷

The reader, knowing the extent of Troy's acquaintance with the unfortunate girl, immediately catches the dramatic irony in Bathsheba's failure to grasp the full content of her own words.

Another such contrast follows the next day, when Troy

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Far from the Madding Crowd, p. 301.

inadvertently opens the back of his watch. Bathsheba glimpses a wisp of yellow curl and immediately demands an explanation. The identity of its owner, Fanny, the officer does not disclose.

'Is she alive?'

'Yes.'

'Is she pretty?'

'Yes.'

'It is wonderful how she can be, poor thing, under such an awful affliction!'⁸

For a moment Troy fears his wife knows all, then finds she means yellow hair by 'affliction.' Here again Hardy puts into the mouth of a character ignorant of tragic realities words that approximate the truth. It is a deliberate striving for incongruities.

Bathsheba, soon growing suspicious, calls her servant Liddy and learns the color of Fanny's hair. Unsolicited the girl contributes other information--to the effect that Mr. Troy had known Fanny's seducer. The reader gasps as the dramatic irony becomes apparent in Liddy's story.

'One day I just named it to him (Troy), and asked him if he knew Fanny's young man. He said, "O, yes, he knew the young man as well as he knew himself, and there wasn't another man in the regiment he liked better."'⁹

With the death of poor Fanny and her child, this dark chapter in Troy's life is ended. Smitten by remorse, the sergeant definitely acknowledges to Bathsheba that Fanny

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Far from the Madding Crowd, p. 313.

⁹

Ibid., p. 321.

deserved the higher place in his affections. A ceremony before a clergyman does not constitute a marriage, he adds. After raising an impressive monument for the deceased, he disappears. When his clothes are later found on the seashore, everyone considers him drowned.

Troy disposed of in this way, Hardy returns the languishing Boldwood to the story. The dejected farmer soon casts off his gloom and entertains hopes of eventually winning Bathsheba, now she is free. Accordingly, he renews his wooing in due seriousness. It is the advent of his pretentious Christmas party, given in Bathsheba's favor, that ushers in the concluding strokes of dramatic irony. While dressing for the festivities, Boldwood has a premonition that augurs a cataclysmic end to his ill-fated courtship. To Gabriel Oak he complains of his uneasiness. Trying to mitigate this feeling, he concludes:

' . . . Still this may be absurd--I feel that it is absurd. Perhaps my day is dawning at last.'
'I hope it 'ill be a long and a fair one.'¹⁰

The 'dawning' of his day, oddly enough, follows within a few hours. Its attendant circumstances, however, bring anything but the hoped-for benefits. At his Christmas party, the very atmosphere portends the sudden descent of impending doom. Hardy's treatment is so effective that even the reader is awed by the feeling of inevitability.

10

Far from the Madding Crowd, p. 414.

The first indication of approaching disaster comes with the covert whisperings of the guests. Someone has seen, peering in at the window, the face of Troy, who, the reader has already learned, was rescued at sea and has returned, after a long interim, to claim his wife. Most dramatic is his entry on the eve of Boldwood's first public appearance with Bathsheba. The excited bachelor, just having received some encouragement from his love, has failed to see the disconcerting spectacle. Now heightened in spirits, he lightly asks the reason for the prevailing hush:

. . . One of them turned and replied uneasily: 'I was something Laban heard of, that's all, sir.'

'News? Anybody married or engaged, born or dead?' inquired the farmer, gaily. 'Tell it to us, Tall. One would think from your looks and mysterious ways that it was something very dreadful indeed.'¹¹

When told there is a stranger outside, he himself loudly proclaims a welcome. This boldly-manipulated incongruity closes abruptly when Boldwood, in a fit of momentary dementia, seizes a gun and shoots Troy. The 'long' day has 'dawned'--in an insane asylum--for this pathetic person. One cannot restrain a feeling of commiseration for the man who has hardly been fairly treated.

From this catastrophe Hardy returns, for strong contrast, to the calm and sweetly-serene pictures suggested by the opening pages of his pastoral background. Once more the

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Far from the Madding Crowd, p. 432.

two principal characters are brought together. It is the heroine, now reversed from her position of the sought-after to the seeker, who comes to Oak and practically proposes. In this turning of the tables lurks a humorous irony, a happy treatment after the preceding gloom. With this conclusion the reader recalls an earlier proposal, climaxed by this fervent promise from Oak:

'I shall do one thing in this life--one thing certain--that is, love you, and long for you, and keep wanting you till I die.'¹²

Throughout unanticipated trials and reverses, Gabriel has kept his promise.

The Return of the Native

Considered by some critics to be Hardy's masterpiece, The Return of the Native has all the potentialities that make possible a prolific use of dramatic irony. A clash of wills, a recurrence of misunderstandings, and a tyranny of the passions--all are productive of strong contrasts and incongruities. Always present is the all-embracing fatalistic background against which blind and blundering characters, impelled by human emotions, enact their tragedies. Almost before the reader has covered the first few pages, the inevitability of approaching calamity becomes manifest. Such is the effect achieved by the superb Egdon Heath description, a portion of which we quote as apt illustration:

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Far from the Madding Crowd, p. 34.

Every night the Titanic form seemed to await something; but it had waited thus, unmoved, during many centuries, through the crises of so many things, that it could only be imagined to await one last crisis--the final overthrow.¹³

This atmosphere created, the novelist takes one with eminent rapidity through a logical sequence of complications and their attendant strokes of irony.

An early episode is indicative of ensuing conflicts. It is introduced under signal circumstances--Thomas in Yeobright's return home after her proposed wedding has been halted by an irregularity in the marriage license. Notable is the fact that she returns, unaccompanied by her fiance, in the fan of the reddleman, Diggory Venn, who secretly adores her, but has heretofore made no profession of his love because of his lower social position. This early service is but a precursor to his later unstinted devotion.

In connection with this memorable trip, an incongruous incident occurs. Mr. Venn, together with his passenger, has come to a group of villagers disporting themselves in folk fashion around a bonfire. He stops to make inquiries about the road leading to the home of Mrs. Yeobright, Thomasin's aunt. A few minutes after the van has moved on, the mentioned relative herself appears. Told about the reddleman's query, she dismisses the matter casually;

'Something to sell, I suppose; what it can be I am at a loss to understand.'¹⁴

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The Return of the Native, p. 4.

¹⁴

The Return of the Native, p. 36.

Having seen her niece off in the morning, she considers her safely married by this time. Hence she at first attaches little importance to Diggory's visit.

Upon learning later the true state of affairs, she is greatly humiliated. In her opinion, an arrested marriage spells disgrace. To accentuate her troubles, the neighbors, supposing Thomasin happily wedded, gather about the home and sing this song:

'He told her that she was the joy of his life,
And if she'd consent he would make her his wife;
She could not refuse him; to church so they went,
Young Will was forgot, and Sue was content;
And then was she kiss'd and set down on his knee,
No man in the world was so loving as he!'¹⁵

With the entrance of the wilful Eustacia Vye, Thomasin's prospects for a belated marriage dwindle. Succumbing to the wiles of Eustacia, Wildeve, summoned by signal fires, frequently meets her of an evening at their secret trysting place on the heath. At one of these rendezvous the conversation is responsible for a contrast which becomes pronounced in the light of succeeding events. Eustacia speaks of the depressing power the place exercises over her. Then, with her companion in mind, she hopefully continues:

'But Egdon will be brighter again now.'
'I hope it will,' said Wildeve moodily.¹⁶

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The Return of the Native, p. 50.

16

Ibid., p. 71.

Little does she foresee what events will make for 'brighter' days and what their sad outcome will be.

In keeping her bonfires burning to attract Wildeve, Eustacia is assisted by Susan Nunsuch's son. The little fellow, unaware of the part he plays in furthering this courtship, is instructed to keep the fire burning until he hears a frog jumping into the nearby pond. This effect, the reader learns, is produced by Wildeve's throwing a stone into the water--in answer to the summons. In visiting with the child one day, Diggory Venn has his curiosity aroused by a relation of these events.

'A hopfrog?' he inquired. 'Hopfrogs don't jump into ponds this time of year.'

'They do, for I heard one.'

'Certain--sure?'

'Yes. She told me afore that I should hearn'n and so I did. They say she's clever and deep, and perhaps she charmed 'en to come.'¹⁷

The dramatic irony in this innocent child's speech is striking. Might he but have known what it was she 'charmed!'

The impetuous Estacia's flirtation with Wildeve is temporarily stayed by the arrival of Clym Yeobright, the returning native, who has been away at Paris. For this development we are prepared by a conversation among the funze stackers on Captain Vye's place. Begun as idle talk, their comments on Eustacia and Clym drift into arresting prognosis:

'I say, Sam,' observed Humphrey when the old man was gone, 'she and Clym Yeobright would make a pretty pigeon-pair--hey? If they wouldn't I'll be dazed!'¹⁸

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The Return of the Native, p. 88.

¹⁸

Ibid., p. 125.

Later, the ill-starred union between these two makes the ironic contrast quite pronounced.

As if in response to Sam's wishes, Eustacia is quickly attracted to the handsome Clym Yeobright. But now she faces a serious obstacle. In wresting Wildeve from Thomasin, to whom he rightly belonged, she has done herself grave injury. For the young man from Paris, she fears, may become the intended of his cousin, Thomasin Yeobright. What irony in this reversal of situation! To promote her better interests, she grows cold towards Wildeve, thereby encouraging him to return to his first love. Her endeavors are successful. The deferred marriage vows are finally solemnized, Eustacia being one of the witnesses. In this connection, a secret by-play after the ceremony deserves mention.

When Thomasin was tremblingly engaged in signing her name Wildeve had flung towards Eustacia a glance that said plainly, 'I have punished you now.' She replied in a low tone--and he little thought how truly--
'You mistake; it gives me sincerest pleasure to see her your wife today.'¹⁹

Her reasons for wishing ^{her} him married Wildeve soon comprehends as she sets out to capture Clym Yeobright. So irresistible is Eustacia that Clym cannot withstand her circumvention. Accordingly he abandons his original plan of returning to Paris, giving as his excuse an altruistic motive--that of ministering as a schoolmaster to the ignorant and superstitious fold of Egdon. Most pointed is the dramatic irony in his mother's adverse reaction to this decision.

'After all the trouble that has been taken to give you a start, and when there is nothing to do but to keep straight towards affluence, you say you will be a poor man's schoolmaster. Your fancies will be your ruin, Clym.'²⁰

As predicted, his whim is his undoing, as we shall see later. But his 'ruin' encompasses far more than mere poverty, to which his mother has just alluded.

When, against Mrs. Yeobright's wishes, Clym marries Eustacia, the dejected woman greatly deplures her son's disobedience.

She covered her face with her hands. 'O, it is a mistake!' she groaned. 'And he will rue it some day, and think of me!'²¹

How deftly stated! Hardy's genius for laying on dramatic irony here attains its apogee. Vividly one later recalls these words when Clym's anguish and remorse at his mother's death find no relief. In that Mrs. Yeobright little thinks how literally her words will be actualized, she contributes a superb contrast. As the bells toll, Mrs. Yeobright, having refused to attend the wedding, ruminates:

'Then it is over,' she murmured. 'Well, well! and life too will be over soon.'²²

For her, it will be over much sooner than she expects!

Additional contrasts appear with cumulative force after the wedding. In striving to make Clym an acquisition, Eustacia had hoped for an avenue of escape from the intolerable Egdon

²⁰

Ibid., p. 206.

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The Return of the Native, p. 256.

²²

Idem.

Heath to the gay life of Paris. What a startling reversal of expectation and realization we find here! As a result of her very designs on him, Clym has cut off his Paris connections. Then, to make matters still more exasperating, his rigorous studies impair his eyesight. He now becomes a trying care. That Wildeve, in the meantime, has inherited a fortune serves only to aggravate the domestic alienation which becomes inevitable between Clym and Eustacia. The upshot of the whole matter is what might be expected under such circumstances: Wildeve and Eustacia, both in "human bondage," resort to clandestine meetings.

It is this surreptitious love-making which hastens the catastrophe. One day, as Clym is sleeping soundly in an adjoining room, Eustacia entertains Wildeve right in her home. As if led by fate, Mrs. Yeobright has chosen this particular moment to visit her son and to make reparations for past estrangements. Taken in surprise by the unexpected arrival of her mother-in-law, Eustacia deliberates on how to proceed. Highly dramatic is this incident--the forgiving mother knocking at the door, the guilty lover within. Then, as if directed by an unseen force, the sleeping Clym cries 'Mother.' After Eustacia has disposed of Wildeve through a back way, she returns to find Mrs. Yeobright gone. A baleful complication is this, yet one which is entirely credible. It contributes to the plausibility of Hardy's later contrasts.

Upon awaking, Clym relates a dream. Its bearing upon the preceding occurrence is astounding.

' . . . It was about my mother. I dreamt that I took you to her house to make up differences, and when we got there we couldn't get in, though she kept on crying to us for help. However, dreams are dreams. What o'clock is it?'²³

By dismissing the vision thus hastily from his mind, he is responsible for another stroke of dramatic irony. It reminds one somewhat of Chauntecleer in Chaucer's Nun's Priest's Tale. In both cases, failure to give credence to ominous warning invites disaster.

Meanwhile the object of Clym's dream is trudging wearily home, heart-broken, for she has seen the face of Eustacia peering at her from a window. Susan Nunsuch's child meets the old woman and accompanies her a short distance. Being questioned by the boy about her jaded appearance, she answers in terms probably not intelligible to the child, but significant for the reader. One instance is particularly commanding, coming immediately after Mrs. Yeobright has sunk down exhausted. Her companion says:

'You will go to sleep there, I suppose, won't you? You have shut your eyes already.'

'No. I shall not sleep much--till another day, and then I hope to have a long, long one--very long.'²⁴

He soon leaves her.

This conversation coincides in point of time with another one not many miles away. Clym has grown uneasy about his mother and expresses his intention of visiting her that evening. A majestic ironic stroke is present in this statement

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The Return of the Native, p. 344.

²⁴

The Return of the Native, p. 341

to Eustacia, 'Poor mother must indeed be very lonely.'²⁵
 The extent of her loneliness overpowers him as he finds her lying on the Heath later that evening. All the assistance of the kind neighbors is to no avail. At an earlier hour than she had expected, Mrs. Yeobright has her 'very long sleep.' and so has come to pass her earlier prediction: Clym 'rues' the day of his marriage and 'thinks' of his mother.

Matters having come to this pass, Eustacia says with misgivings:

'I am to blame for this. There is evil in store for me.'²⁶

The evil approaches with unerring certainty. Driven away by her husband's wrath, she consents to become Wildeve's mistress. A stormy night adumbrates the advent of her fateful elopement. As if the evil one himself had a hand in her undoing, a folk superstition is brought to play in the case. The manipulator is Susan Nunsuch, who, thinking her little boy bewitched, melts a waxen effigy of the suspected-- Eustacia. That night the original of the image drowns on her way to meet her paramour. The reader gasps at the coincidence. Clym and Wildeve, reaching the scene simultaneously, try in vain to rescue her.

Over the conclusion to this novel, Thomasin's marriage to Diggory Venn, we pass hurriedly. In changing from his original plan to this inartistic end, Hardy was trying to

²⁵

Ibid., p. 345.

²⁶

The Return of the Native, p. 361.

please his readers. Consequently, we do not look here for tragic incongruities and ironic contrasts that characterize the preceding chapters.

The Mayor of Casterbridge

One character--Henchard, the mayor of Casterbridge--dominates this novel. His is a never-ending battle against adverse circumstances. He alone, however, is responsible for his reverses. Because of his intractability, he fails to find the proper course of action. Consequently, he subjects himself to a concatenation of contrasts between aims and expectations on the one hand, and results and realizations on the other. Nearly all of his exertions, because they are sadly askew, strike back at him with terrific force. To this man's perverseness, then, we look to find the seeds of dramatic incongruities.

The march of ironies has its inception in an opening episode of the story. Henchard, at this time an itinerant hay trusser, offers his wife, together with their daughter, for sale at a refreshment tent. To this recklessness he has been driven by imbibing to freely of furmity which the attending old hag had slyly mixed with a stronger concoction. The first incongruity arises from the fact that Mrs. Henchard, seeing her husband inclined to enter a beer concession, had urged upon the present place, expressing her preference for furmity. This decision has been her undoing, as her sale to Newson, a sailor, demonstrates. When Henchard returns to his senses, he finds himself the victim

of ironical circumstances: his joke has been interpreted literally. After a long and unavailing search for his wife and daughter, he vows never to touch another drop liquor for twenty years.

For a further incongruity we follow the story as it continues eighteen years later. Our principal character, having practiced rigorous self-abnegation, has become a respected and prosperous citizen. As a wealthy grain merchant and mayor of Casterbridge, he entertains, on this particular afternoon, the gentility at a public dinner. Concurring with this event is the inconspicuous arrival of three strangers: Susan, his former wife, who, after all these years, has finally been disillusioned about the legality of her union with Newson; Elizabeth-Jane, her daughter; and Donald Farfrae, a Scotchman. That these three persons, who will figure most prominently in Henchard's ultimate undoing, should arrive at this scene of his triumph strikes the reader as one of Hardy's boldly-designed coincidences.

With the arrival of the mayor's wife, complications surge to the fore. Breaking his promise of marriage to Lucetta Templeman, with whom he has indulged in illicit intimacies, he reinstates Susan, first publicly courting her and then going through another ceremony in order to keep hidden the secret of his past folly. By inflicting injury upon Lucetta, he reverts deceit upon himself, for Elizabeth-Jane is not his daughter, as his wife has led him

to believe. This girl is the offspring of the union with Newson, Henchard's child having died soon after the sale. An excellent situation for dramatic irony is this--the betrayer duped!

On the subject of the mayor's ignorance of Elizabeth-Jane's fatherhood, Hardy creates several pronounced contrasts. One arises with Henchard's questioning his wife about her daughter's hair.

'I thought Elizabeth-Jane's hair promised to be black when she was a baby?' he said to his wife.

'It did, but they alter so,' replied Susan.
'Their hair gets darker, I know--but I wasn't aware it brightened ever?'²⁷

For an explanation of this puzzle Henchard has only to wait until Susan, for the convenience of the story, dies. At this juncture we have another incongruity. The mayor, feeling quite paternal towards the motherless Elizabeth-Jane, who rightly considers Newson her father, decides to disillusion her--so he thinks. The bereaved girl, at first quite unwilling to believe his story, finally accepts his statements when he speaks of having incontrovertible proof. With considerable satisfaction at having won his point, he adds:

'I'll go upstairs and hunt for some documents that will prove it all to you. But I won't trouble you with them until to-morrow.'²⁸

27

The Mayor of Casterbridge, p. 101.

28

Ibid., p. 142.

Instead of righting the girl's impressions, he disillusioned himself. Disregarding the restriction, 'Not to be opened till Elizabeth-Jane's wedding day,' he impulsively reads Susan's confession. What a reversal in expectations! Naturally, of this letter the step-daughter remains un-informed.

His wife's death has given him an opportunity to renew his friendship with Lucetta Templeman. But here he encounters an unforeseen difficulty which, at one time, he might have obviated. The opposition comes from Donald Farfrae, whom we remember as reaching Casterbridge the day of the mayor's dinner. This extraordinary person, after getting his start in Henchard's employ, has worked up a strong competitive grain business. It is he who has won the heart of Lucetta. Once deeply in love with Elizabeth-Jane, he was prevented from pressing his suit by her step-father; but now Farfrae cannot be hindered in winning the mayor's former sweetheart, whose past errors he does not know. Such are the bitter reverses the central character heaps upon himself through his doggedness.

As Donald's courtship progresses, Hardy consistently avails himself of every possibility for ironical contrasts offered by the anomalous circumstances. To this end the suitor is kept unacquainted with his role as Henchard's rival. He does know, however, through his former employer's confidences, of the earlier disreputable liaison, though the name of the woman in the case has been withheld. Hence

the incongruity of the following conversation between the two men just mentioned is most striking:

'Do you remember,' said Henchard, as if it were the presence of the thought and not of the man which made him speak, 'do you remember my story of that second woman--who suffered for her thoughtless intimacy with me?'

'I do,' said Farfrae.

'Do you remember my telling 'ee how it all began and how it ended?'

'Yes.'

'Well, I have offered to marry her now that I can; but she won't marry me. Now what would you think of her--I put it up to you?'

'Well, ye owe her nothing more now,' said Farfrae heartily.²⁹

Almost as if with an insight to the whole complication, he has answered to his own interests.

The singular complexity of these circumstances is intensified through Elizabeth-Jane's close friendship with Lucetta. Each, at first, knows nothing of the other's love for Farfrae. Later the younger girl learns of her companion's affection, but remains silent. One day Henchard comes to Miss Templeman's quarters. While his step-daughter, who is ignorant of his past intimacies, is in another room, he threatens to expose Lucetta if she does not marry him. The unfortunate woman, coerced into a promise, breaks down after his departure. Follows this episode with its ironical contrast:

Elizabeth-Jane had continued to kneel by Lucetta. 'What is this?' she said. 'You called my father "Michael" as if you knew him well? And how is it he has got this power over you, that you promise to marry him against your will? Ah--you have many secrets from me!'

'Perhaps you have some from me,' Lucetta murmured with closed eyes, little thinking, however,

²⁹The Mayor of Casterbridge, p. 206.

so unsuspecting was she, that the secret of Elizabeth's heart concerned the young man who had caused the damage to her own.³⁰

Shortly after this visit Henchard experiences a humiliation which starts his rapid decadence. Adding to the dramatic value of the episode, the setting of this disgrace is a courtroom, where the mayor sits in judgment. Finally a coarse woman is brought to him. Before he can pronounce a verdict, she defames him by openly relating his youthful escapade--the sale of his wife. She is the furmity woman who was responsible for this wrong doing! Publicly the judge must acknowledge the truth of the accusation. We leave this tense scene, marveling at the ironic contrast brought out by this reversal between two persons in the opposite extremes of society--high and low degree.

Following hard upon this disaster is the frustration of Henchard's plans for marriage. But first he must become the victim of further irony. The occasion arises when he suddenly comes upon Lucetta pursued by a furious bull. From this enraged beast the man saves her. Here the contrast scales pretentious heights, for the woman is on her way to Farfrae, whom she has secretly married. The rejected lover has unknowingly rescued his rival's bride!

Henchard is yet to endure greater adversity. This time it is his financial status which suffers. He is forced to declare bankruptcy and is bought out--his rival

³⁰

Ibid., p. 227.

and now-loathed competitor, Farfrae! The latter, feeling compassionate towards the ruined man, makes him this offer:

' . . . what I propose is this--if you will listen. Come and live in your old house. We can spare some rooms very well--I am sure my wife would not mind it at all--until there's an opening.'³¹

What situation could be more incongruous--the husband, ignorant of his wife's past sin, inviting her betrayer to live with them! Needless to say, the startled Henchard cannot accept such a proposal, although he entertains thoughts as to what Lucetta's consternation might be in such an extremity.

The ruined man bears his loss with humility until an insult from Lucetta--she refers to him at a large public gathering as her husband's laboring man--fans the smoldering coals of hatred. Determining on revenge, he comes to the Farfrae's house and obtains her love letters, which he has left carefully preserved in the vault. Broaching the subject of his unsavory attachment, he hopes to name the woman and produce this correspondence as evidence. We turn to Hardy for the narrative and its attendant irony:

'What became of the poor woman?' asked Farfrae.
'Luckily she married, and married well,' said Henchard.

'But why didn't you marry her when your wife Susan died?' Farfrae asked

31

The Mayor of Casterbridge, p. 261

'Ah--well you may ask that!' said
Henchard³²

Craftily he proceeds with the reading of the letters, including the more sensational excerpts, saving the signature for the climactic effect. Farfrae finally interrupts the reading.

'If I were you I would destroy them,' said
Farfrae. . . 'As another man's wife it would
injure the woman if it were known.'³³

What a stroke of dramatic irony is built upon his ignorance of the facts! Might he but have known how truly he had spoken for himself! Fortunately for him, Henchard loses heart and does not expose Lucetta.

One more incident remains to complete the reversal in The Mayor of Casterbridge. It is ushered in by the arrival of Newson, who has come to claim his daughter, Elizabeth-Jane. Henchard intercepts the sailor, telling him the girl is dead. Herein he makes the last grave error that contributes to his final and ignominious perdition. The ruse whereby he hopes to keep his step-daughter--she has become his only stay and comfort in this time of tribulation--is responsible for his losing her. Learning of the deception practiced upon her--Newson succeeds in finding her--she turns against Henchard, who dies of a broken heart. His tragic exit is a fitting and artistic close to a life

³²

The Mayor of Casterbridge, p. 282-283.

³³

Ibid., p. 286.

filled with ironical contrasts and reverses.

The Woodlanders

As the artistically-created background of Egdon Heath predominates in The Return of the Native, so does the realm of trees occupy a prominent position in The Woodlanders. Against this kingdom of timber are sharply outlined the conflicts arising from a clash of temperaments between the rustic inhabitants, on the one hand, and the sophisticated newcomers, on the other. Such a plan of organization, as one can readily see, is provocative of pronounced dramatic irony. In our attempt to follow Hardy through his characteristic maze of complexities, the incongruities will reveal themselves.

For the germ of the major contrasts, we first consider certain inconsistencies in the character of George Melbury, a simple timber merchant. His daughter Grace, who has just returned from a fashionable school, is, by a promise made before the death of his early rival in love, to become the wife of the latter's son, Giles Winterborne. In view of her newly-acquired graces and accomplishments, however, the father decides she is too good for a common woodlander. He seriously questions the feasibility of wedlock here. The death of Mr. South, upon whose life depends Giles's title to certain freeholdings, turns the tide against the humble suitor. As a result, Mr. Melbury encourages Grace's friendship with Dr. Fitzpiers, a recently-arrived gentleman of questionable character. By this inconstancy, the father has

unwittingly paved the way for a tragic reversal, of which we shall speak later.

For a few incongruities we return briefly to the passing of Mr. South. Attended at his bedside by his daughter Marty and by Winterborne, the dying man wildly deploras the menacing aspect of a giant tree outside his window. He fears some day it will crush him with its fall. In his speech we plainly perceive the element of irony:

'Ah, when it was quite a small tree,' he said, 'and I was a little boy, I thought one day of chopping it off with my hook to make a clothes-line prop with. But I put off doing it, and then again thought that I would; but I forgot it and didn't. And at last it got too big, and now 'tis my enemy and will be the death of me. Little did I think, when I let the sapling stay, that a time would come when it would torment me, and dash me into my grave.'

Follows Hardy's ironical application to the speech:

'No, no,' said Winterborne and Marty soothingly. But they thought it possible that it might hasten him into his grave, though in another way than by falling.³³

Hoping to give the man relief, Dr. Fitzpiers orders the tree cut down. But this attempt at comfort produces exactly the opposite results: as if paralyzed, South stares rigidly out of the window and dies soon after. Accentuating the irony of this situation is the fact that Winterborne, by cutting down the tree, has been the blind agent in precipitating his own ruin. His holdings have passed out of his possession with the death of the old man.

Giles's loss is the gain of Felice Charmond, a sort of

³³The Woodlanders, p. 108-109.

adventuress, to whom the property now reverts. His request for an extension of time is rejected, probably because he had once refused to turn his load of lumber aside before an oncoming carriage, only to learn afterwards that she had been the occupant of the vehicle. In setting her face against Winterborne, Mrs. Charmond indirectly is responsible for terminating his courtship with Grace, for Melbury favors the more prosperous suiter, Dr. Fitzpiers. But the harm she does herself is even more damaging, for she later falls in love with the doctor after he is already married. Ironies upon ironies! Winterborne unpropitiously displeases Mrs. Charmond; he is dispossessed. Mrs. Charmond unconsciously aids in the doctor's suit; she precludes the possibility of her own marriage. What a concentration upon the complex and spectacular!

While the abject Giles is suffering his misfortunes, he is secretly loved by Marty South. This wholesome and sincere woodland girl has suffered a severe restraint of feminine vanity: for financial reasons she has had to sell her heavy tresses, her distinguishing mark of beauty. One day as Mrs. Charmond passes Marty and Grace, the latter innocently remarks:

'Her hair so becomes her worn that way. I have never seen her any more beautiful!

'Nor have I, miss! said Marty drily, and unconsciously stroking her crown.³⁴

34

The Woodlanders, p. 116.

This false hair, which has been admired as genuine, helps to enhance the charms of the wearer. It probably adds, also, to the allurements Mrs. Charmond finally exercises over Dr. Fitzpiers, who pays her frequent visits under the guise of professional calls.

Although this perfidy of Grace's husband escapes immediate detection, it is finally discovered by Melbury. Now it is this man's time to rue his former unkindness to Winterborne. By taking his daughter from the woodlander, to whom she rightly belonged, and giving her to a more glamorous man of the world, he has steeped her in misery. His misgivings are aggravated when he finds his son-in-law stunned as a result of a fall incurred while riding home from Mrs. Charmond's. Not recognizing the identity of his rescuer, the dazed man speaks of his love for the widow. In disgust Melbury drops him in the woods. This incident now guides the timber merchant to a new course of action: he hopes to obtain a divorce for his daughter and make reparations by uniting her with Giles.

While he is away, inquiring into the legality of such a separation, Grace lies sick at her paternal home, Fitzpiers having joined Mrs. Charmond on the continent. It is now Hardy introduces another of his incongruities through a parallel between human affairs and concurring natural phenomena. Again the cuckoo becomes a symbol of unfaithfulness in marriage. We turn to his narrative for the full effect achieved.

It was the beginning of June, and the cuckoo at this time of the summer scarcely ceased his cry for more than a couple of hours during the night. The bird's note, so familiar to her ears from infancy, was now absolute torture to the poor girl. On the Friday following the Wednesday of Melbury's departure, and the day after the discovery of Fitzpiers's hat (lost in the forest during the encounter with Melbury), the cuckoo began at two o'clock in the morning with a sudden cry from one of Melbury's apple-trees, not three yards from the window of Grace's room. 35

During Melbury's absence, further dramatic irony plays about the persons of Grace and Winterborne. The latter, after the encouragement newly received from the timber merchant, had confidently expected to win his jewel at last. In anticipation of this joy, he had asked her for a kiss, but had been refused. At the present meeting the woodlander is in possession of Melbury's message to the effect that a divorce cannot be obtained. Of this recent information Grace is unaware. Noticing her companion's dejected appearance, she thinks she must have displeased him at their former meeting by denying him the privilege of a kiss. In an attempt to ameliorate the hurt, she unknowingly plagues Giles to the breaking point. We follow the dialogue for contrast:

'And perhaps--as I am on the verge of freedom--I am not right, after all, in thinking there is any harm in your kissing me.'

'O Heaven!' groaned Winterborne to himself...

'Did you say anything?' she asked timidly.

'O no--only that--'

'You mean that it must be already settled, since father is coming home?' she said gladly. (She is confident, of course, of a favorable settlement--divorce).

'Ah--yes.'

'Then why don't you do what you want to?' she was almost pouting at his hesitation.³⁶

Even the reader becomes taut during this painful torture of poor Giles. The reversal between expectations and realities is too great. In these thrusts Hardy is almost cruelly intense.

While these woodland folk are coping with the problem of renewing old bonds, Fitzpiers and Mrs. Charmond are having their difficulties. The false tresses have done the evil in this case. The doctor, having learned their history through a letter from the original owner, treats the matter as a joke with which to tease his mistress. She, on the other hand, is deeply offended by his taunts. In the ensuing bitter quarrel, the lovers part. Soon after Fitzpiers has left, the flirtatious woman's wiles rebound upon her: a jilted suitor of former days, demented by her affronts, shoots both her and himself. Another reversal has been added to the already-overcharged sequence.

In the meantime the doctor has returned to England, hoping to restore himself in his wife's favor. Grace, on the contrary, flees for refuge to Giles. This noble forester, wishing to keep her reputation unblemished, lets her occupy his cottage while he sleeps in a shed. But the

36

The Woodlanders, p. 350-351.

exposure is too much for him. Already carrying the germs of a pernicious disease, he becomes critically ill. A doctor is summoned, Fitzpiers--Hardy plies his strokes still more boldly as he approaches the end--but he can be of no help. After Winterborn's death, Grace tells her husband that Giles has been her lover in the full sense of the word. Fitzpiers can say nothing: it is but a reversal of his own faithlessness, only feigned, of course.

With the conclusion of this novel comes the reconciliation between husband and wife--almost too readily, the reader feels. Though not exactly an illustration of dramatic irony, another feature must be mentioned. At the beginning of the story, the first picture was that of Marty South sitting on a coffin stool. Striking is its similarity to the closing scene: Marty is pausing beside the grave of Giles Winterborne, she alone having remained loyal to his memory. This remarkable resemblance between the beginning and the ending of his narrative testifies to Hardy's knack for maintaining perfect symmetry, a form of technique to which we have already alluded in a previous chapter.

V. NOVELS OF CHARACTER AND ENVIRONMENT (Continued)

Tess of the d'Urbervilles

In this novel the operation of an evil destiny overshadows the struggles of a "pure woman." Against the inexorable force of circumstances, the heroine fights a losing battle. As the narrative proceeds with its feeling of inevitability, the gripping "soul's tragedy" unfolds itself. Again a matter of literary craftsmanship to which we have alluded before deserves mention: this fatalistic background promotes the abundant use of dramatic irony. So that we may be assisted in our understanding of these contrasts, we shall pause for a synopsis of Tess of the d'Urbervilles.

Briefly, the simple and unified plot is built around the tragic life of Tess Durbeyfield. The child of a large impoverished family, she accepts work with one Alec d'Urberville, whom, because of his recently-assumed surname, she erroneously believes descended from her own ancient origin. Later seduced by her employer, she returns home to become a mother. Her child dying in infancy, she is free to rectify her sorry past through a new start on life. Leaving the scene of her early misfortune, she finds employment in Farmer Crick's dairy. Here she is loved deeply by a clergyman's son, Angel Clare, who, unable to accept his father's orthodox views, has refused an education for the ministry and is now familiarizing himself with farming. Despite her conscientious scruples to the contrary, she marries him. All former attempts at baring her secret having failed, she is finally emboldened,

by his making a similar confession, into telling him everything the eve following their wedding. Contrary to expectations from one so liberal, Angel reacts adversely. Unable to countenance life with the betrayed girl, he leaves for South American. While Tess is struggling against insurmountable obstacles, Alec d'Urberville, now an itinerant clergyman, enters her life a second time. Driven by her ineffable beauty and his incontinent desires into forsaking religion, he repeatedly assails her with temptations. With the prospect of Clare's return hopeless and her family in straitened circumstances, she succumbs to his offer of financial aid. When her husband does return, however, to find her in the capacity of a fashionable mistress, her anguish is too great. Frenzied by mental distress, she murders Alec and flees. Angel, who has bitterly repented his past harshness, joins her. Together they spend a few happy days in hiding. At last the police find them, and Tess atones for her crime on the gallows.

For the purpose of our study, this story logically falls into four divisions: (1) the youthful betrayal of Tess; (2) her frustrated attempt to start life anew; (3) the reappearance of the villain, Alec d'Urberville; (4) Angel Clare's return and the subsequent tragical dénouement. Into this grouping the instances of dramatic irony very readily resolve themselves. A closer examination will reveal the artistic symmetry here: two persons, a worker of iniquity and an unorthodox gentleman, play the leading rôles in the tragic

drama of Tess' life; each one makes two entrances; except for the conclusion, these men do not appear on the stage simultaneously.¹ This chapter will now give the substance of our investigation, following without further mention the classification given above.

1

The feeling of determinism pervading the novel from the first is vividly called to our attention by an early episode. Tess and her younger brother Abraham, while taking a load of beehives to market at two o'clock one morning, discuss the stars. Aroused by the girl's mention of sound and blighted ones, the boy asks her on which one they live. She tells him that theirs is a blighted one. Both falling asleep during the trip, they collide with a passing mail-cart. Prince, their horse, is killed in the accident. Grief-stricken, Tess is full of misgivings.

'Why I danced and laughed only yesterday!' she went on to herself. 'To think that I was such a fool!'

''Tis because we live on a blighted star, and not a sound one, isn't it, Tess?' murmured Abraham through his tears..²

These words, when compared with the fuller implications given them by succeeding events, constitute a pronounced ironical contrast. A suggestion of the oncoming tragedy appears with the burial of Prince:

1

See J. W. Beach, The Technique of Thomas Hardy, p. 182.

2

Tess of the d'Urbervilles, p. 36

Then Durbeyfield began to shovel in the earth, and the children cried anew. All except Tess. Her face was dry and pale, as though she regarded herself in the light of a murderess?

Prince, their breadwinner, dead, the precipitous decline has begun for this decadent strain of an ancient family. Had these simple folk remained in ignorance of their lineage, the future might have been vastly different. Unfortunately for them, however, Mr. Durbeyfield had just recently learned, through an antiquarian, of his descent from the lordly d'Urbervilles. Typical of Hardy's artistry, this seemingly-inconsequential knowledge has given impetus to a sequence of disasters. For example, it had been by imbibing too freely at the tavern in jubilation over this information that the father had incapacitated himself for the marketing of the beehives, leaving the undertaking to his inexperienced children, thereby bringing upon himself the first catastrophe. It is now Mrs. Durbeyfield's grave error, growing out of good intentions, which serves as a prelude to later calamities. Not knowing that the d'Urbervilles of a neighboring locality have merely appropriated their name after coming into sudden wealth, she urges her daughter to apply for work with her supposed kinsfolk. Tess being unwilling, the mother contends:

'You could win her (Mrs. d'Urberville) to do anything, my dear. Besides, perhaps there's more in it than you know of.'⁴

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Tess of the d'Urbervilles, p. 38

⁴

Tess of the d'Urbervilles, p. 39

What virulent irony comes with this prognosis! All too soon the erring mother is to learn what 'more. . . than you know of' embraces.

After having obeyed her mother by making the requested interview, Tess returns, laden with the roses given her by Alec. Attracting undue attention from her fellow-passengers, she slyly conceals some of the flowers in her basket. Hardy gives this turn to the incident:

Then she fell reflecting again. And in looking downward a thorn of the rose remaining in her breast accidentally pricked her chin. Like all the cottagers in Blackmoor Vale, Tess was steeped in fancies and pre-figurative superstitions; she thought this an ill omen-- the first she had noticed that day?

Could Tess but have associated this omen with the giver of her roses! How the novelist revels in employing such folk superstitions! Deliberately he weaves them into his design, as if inviting the reader to make comparisons between them and the ensuing adversities.

A further contrast foreshadows the evil fate that awaits Tess. It is introduced while the girl is riding beside Alec, headed for the place of her employment. Having been shamefully frightened by d'Urberville into submitting to a kiss, she pathetically expresses her disapproval.

'Very well,' said Tess, 'I'll not move since you be so determined' But I--thought you would be kind to me as my kinsman!'

'Kinsman be hanged! Now!'⁶

5

Ibid., p. 50.

6

Tess of the d'Urbervilles, p. 65.

What could be more spectacular than this sensual man's unwitting suggestion of his victim's untimely end! Especially arresting are these words in that their speaker's murder actualizes their deeper portent.

The last instance of dramatic irony in this group appears when Tess, following the loss of her virginity, is on her way home to bear her child. By one of Hardy's purposeful coincidences, she meets a painter of religious signs. Pausing to observe the workman, she is made to feel still more heavily the weight of her misfortune. Let us continue the narrative in the author's appropriate language:

He . . . began painting . . ., placing a comma after each word, as if to give pause while that word was driven well home to the reader's heart--

THY, DAMNATION, SLUMBERETH, NOT.

2 Pet. ii. 3

. . . the words entered Tess with accusatory horrors. It was as if this man had known her recent history; yet he was a total stranger.⁷

The painter continues with further admonitions.

It was with a sudden flush that she read and realized what was to be the inscription he was now half-way through--

THOU, SHALT, NOT, COMMIT--⁸

The reader, who knows all, winces with this child of unfortunate circumstances as the painter unwittingly sears her conscience. A remark from the workman prepares one for further complications:

7

Ibid., p. 101.

8

Tess of the d'Urbervilles, p. 102.

'If you want to ask for edification on these things of mement, there's a very earnest good man going to preach a charity-sermon to-day in the parish you are going to--Mr. Clare of Emminster.'⁹

Musing over the Biblical passages, Tess disregards this information. She walks on, saying, 'Pooh--I don't believe God said such things.'¹⁰ Yet this same Mr. Clare is the father of Angel, with whom the path of her life is soon to converge.

2

With Tess employed at Farmer Crick's dairy in an effort to forget her unhappy past, we come to the second stage in our study of this novel. In this connection a first daring stroke of dramatic irony is the outgrowth of curious table conversation. During the milkers' discussion of things metaphysical, Tess ventures the opinion that one's soul can be made to leave one's body during life. Ensues this startling picture:

The dairyman turned to her with his mouth full, his eyes charged with serious inquiry, and his great knife and fork (breakfasts were breakfasts here) planted erect on the table like the beginnings of a gallows.¹¹

How deliberately Hardy has planned this thrust! Here the reader himself promotes the contrast by regarding this description as an unusual simile, only to be shocked later by the dad literal import of this figure.

Just now, however, the mood of the novel is a joyful

9

Idem.

10

Idem.

11

Tess of the d'Urbervilles, p. 155.

one, so that the gloom which is to follow will appear all the more pronounced. Steadily the heroine and Clare are being drawn to each other by what the novelist calls an "irresistible law." While they are yet "on the debatable land between predilection and love,"¹² another folk superstition makes possible an ironic stroke. It is during the homely business of churning that someone suggests a reason for the failure of the butter to come. Mrs. Crick makes this application:

'Perhaps somebody in the house is in love,' she said tentatively. 'I've heard tell in my younger days that that will cause it.'¹³

But, instead of considering the facts close at hand, she leaps to the remote by thinking of a milkmaid who was in her service the previous year.

With Angel's profession of love, the heroine's present peace of mind gives way to mental conflicts. Her emotions toward the clergyman's son are most tender; yet she dare not come to him while harboring the secret of her ruin. Accordingly she meets his proposals with painful rejections. Puzzled by her behavior, the young man makes a pointed inquiry.

'Tess, why did you say "no" in such a positive way?' he asked her in the course of a few days.

She started.

'Don't ask me. I told you why--partly. I am not good enough--not worthy enough.'

'How? Not fine lady enough?'

'Yes--something like that,' murmured she.¹⁴

¹²

Ibid., p. 165.

¹³

Ibid., p. 171

¹⁴

Tess of the d'Urbervilles, p. 224.

Here, as frequently the case, Hardy relies on a misunderstanding for the desired artistic effect. Given an answer to his question, though rather elusive, Clare is misled by its surface meaning.

In supposing that she could forget her past, Tess has been wrong. Unintentional reminders occasionally arise in the conversation about her. One story that especially harrows her soul concerns a certain Jack Dollop, who had ruined a maiden. Farmer Crick, trying to entertain his workers, tells how the wronged girl had pursued her seducer with a vengeance. The effect of this narrative on the heroine, naturally, is far from pleasurable. Pale-faced she is forced to leave the room. Yet Hardy does not pause with this initial torture. At a later date he again introduces the subject of Dollop, who, according to recent rumors, has had his own reverses. He has married a widow for her fifty pounds a year, only to learn that the annuity has stopped with matrimony. Crick asks Tess whether the widow should have warned her suitor of this possible loss. Drawing an analogy to her own situation--she is fighting to make herself confess to Clare--the poor girl struggles for an answer:

'I think she ought--to have told him the true state of things--or else refused him--I don't know,' replied Tess, the bread and butter choking her.¹⁵

In line with these unpleasant recollections comes a chance reference to a melancholy subject. While Tess and

15

Tess of the d'Urbervilles, p. 231.

Clare are taking the milk to town early one morning, they pass the ancient d'Urberville seat. Not aware of his companion's personal connection with the topic of discussion, the young man tries to enrich her historical background. Then, in a reflective mood, he comments:

'I never pass one of these residences without thinking of them. There is something very sad in the extinction of a family of renown, even if it was fierce, domineering, feudal renown.'¹⁶

Knowing how much she has had to suffer recently because of her remote relationship with this medieval family, she heartily agrees with Clare.

Frequently thrown together by their activities in the dairy, these two cannot resist their growing love for each other. Conscious of committing a great wrong, the heroine follows the promptings of her heart and becomes betrothed to Angel. During the interim preceding their wedding, her mental suffering is excruciating. Continually deferring her confession, she finally loses courage altogether. All along her besetting fear is that the announcement of banns may bring a disclosure of her secret from Trantridge, the scene of her youthful disaster. It is with a surge of relief, therefore, that she learns from Clare of his plans to be married by license. Having previously noticed her dread of the banns, he explains it as an indication of modesty. He says:

'So if you go to church on Sunday morning you will

¹⁶

Ibid., p. 239.

not hear your own name, even if you wished to.'

For reasons which he does not suspect she replies:

'I didn't wish to hear it, dearest.'¹⁷

Shortly before their wedding, a bitterly-ironical incident occurs. Celebrating Christmas at an inn, Clare and Tess meet a man who observes the girl closely. Evidently from Trant-ridge, he knows of the heroine's past and imparts this information to his companion. Overhearing these remarks, Angel is quick to take offense and strikes the speaker on the chin. Ah, what a blind error on his part! He has refused the very warning which might have liberated him from the ensuing hours of despair.

After this occurrence Tess makes one last effort at confession, placing a written account under her fiance's door one night. But it slips under the carpet and escapes detection. Failing at this attempt, she goes on with the marriage ceremony. Following the wedding, she is depressed, for she fancies she has seen before the coach in which they are driving. Clare, who by now knows of her d'Urberville ancestry, refers to a legend pertaining to that family.

'A certain d'Urberville of the sixteenth of seventeenth century committed a dreadful crime in his family coach; and since that time the members of that family see or hear the old coach whenever--'

He interrupts the story, thinking of its gloomy effect on the bride. However, he has already gone too far. The next ques-

¹⁷

Tess of the d'Urbervilles, p. 262.

tion shows her making a personal inference, perfectly obvious to the reader, but lost to Clare:

'Is it when we are going to die, Angel, or is it when we have committed a crime?'¹⁸

Their farewell at the dairy is accompanied by another of Hardy's ironical thrusts effected through the use of natural phenomena. A lull in the leave-takings is broken by the crowing of a white cock within a few yards of the newly-weds. Three times the fowl repeats its performance, once crowing straight at Clare. Two men just out of hearing distance consider it a bad sign. After the wedding party has left, hastened by the uneasiness of Tess, Mr. Crick cannot help wondering why this symbol of unchastity should have appeared before one so obviously pure and chaste as Tess. His wife, in an effort to discredit his suspicions, says:

'It only means a change in weather;' . . . 'not what you think: 'tis impossible!'¹⁹

To the events following the wedding, we have already referred. The confession of Tess brings an unexpected reaction from Clare, whose own youth conceals a night's orgy. He who has been most heterodox now cannot accept the woman whose only fault has been the outcome of unavoidable circumstances. In desperation that night Tess entertains the thought of hanging herself right under the mistletoe where Clare had hoped to kiss her--a truly sensational Hardy contrast--but her better

18

Tess of the d'Urbervilles, p. 272.

19

Tess of the d'Urbervilles, p. 274.

impulses sway her when she thinks of the possible disgrace to her husband. Since the two cannot live together with a void between them, they mutually agree to a separation. So it is that the bride of a day returns to her poverty-stricken family, and Clare visits briefly with his parents before leaving for South America.

The clergyman and his wife, both with rather aristocratic leanings, have at last become reconciled to welcoming a daughter-in-law from the peasant class. They console themselves with the expectation of her redeeming feature--virtue. It is with somewhat of a disappointment that they receive Clare without his wife. The son keeps hidden his true reason for coming alone. Wishing to have her womanly curiosity satisfied, Mrs. Clare proceeds with rapid inquiries. With the force of an inquisition she rains pertinent questions upon her tortured boy. Although it grows out her ignorance of the true facts, this interrogation appears as if it were designed to overtax Angel. Her queries about beauty and purity having been answered in the affirmative, she makes this intensely painful observation:

'I quite see her. And living in such seclusion she naturally had scarce ever seen any young man from the world without till she saw you.'²⁰

To climax this discussion of Tess' admirable attributes, the parson announces his intention of reading for family worship the thirty-first chapter of Proverbs. Probably nowhere else

²⁰

Tess of the d'Urbervilles, p. 335.

in Hardy's novels is the dramatic irony more vivid than in Mrs. Clare's second to her husband's suggestion:

'My dear son, your father has decided to read us the chapter in Proverbs in praise of a virtuous wife. We shall not need to be reminded to apply the words to the absent one. May Heaven shield her in all her ways!'²¹

The reader will recall this particular Biblical passage beginning, "Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is above rubies" and note the trenchant contrast that arises through its context.

3

Intensely gloomy grows the story of Tess' sufferings at this point. Subjected to the worst of tortures, both physical and mental, she fights gamely against the closing web of destiny. Unable to endure her mother's reproach--the woman considers the disastrous confession sheer folly--she leaves home to earn a livelihood elsewhere. At various difficult menial tasks she tries her hand, her physical powers almost breaking under the inordinate strain. At last, considering her lot unendurable, she decides to visit Angel's parents and implore their help. When she has already reached her destination, her courage fails her; and she starts back without announcing herself.

Her return trip does net unforeseen consequences, however. Passing a barn in which a traveling evangelist is preaching, she looks in a moment. Then she recognizes the voice and face of the speaker, Alec d'Urberville! He notices

²¹

Idem.

her, then flounders temporarily to regain his composure. She departs immediately. After a few minutes Alec overtakes her, having been unable to go on with his sermon. In the explanation of his phenomenal conversion lurks more trenchant irony:

' . . . Have you ever heard the name of the parson of Emminster (Angel Clare's father) --you must have done so?--one of the few intense men left in the church. . . .He is one who, I firmly believe, has been the humble means of saving more souls in this country than any other man you can name. You have heard of him?'

'I have,' she said.²²

Considerable would be his surprise should he know in what connection Tess has heard of the parson.

Feeling deeply concerned over the welfare of her soul, he tries his powers of moral suasion. She remains indifferent to his eloquence, for through her contact with Angel she has come to accept some unorthodox views. Decidedly imposing is the contrast brought out by Alec's speech:

'I am sorry you are not a believer,' he continued; 'that some unbeliever should have got hold of you and unsettled your mind. But no more now. At home at least I can pray for you; and I will; and who knows what may not happen?'²³

He has denounced the son of his beloved parson! Furthermore, his expectations of something to 'happen' meet with unexpected realizations.

On leaving Tess, he exacts from her a promise never to tempt him--so weak is his power of resistance to her physical charms. To add solemnity to the occasion, she must lay her

²²

Tess of the d'Urbervilles, p. 393.

²³

Ibid., p. 397.

hand on what he supposes to be a holy cross, and swear. Her curiosity aroused by these proceedings, she asks the first pedestrian she meets about the stone symbol.

'What is the meaning of that old stone I have passed?' she asked him. 'Was it ever a Holy Cross?'
 'Cross--no; 'twere not a cross! 'Tis a thing of ill omen, Miss. It was put up in wild times by the relations of a malefactor who was tortured there by nailing his hand to a post and afterwards hung. The bones lie underneath. They say he sold his soul to the devil, and that he walks at times.'²⁴

What could be more obvious than the irony of this contrast couched in the appropriate setting of an old superstition? This is but another illustration of Hardy's fondness for incorporating evil omens.

As if to prove the informer's remarks about the stone symbol, mischief rushes upon Tess. Alec, unable to ward off his passion for her, under the pretense of Christian duty frequently visits the farm where she is employed. Despising him for his part in her undoing, she answers all his religious arguments with snatches of philosophy gleaned from her association with Clare. In doing so, she is guilty of a serious fault which will recoil upon her with doubled force. Yielding to the power of her logic, the evangelist becomes an apostate. The control formerly exercised over him by religion ceases; he now becomes an actual menace to the safety of Tess. The irony of this reversal is clearly defined in the following passage:

He said to himself, as he pondered again and again

24

Tess of the d'Urbervilles, p. 398.

over the crystallized phrases she had handed over to him,
'That clever fellow little thought that, by telling
 her those things, he might be paving my way back her!'²⁵

Further complications show that he is determined to win his 'way back to her.' Summoned home by the critical illness of her mother, Tess arrives in time to nurse the patient back to health. Finding the neglect to the children has been greater than ever, she remains with her family in an effort to set things running smoothly. One evening, as she is burning the refuse on a plot of ground being prepared for potato planting, the fire suddenly illumines the face of a nearby laborer. It is Alec, disguised so as to escape detection while working alongside her. His remark, lightly made, is grimly apropos in the light of subsequent events:

'A jester might say this is just like Paradise. You are Eve, and I am the old Other One come to tempt you in the disguise of an inferior animal.'²⁶

It needs but one of Hardy's twists of circumstance to encourage the egregious temptations of this 'Other One.' The chance is supplied when, by the sudden death of Mr. Durbeyfield, the widow and her children are made homeless. Leaving Marlott, they take their possessions to Kinsbere, where they are to occupy a few rooms. Upon their arrival, however, they learn that their promised quarters have been let. Strangely incongruous is the extremity to which they are now driven: with no other alternative before them, they seek shelter from

²⁵

Tess of the d'Urbervilles, p. 415.

²⁶

Ibid., p. 444.

the rainy night in the aisle of a church, above the d'Urber-ville vaults. Examining her somber surroundings, Tess is attracted by the life-like appearance of what she takes to be an effigy. Under her scrutiny it moves and proves to be Alec, who has followed her here to play his triumph card. To make his entrance more dramatic, he stamps his foot above the dead. A hollow roar resounds.

'That shook them a bit, I'll warrant!' he continued. 'And you thought I was a mere stone reproduction of them. But no The little finger of the sham d'Urbervilles can do more for you than the whole dynasty of the real underneath.'²⁷

In the fulfilment of his promise is latent another ironical contrast between the apparent context of words and the more significant application given them by the reader. By doing more for Tess in a material way Alec does irreparable harm to her soul and hastens his own end. Forced by Clare's longsilence and lack of support to accept financial aid for her family, she unwillingly becomes the mistress of this renegade evangelist. In this position we find her as we begin the last division of the chapter.

4

Only a few examples of dramatic irony reward our investigation toward the close of the novel. Although somewhat more infrequent here than in other parts of the book, they exhibit, nevertheless, all the startling contrasts and poignant misunderstandings of Hardy's most representative illustrations. They arise with the return of Clare, who, after

27

Tess of the d'Urbervilles, p. 464.

a lingering and devitalizing illness and mental conflicts, has come to rue his regrettable prudery.

For our first instance we follow Angel in his attempt to find Tess. Many disheartening experiences attend his efforts. At Sandbourne he finally receives his first clue as to her place of residence. Inquiring at the post-office for a Mrs. Clare, he gets no results. "Miss Durbeyfield" is likewise unrecognized. Finally another postal clerk suggests the name of d'Urberville, a young couple living at a fashionable lodging-house, The Herons.

'I know no name of Durbeyfield; but there is the name of d'Urberville at the Herons,' said the second.

'That's it!' cried Clare, pleased to think that she had reverted to the real pronunciation.²⁸

Calling at the specified residence, he asks the woman in charge for Teresa d'Urberville.

'Mrs. d'Urberville?'

'Yes.'

Tess, then, passed as a married woman, and he felt glad, even though she had not adopted his name.²⁹

Still more caustic grows the irony when Tess comes to welcome her caller. She appears on the threshold, bewilderingly beautiful in rich attire given her by Alec. Realizing the contrast between her lovely person and his own emaciated self, Clare drops his arms, at first lifted to receive her. Painful is the pause as he waits vainly for her to come to him. Not able to comprehend what he mistakes for reserve,

28

Tess of the d'Urbervilles, p. 482.

29

Idem.

he says:

'But don't you love me, my dear wife, because I am so pulled down by illness? You are not so fickle-- I am come on purpose for you--my mother and father will welcome you now!'³⁰

How blindly he errs! All the more agonizing does it make her explanation of the situation. A pronounced reversal, this--she must now send him away as he had formerly done her!

One further ironical episode remains for us in the conclusion. Passing over the developments in plot--the essentials have been given in the summary near the beginning of the chapter--we come to the last ecstatic hours between the reunited Clare and Tess. The heroine's reference to theology casts a gloom over even these fleeting hours of bliss. Wondering what love will be hers in the hereafter, she asks her husband whether they will meet again. It is a pathetic scene that follows this question. Unable to give her any assurance on this matter, he kisses her in silence. His unorthodox views have rebounded upon him with a terrific force.

'O, Angel--I feel that means no!' said she, with a suppressed sob. 'And I wanted so to see you again--so much! What--not even you and I, Angel, who love each other so well?'³¹

With this desolate note we leave the tragedy of Tess. As already mentioned earlier in the chapter, the atmosphere of gloom, the feeling of inevitability, and the suggestion

³⁰

Tess of the d'Urbervilles, p. 483.

³¹

Tess of the d'Urbervilles, p. 503.

of determinism make a fitting background here for striking dramatic irony. Hardy's contrasts, in this novel especially, show the effects of deliberate planning. Not once is the reader forgotten, for it is his receptive mind which determines the success of an ironic stroke. In this work the novelist aptly illustrates his artistic method.

VI. NOVELS OF CHARACTER AND ENVIRONMENT (Continued)

Jude the Obscure

With Jude the Obscure we come to a study of thwarted ambition. Stripped of all prudery, this novel presents with stark realism the tyrannical devastation of man's strongest passion--sex. The conflict between his loftier ideals and his baser emotions is vividly portrayed with many an ironical interpolation. As the convention of the "fallen woman" was attacked in Tess of the d'Urbervilles, so is the institution of marriage assailed here.¹ Jude's ill-starred unions, contracted because of his basic weakness, contribute to the defeat of his earnest desire for scholastic attainment. For his error in yielding to nature's primal urge, he must endure the collapse of his life-long yearnings and aspirations. He is the "sort of man who was born to ache a good deal before the fall of the curtain upon his unnecessary life should signify that all was well with him again."² Treating, as it does, the injustices of existence, this work abounds in vivid incongruities and contrasts.

In the sad history of Jude Fawley we sense clearly the presence of a tragic destiny. Inspired in his boyhood by an esteemed teacher, the youth early entertains hopes of entering Christminster University. While assisting his aunt with her bakery at Marygreen--he had been orphaned in childhood--

¹

Based partly upon the discussion in J. W. Beach, The Technique of Thomas Hardy, p. 218-244.

²

Jude the Obscure, p. 13

he utilizes every minute of spare time to pursue his language studies. As a young man he is apprenticed to a stone-mason at Alfredston. Here his efforts at erudition are arrested by a pig-breeder's daughter, Arabella Donn, who lures him into marrying her. Incompatibility finally leads to a bitter quarrel and his wife's departure for Australia. Free again, he follows his trade at Christminster, expecting still to be admitted to the university; but, receiving no encouragement from the school officials, he decides to become a humble curate instead of a scholar. By chance, he meets in this city his former schoolmaster, Phillotson, and his cousin, Sue Bridehead. After these two have become acquainted through him, Phillotson first sends Sue to a teacher's training school and later makes her his assistant. In the meantime, Jude has fallen desperately in love with his cousin. When, however, he tells her of his former relationship with Arabella, she marries Phillotson. But unable to endure this unhappy marriage, Sue later goes to live with Jude. Although divorced from their former mates and free to legalize this present union, the cousins cannot undergo what they consider the 'sordid' sacrament of matrimony. Consequently, society ostracizes them, forcing them to seek a wretched subsistence through a life of wanderings. Impelled by his youthful ambitions, Jude finally goes back to Christminster, accompanied by Sue and three sons, the oldest having sprung from his union with Arabella. Advanced for his years--he has been nicknamed "Little Father Time" because of his serious mien--

this boy senses what an encumbrance the children are to his parents. Learning of an expected increase to the family, he hopes to lighten the burden by hanging his brothers and himself. Cruelly smitten by this blow, Sue yet considers it her due punishment. Following the arrival of a still-born child, she represses all physical repulsion and returns to Phillotson, considering him still her husband by the laws of God. Jude, overcome by despondency, is again inveigled into a marriage with Arabella. When he succumbs to a lingering illness, however, his wife neglects him. One day while Arabella is disporting herself elsewhere, he dies unattended. Only the strains from a nearby university organ mark his passing.

We shall set forth the instances of dramatic irony in this novel under the main heads suggested by the summary just given: (1) the thwarting of Jude's youthful aspirations through the machinations of Arabella; (2) the final overthrow of his plans after his unconventional union with Sue; (3) final degradation and last days with Arabella. Without any further mention, this arrangement will be followed in this discussion.

1

From the very beginning the reader has feeling that Jude is doomed to disappointment. We first see the boy taking leave of his beloved schoolmaster, Phillotson, who plans to continue his studies at Christminster. Strangely fascinated by the idea of pursuing a similar scholarly life some

day, the lad asks his Aunt Drusilla where the university is located. As the food woman answers the inquiry, she little thinks how well spoken her advice is. Nor does the nephew anticipate the evils that will befall him by grasping too high.

'Lord! you ought to know where the city of Christminster is. Near a score of miles from here. It is a place much too good for you ever to have much to do with, poor boy, I'm a thinking.'³

A pronounced reversal comes to him in early manhood. Having persevered in his language studies, he feels he is approaching his goal. Fond dreams are his while his is driving home one day. Thus he sums up his prospects:

'I have staying power in abundance, thank God! and it is that which tell. . . . Yes, Christminster shall be my Alma Mater; and I'll be her beloved son, in whom she shall be well pleased.'⁴

How ironical, then, is the incident that follows! Just at the conclusion of his speech a piece of pig's offal strikes his ear. It has been thrown by one of three young women across the hedge. Stopping to make investigations, Jude meets Arabella for the first time. To what unfortunate circumstances this acquaintance leads him, we have already learned. We cannot help noticing the artistic device Hardy has used here-- a contrast designed in every way to startle. The high ideals of Jude Fawley are cast from their pinnacle by a coarse woman with a still more vulgar missile!

³
Jude the Obscure, p. 14.

⁴
Ibid., p. 41.

The first rendezvous between Sue Bridehead and Jude Fawley strikes a note of grim incongruity. Learning that she plans to leave Christminster soon, he dispatches a note to her, asking for a meeting "at the cross in the pavement which marked the spot of the Martyrdoms."⁵ The coincidence of this selection is significant in symbolizing the future anguish in store for these two. For them the "Martyrdom" on the cross of society is soon to begin.

When the intimate friendship develops between the two cousins, one hears the rumblings of approaching doom. For them the tragedy is inherent; unhappy marriages have been characteristic of this family. It is with this fact in mind that Aunt Drusilla warns Jude:

'. . . If your cousin is civil to you, take her civility for what it is worth. But anything more than a relation's good wishes it is stark madness for 'ee to give her.'⁶

Coming at a time when the young man already feels very tender towards his cousin, this admonition suggests a contrast. Especially ironical is the turn given it by later calamities. Sue, too, receives her share of reproach. It is shortly after her marriage to Phillotson that she visits the dying Aunt Drusilla. Austere is the message to the already-troubled niece:

⁵
Jude the Obscure, p. 116.

⁶
Ibid., p. 131.

' . . . Ah--you'll rue this marrying as well as he!' she added, turning to Sue. 'All our family do,--and nearly all everybody else's. You should have done as I did, you simpleton! And Phillotson the schoolmaster, of all men! What made 'ee marry him?'⁷

Since the girl, unknown to her aunt, already has come greatly to rue her marriage, the irony in this remark is stinging.

Jude, made miserable by his cousin's ill-mated marriage and his own desolation, finds some comfort in a new hymn, "The Foot of the Cross." To the composer of this song he now decides to go for consolation. Great are the despondent man's expectations:

'He of all men would understand my difficulties,' said the impulsive Jude. If there were any person in the world to choose as a confidant, this composer would be the one, for he must have suffered, and throbbed, and yearned.⁸

Pronounced is the ironical reversal that concludes this incident. It is an extreme contrast between expectations and realizations. The composer proves to be a man interested solely in mercenary undertakings. The income from his hymn writing being insufficient, he has lately entered the wine business. As a final stroke he hands Jude an ornamented advertising list of intoxicating beverages!

It is small wonder, then, that Jude throws himself upon the world with reckless abandon. Nor is it surprising that his determination to become a curate receives a check as he contemplates life with his cousin; In granting Sue a divorce

⁷

Jude the Obscure, p. 228.

⁸

Ibid., p. 233.

on the grounds of adultery, Phillotson promotes further irony, for his wife, as yet, is absolutely innocent of these charges. By freeing her from the bonds of wedlock the schoolmaster paves the way for the very sin of which she is now falsely accused.

Into the unconventional companionship between Jude and Sue enters the precocious child, "Little Father Time." His arrival calls for this pathetically ironical speech from his father:

'. . . And Sue, darling; I have an idea! We'll educate and train him with a view to the University. What I couldn't accomplish in my own person perhaps I can carry out through him? They are making it easier for students now, you know.'⁹

A bitter reversal awaits the poor parent. It is unconsciously suggested by Sue when she says: 'There's more for us to think about in that one little hungry heart than in all the stars in the sky.'¹⁰ Yes, for them there is much 'to think about'--vastly more than Sue can possibly grasp with her limited insight. In the hands of this innocent child lies the tragic termination of her comradeship with Jude. Her words are an astounding contrast between the apparent meaning and the sad implication.

Perhaps an ironical suggestion of the impending calamity emerges with a curious dialogue between the woman and the child. The occasion is the sale of Jude's property, social

9

Jude the Obscure, p. 335.

10

Idem.

ostracism necessitating his resort to an itinerant type of life. One of the last items at the auction is Sue's pair of pet pigeons. Heart-broken at the thought of their eventual slaughter, she says:

'. . . O why should nature's law be mutual butchery!' 'Is it so, mother?' asked the boy intently.¹¹

Might a merciful angel but have opened her eyes to this irretrievable error! In the boy's susceptible mind she is unwittingly sowing the seeds of doom. How deliberately Hardy is designing for this grim contrast!

The inevitability of approaching disaster is intimated further by this child's curious remark. This time the Fawleys' disheartening search for temporary living quarters at Christminster ushers in the ironic stroke. Against a strikingly-effective setting it arises.

The sky had grown overcast and livid, and thunder rumbled now and then. Father Time shuddered. 'It do seem like the Judgment Day!' he whispered.¹²

For him it is soon to be the 'Judgment Day'--in an unanticipated grim literal sense of the expression.

To close the sad chapter of this boy's ill-fated life, we turn to the last few hours preceding his gruesome death. Quick to realize that Jude has gone elsewhere for the night to make room for his family in the cramped lodgings, the super-sensitive "Little Father Time" expresses his opinions to Sue.

11

Jude the Obscure, p. 371.

12

Ibid., p. 391

'It would be better to be out o' the world than in it, wouldn't it,'

'It would almost, dear.'

'I think that whenever children are born that are not wanted they should be killed directly, before their souls come to 'em, and not be allowed to grow big and walk about!'¹³

Wondering how to treat this reflective child, Sue precipitates the tragedy by telling him that another baby is coming soon. We have already seen how the boy takes matters into his own hands thereafter. This reversal is overwhelming; its austerity shocks even the most cynical reader; it is a crushing ironical stroke.

3

With Sue's return to Phillotson, following the death of her children, Jude is again subjected to the wiles of Arabella. Once in the clutches of this unprincipled woman, he suffers the last extremities of degradation. Not long before the end, he recalls his first attempt to stab a hog--an incident which has harrowed his soul considerably at one time. He speaks of it to his wife:

'Ah, yes!' said he, laughing acridly, 'I have been thinking of my foolish feeling about the pig you and I killed during our first marriage. I feel now that the greatest mercy that could be vouchsafed to me would be that something should serve me as I served that animal!'¹⁴

In this pathetic expression of hopelessness lies our last instance of dramatic irony. It is Arabella who figuratively

¹³

Jude the Obscure, p. 402.

¹⁴

Jude the Obscure, p. 465.

serves him as he had 'served that animal.' While she is enjoying the embraces of a quack doctor, he lies dying in his room. Unwept and unattended he must shuffle off this weary coil.

By way of summary to our study of Jude the Obscure, we may add that the spirit of this novel is probably more intense and trenchant than that of the preceding works. Coupled with the contrasts between surface and hidden meanings of words is a definite emphasis on reversals. Repeatedly does Hardy stress the diversity separating expectations and actual realizations. For the student bent upon finding illustrations for this investigation, the difficulties are many. It is often almost impossible to distinguish between dramatic and simple irony--so closely are the two interwoven here. On this account the instances in this chapter are somewhat fewer than in the preceding one. It has been deemed best to select only examples which definitely appear as dramatic irony.

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VII. CONCLUSIONS

In the course of this study we have called attention to Hardy's pronounced concentration on accident and coincidence. We have observed how a concatenation of events, often introduced by a trifling incident, weaves its entangling web of circumstances around the protagonist. The resultant conflicts, as has been shown, usher in the striking contrasts and incongruities mentioned in the preceding chapters. By way of recapitulation, let us now outline the principal factors that contribute to our novelist's effective use of dramatic irony.

Chief among these agencies is the use of secrets and inhibitions. Repeatedly, failure to make a timely confession leads to misunderstandings and complications. It is the women of the novels who most frequently promote the irony through evasions. For example, Cytherea Aldclyffe¹ withholds the identity of her illegitimate son; Ethelberta Petherwin² conceals the facts of her humble origin; Elfride Swancourt³ throws a veil over her earlier engagement to Stephen Smith; Fancy Day gives Dick Dewy no hint of her short-lived relations with Vicar Maybold; Susan Henchard⁵

¹Desperate Remedies.

²The Hand of Ethelberta.

³A Pair of Blue Eyes

⁴Under the Greenwood Tree.

⁵The Mayor of Casterbridge.

keeps her husband in ignorance of Elizabeth-Jane's fatherhood; and Tess Durbeyfield,⁶ before marrying Angel Clare, cannot bring herself to disclose the story of her youthful betrayal. Similarly, mystery cloaks the artifices of William Dare,⁷ the misfortunes of Fanny Robin,⁸ and the and the sacrifices of John Loveday.⁹

Supplementing the use of concealment is an emphasis on premonitions and prophecies. Owen Graye's¹⁰ uneasiness after Cytherea's marriage to Manston, Boldwood's¹¹ presentiment of calamity preceding his Christmas party, Sol Chickerell's¹² prediction of evil following Ethelberta's union with Lord Mountclere, Mrs. Yeobright's¹³ forebodings of remorse for her son Clyme, and Aunt Drusilla's¹⁴ warnings to Jude on the subject of matrimony--these are but a few typical examples. They are responsible for many of the con-

⁶
Tess of the d'Urbervilles.

⁷
A Laodicean.

⁸
Far from the Madding Crowd.

⁹
The Trumpet-Major.

¹⁰
Desperate Remedies.

¹¹
Far from the Madding Crowd.

¹²
The Hand of Ethelberta.

¹³
The Return of the Native.

¹⁴
Jude the Obscure.

trasts from the unanticipated literalness of their execution.

Closely related to this prognostication are the recurring omens and superstitions. Vividly do we recall such instances as the burning of the effigy in The Return of the Native; the choice of room 13 as the bridal chamber in Desperate Remedies; and the rose thorn, the coach legend, and the holy-cross episode in Tess of the d'Urbervilles. Again we note the force of coincidence as these austere signs invariably presage corresponding strokes of adversity.

In line with these allusions to the supernatural is the incorporation of natural phenomena to symbolize unfaithfulness in love and marriage. The cries of the cuckoo in Desperate Remedies and The Woodlanders, the crowing of the cock in Tess of the d'Urbervilles, and the lovers' walk through Cuckoo-Lane in Under the Greenwood Tree--all are deliberately woven into the plot. They attest to Hardy's fondness for inviting the reader, already in possession of the significant facts, to appreciate fully the ironical slant given to these situations.

Finally we come to the most important element, that essential without which dramatic irony in Hardy's novels would lack its convincing power--a skillfully-created fatalistic atmosphere. How this end is sometimes furthered by superb descriptions of settings, we have seen in such novels as The Return of the Native and The Woodlanders. Additional coloring of this somber hue results from the suggestion of an inescapable necessity always hovering in

the background. The reader feels as if the inexorable decrees of a malignant force had doomed struggling humanity to misery. This baleful hostility becomes apparent in the disparity between what is sought and what is really secured, between what is striven after and what is actually attained. With eminent rapidity the reversals follow each other to intensify this picture of darkest gloom.

Should we try, now, to characterize with one expression the modd of Thomas Hardy's dramatic irony, we should employ the term "awe-inspiring." The author achieves this desired effect by selecting, for the most part, characters from the prosaic walks of life and following them through the surge of conflicting emotions. As this pitiless baring of the soul proceeds, it cannot fail to set in vibration the chords of sympathy. Again and again we see how yielding to the human passions and urges spells ruin. It is the injustices of existence, the flaws in the plan of creation that hold erring humanity in thrall. Especially is this profound philosophy typified in the three masterpieces: The Return of the Native, Tess of the d'Urbervilles, and Jude the Obscure. Here the ironical strokes are most artistic; their intensity is often overwhelming; at times they scale the heights of Sophoclean grandeur.

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3. Vol.III: Jude the Obscure, 493.
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6. Vol.VI: The Woodlanders, 444 pp.
7. Vol.VII: Under the Greenwood Tree, 211 pp.
8. Vol.VIII: Life's Little Ironies, 259 pp.
9. Vol.IX: Wessex Tales, 287 pp.
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11. Vol.XI: The Trumpet-Major, 373 pp.
12. Vol.XII: Two on a Tower, 314 pp.
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