Hardy's Meliorism as evident in his Short Tales

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The thesis explores some aspects of Thomas Hardy's meliorism in his short tales. Chapter I is a general introduction to Hardy's view of life. It attempts to prove, by examples from his best known novels and quotes from his notebooks, that Hardy was neither a hopeless pessimist nor a determinist. Rather he allowed his characters the power to act with a degree of freedom to improve their own or others' lives. Hardy's characters are given the power of choice, and Chapter II explores the choices made by the protagonists of some of the tales. Chapter III deals with those characters who refuse to accept the real world and their power to influence it. Chapter IV concentrates on the individual's power to make improvements in society as a whole, and points out Hardy's belief in the responsibility of each individual to do so. The conclusion reiterates that Hardy's tales prove him to be a meliorist, since he advocated the improvement of the world through man's efforts.

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Heine observed nearly a hundred years ago that the soul has her eternal rights; that she will not be darkened by statutes, nor lullabied by the music of bells. And what is to-day, in allusions to the present author's pages, alleged to be "pessimism" is, in truth, only such "questionings" in the exploration of reality, and is the first step towards the soul's betterment, and the body's also.

If I may be forgiven for quoting my own words, let me repeat what I printed in this relation more than twenty years ago, and wrote much earlier, in a poem entitled "In Tenebris":

> If way to the Better there be, it exacts a full
> look at the Worst:

that is to say, by the exploration of reality, and its frank recognition stage by stage along the survey, with an eye to the best consummation possible: briefly, evolutionary meliorism.

-Apology to Late Lyrics and Earlier

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I

If but some vengeful god would call to me
From up the sky, and laugh: "Thou suffering thing,
Know that thy sorrow is my ecstacy,
That thy love's loss is my hate's profiting!"

Then would I bear it, clench myself, and die,
Steeled by the sense of ire unmerited;
Half-eased in that a Powerfuller than I
Had willed and meted me the tears I shed.

But not so. How arrives it joy lies slain,
And why unblooms the best hope ever sown?
--Crass Casualty obstructs the sun and rain,
And dicing Time for gladness casts a moan . . . .
These purblind Doomsters had as readily strown
Blisses about my pilgrimage as pain.[1]

Thomas Hardy wrote these lines on "Hap" when he was only twenty-six years old; yet the theme of the poem appears again and again throughout Hardy's works. Even his latest novels, such as Tess of the D'Urbervilles and Jude the Obscure, deal with the causes of human suffering, and Hardy's notebook entries on the subject emphasize his concern with the assignation of responsibility for that suffering.

Trained from childhood as a traditional Christian, Hardy never really gave up the desire to believe in an omnipotent god, even when his intellect forced a renunciation of belief. In 1890 he wrote in his notebook: "I have been looking for God 50 years, and I think that if he had

[1] Thomas Hardy, The Collected Poems of Thomas Hardy (London, 1952), p. 7.

existed I should have discovered him."[2] So strong is this desire to affirm the existence of God, suggests one critic, that it affects the plots of the novels: "in some corner of his heart Hardy seems to desire to see his protagonists damned. It is almost as if damnation were the one certain proof of God's existence."[3] In spite of this desire for belief, however, Hardy could not bring himself to accept a doctrine that contradicted his own observations of the world. The existence of pain, especially, seemed to him incompatible with the concept of an omnipotent god of goodness: "Pain has been, and pain is: no new sort of morals in Nature can remove pain from the past and make it pleasure for those who are its infallible estimators, the bearers thereof."[4] Not only his own observations, but also the ideas expressed by several of his contemporaries prompted Hardy's rejection of Christianity. As a young man he read and was greatly influenced by the iconoclastic The Origin of Species (1859), and Essays and Reviews (1860), the latter written by a group of intellectuals dubbed "The Seven against Christ."[5] Critics and biographers agree that the effect of these books on Hardy marks a turning-point in his intellectual development;

[2] Florence E. Hardy, The Early Life of Thomas Hardy (London, 1928), p. 293.
[3] Desmond Hawkins, Thomas Hardy (London, 1950), p. 74.
[4] Florence E. Hardy, The Later Years of Thomas Hardy (New York, 1930), p. 97.
[5] F.B. Pinion, A Hardy Companion (London, 1968), p. 4.

no longer could he accept "Christian theology, chiefly the idea of Providence, Redemption, and Life after death, [which were] overthrown for Hardy when . . . he was introduced to contemporary scientific thought."[6] "Hap" and other poems make this loss of faith explicit,[7] and a notebook entry of 1907 documents the corresponding loss of the comfort of belief: "We enter church, and . . . we have to sing, 'My soul doth magnify the Lord', when what we want to sing is, 'O that my soul could find some Lord that it could magnify!'"[8]

Since Hardy could not accept the beliefs offered by Christianity, he began to look for a substitute theory of existence, exploring the relation of imperfect powers in an imperfect world, and attempting to allot responsibility for good and evil in a universe which has neither God nor Satan. He explained the rationale behind such questionings in the preface to Late Lyrics and Earlier:

> While I am quite aware that a thinker is not expected, and, indeed, is scarcely allowed . . . to state all that crosses his mind concerning existence in this universe, in his attempts to explain or excuse the presence of evil and the incongruity of penalizing the irresponsible--it must be obvious to open intelligences that, without denying the beauty and faithful service of certain venerable cults, such disallowance of "obstinate questionings" and "blank misgivings"

[6] Ibid., p. 168.
[7] For example, "God's Funeral," "The Darkling Thrush," and "The Graveyard of Dead Creeds."
[8] Later Years, p. 121.

tends to a paralysed intellectual stalemate.[9] Hardy's "obstinate questionings" eventually led him to the conception of a limited and amoral force as the original impulse behind creation. He calls it by several names--"Law," "Prime Mover," "the Cause of Things," "the invariable antecedent." In this function of creator, Hardy's Prime Mover possesses attributes usually associated with the Christian God.(Hardy once noted that "fifty meanings attach to the word 'God' nowadays, the only reasonable meaning being the Cause of Things, whatever that cause may be."[10]) The Prime Mover is, however, a much more limited force than the traditional Christian God, as Hardy's notes on the Prime Mover indicate. It is unconscious. "If Law itself had consciousness, how the aspects of its creatures would terrify it, fill it with remorse."[11] It is capable of making mistakes. "He, she, had blundered; but not as the Prime Cause had blundered. He, she, had sinned; but not as the Prime Cause had sinned. He, she, was ashamed and sorry; but not as the Prime Cause would be ashamed and sorry if it knew."[12] As an unconscious force, the Prime Cause has neither moral sense nor an interest in human beings; "the said Cause is neither moral nor immoral, but

9 Collected Poems, p. 526.
10 Later Years, p. 176.
11 Early Life, p. 192.
12 Ibid., p. 282.

unmoral: 'loveless and hateless' I have called it, 'which neither good nor evil knows.'"[13]

The concept of a Prime Cause, then, does nothing more than explain the creation of the universe. Belief in such a limited and indifferent power affords little comfort compared to that offered by the belief in God, who has at once Vision, with which He sees the larger pattern invisible to man; Power, to exercise His benevolent purposes; and Love, or partiality to mankind. Such comfortable beliefs Hardy refused, and his world thus became one in which mankind stands very much alone. As the only possessor of consciousness and intelligence, man must use his own resources to improve the world, relying on himself rather than on the intervention of Providence. In "A Plaint to Man" Hardy summarizes his view of man's position:

> When you slowly emerged from the den of Time,
> And gained percipience as you grew,
> And fleshed you fair out of shapeless slime,
>
> Wherefore, O Man, did there come to you
> The unhappy need of creating me--
> A form like your own--for praying to?
>
> .....
>
> And now that I dwindle day by day
> Beneath the deicide eyes of seers
> In a light that will not let me stay,
>
> And to-morrow the whole of me disappears,
> The truth should be told, and the fact be faced
> That had best been faced in earlier years:

[13] Later Years, p. 217.

The fact of life with dependence placed
On the human heart's resource alone
In brotherhood bonded close and graced

With loving-kindness fully blown
And visioned help unsought, unknown.[14]

This poem echoes an earlier notebook entry suggesting that until man can find some god to glorify he should "magnify good works, and develop all means of easing mortals' progress through a world not worthy of them."[15] Both the poem and the notebook entry imply that Hardy believes that man has a degree of power in determining the course of his life. Many of Hardy's critics deny that Hardy allows his characters such power. Rather they postulate that Hardy is a fatalist who sees human struggle as condemned to failure. His characters seem helpless victims of forces beyond their control. R.A. Scott-James states that "we are to see them through Hardy's eyes, as Aeschylus saw Prometheus, chained to a rock, against a vast background of nature, the victim of the President of the Immortals."[16] Certainly Hardy's vision of life is tragic rather than comic, and most of his tales deal with

[14] Collected Poems, p. 306.
[15] Later Years, p. 121.
[16] R.A. Scott-James, Thomas Hardy (London, 1951), p. 21. Patrick Braybrooke in Thomas Hardy and his Philosophy (London, 1928), complains that throughout the novels and stories Hardy "seems to moan that life is unfair, that life is governed and planned by some arbitrary power. No road leads to happiness or even the avoidance of unhappiness."(p. 159)

human unhappiness. They do not, however, deny man's own responsibility in helping to create that unhappiness. Hardy himself remarked that his books are "one long plea against 'man's inhumanity to man'--to woman--and to the lower animals," asserting that "whatever may be the inherent good or evil of life, it is certain that men make it much worse than it need be."[17] This idea is inconsistent with a fatalistic attitude to life, and, indeed, it is only Hardy's peasants who express the doctrine of fatalism. With Joan Durbeyfield, they take the easiest course in blaming outside forces for disasters that have been caused by their own mistakes. "'Tis nater, after all, and what do please God!" says Joan of Tess's pregnancy, and thus dismisses her own error, which Tess has just pointed out: "Why didn't you tell me there was danger in men-folk? Why didn't you warn me?"[18]

The heroes and heroines of the novels are less willing to resign themselves to such a fatalistic attitude, and thus they are protagonists rather than chorus figures. Their efforts are aimed at testing their power to transcend the barriers placed upon them by fate; they defy social norms by loving one whose social position is either above or below their own. Ambition rather than acquiescence is

[17] William Archer, Real Conversations (London, 1904), p.46.
[18] Thomas Hardy, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, Macmillan Library Edition (London, 1950), p. 104. Subsequent references are to this edition.

their rule of life. It is true that their struggles rarely lead to happiness, and it almost seems that the relative contentment of the peasants' resigned attitude is better suited to a "planet [which] does not supply the materials for happiness to higher existences."[19] Yet some of Hardy's characters do strive towards a goal that they eventually obtain, and thus they achieve some measure of happiness. Among these are Gabriel Oak of Far from the Madding Crowd, Elizabeth-Jane Henchard of The Mayor of Casterbridge, and Stephen Reynard of "The First Countess of Wessex." In reference to Elizabeth-Jane, critics often quote the last sentence of The Mayor of Casterbridge as evidence that for Hardy "happiness was but the occasional episode in a general drama of pain." They neglect the first part of the sentence, which indicates that attitude to be a mistaken one of Elizabeth-Jane's youth: "And in being forced to class herself among the fortunate she did not cease to wonder at the persistence of the unforeseen, when the one to whom such unbroken tranquillity had been accorded in the adult stage was she whose youth had seemed to teach that happiness was but the occasional episode in a general drama of pain."[20] For a few "fortunate," then,

[19] Early Life, p. 286.
[20] Thomas Hardy, The Mayor of Casterbridge, Macmillan Library Edition (London, 1958), p. 385.

the attainment of happiness is possible if, like Elizabeth-Jane, one does not expect too much. Though the struggle of many of Hardy's characters ends in the failure to obtain that elusive goal, Hardy indicates that success could have been the outcome of struggle, had the events of one or two crucial moments been avoided or altered.

Many of Hardy's critics are concerned with the question of whether or not Hardy allows his characters the power to alter such events. Do the characters really choose one course instead of another, or do they simply carry out a course of action that has been predetermined by forces beyond their control? Are their individual characters so moulded by heredity and environment that they have no power over their own actions? According to one critic, Patrick Braybrooke, neither human character nor situation is within man's control in Hardy's world. Rather man is powerless to avoid the destiny that governs his life. Braybrooke argues that Hardy's philosophy is one of "subtle and dangerous Determinism,"[21] and that his explorations of man's place in the universe "throw him back again and again, almost exhausted, to that pernicious Determinism which leaves us wailing, 'No hope, no hope.'"[22] The natural world

[21] Thomas Hardy and his Philosophy (London, 1928), p. 47.
[22] Ibid., p. 50.

Braybrooke sees as "the old gloom Nature--cruel, Nature--unscrupulous, Nature the ally of Determinism."[23] To Hardy, however, Nature seemed indifferent rather than cruel, and the principle of Determinism implies a rational law which contradicts Hardy's belief that "non-rationality seems, as far as one can perceive, to be the principle of the Universe."[24] Since Hardy felt that the "Scheme of Things is, indeed, incomprehensible,"[25] he did not attempt to explain it with any consistency, and objected to a reviewer who, like Braybrooke, treated his "works of art as if they were a scientific system of philosophy, although [he had] repeatedly stated in prefaces and elsewhere that the views in them are seemings, provisional impressions only, used for artistic purposes because they represent approximately the impressions of the age, and are plausible, till somebody produces better theories of the universe."[26]

The power which most influences Hardy's world is not orderly Law, as implied by the concept of Determinism, but capricious Chance. In "Hap," Hardy points to "these purblind Doomsters," "Crass Casualty" and "dicing Time" as the arbiters of his fortune. Those who insist on forcing Hardy's work into a consistent philosophy see the

[23] Ibid., p. 60.
[24] Later Years, p. 90.
[25] Ibid., p. 218.
[26] Ibid., p. 175

caprice of Chance as a function of a law greater than Chance itself; "Hardy insists on this aggregation of evil chances," states one critic, "the better to illustrate his doctrine that man is the sport of an indifferent Destiny."[27] "Hap" contradicts this purpose behind the workings of Chance: "These purblind Doomsters had as readily strown/Blisses about my pilgrimage as pain." Without any rationale to guide it, Chance determines the basic conditions of each man's existence, including his social standing, intellectual capacity, and nationality. At critical moments it interferes with man's attempt to cope with his lot, so that frequent unexpected accidents occur throughout Hardy's works. It is by Chance that the storm that threatens Bathsheba's hay ricks comes on the very night that Troy and the labourers are too drunk from their harvest celebrations to save the ricks. It is by Chance that the note Tess writes to Angel telling him of her past slips under his rug, so that he does not read it. It is by Chance that Henchard is prevented from committing suicide when he sees the effigy of himself floating in the pool. The presence of capricious Chance is the basic condition of existence in Hardy's world as in any imperfect world. Unforeseen circumstances change his characters' courses,

[27] Lord David Cecil, Hardy the Novelist: An Essay in Criticism (London, 1954), p. 129.

but only when those characters are not strongly committed to a definite course of action. If Henchard had really wanted to drown himself, the sight of his effigy would not have stopped him from doing so. If Tess was determined to tell Angel of her past, the accident of the note would have delayed her confession only slightly. The morning after she had put the note under the door, she was almost certain that Angel had not received it. There were still three days before the wedding in which she could have found the note under the rug and attempted another confession. Instead, she waited until the morning of the wedding to look for the note. Even then there was still time to tell Angel her story, but Tess preferred to let the accident of the letter deter her. Hardy makes this quite clear: "The incident of the misplaced letter she had jumped at as if it prevented a confession; but she knew in her conscience that it need not; there was still time."[28] Chance, then, does not always hinder human struggle, but often acts as a convenient excuse for those whose wills are weak, and who welcome any accident that interferes with their pursuit of a difficult course of action.

Contrasted to Tess is the strong-willed Gabriel Oak of Far from the Madding Crowd. Oak's actions are

[28] Tess of the D'Urbervilles, p. 269.

directed towards definite goals--having his own farm and Bathsheba as his wife. He refuses to be deflected from the pursuit of these goals, even when he is financially ruined by an accident that destroys all his sheep. The precedent established by this refusal is repeated in all Oak's confrontations with "Crass Casualty," and his actions on the night of the storm typify his persistent defiance of Chance. Seeing the possibility of a storm and the consequent danger to Bathsheba's ricks, Oak first warns Troy, who denies the possibility of rain. He then tries to enlist the help of the drunken labourers and, finally, begins the task of covering and thatching the ricks by himself. He saves the ricks, and, incidentally increases Bathsheba's dependence on him. Thus Oak actively resists the accidents which threaten his pursuit of planned goals, and does not allow himself to be destroyed by "Crass Casualty." He accepts unexpected contingencies, even those that seem most destructive, as creators of a situation that he must take as raw material, moulding it to shape the future. He thus achieves a degree of power over his own destiny.

It can be argued, of course, that it is only by Chance that Oak's character possesses the attributes that allow him to take advantage of every situation. Once again responsibility for action is removed from human hands and placed on whatever "hap of birth"[29] determined the hereditary

[29] Thomas Hardy, "Discouragement," Collected Poems, p. 789.

and environmental influences which formed Oak's resolute character. Tess, too, can be seen as a helpless victim of a quality she inherited from her lackadaisical parents--the tendency to passivity at crucial moments. Tess is equally endowed, however, with an ability for aggressive action that her parents never display, which finally explodes in the slaying of Alec D'Urbervilles. Thus her character contains the germs of both passive acceptance and active resistance. While these contrasting qualities remain latent within her, her reactions to a situation cannot be prejudged by a knowledge of her character. With all Hardy's protagonists, as with Tess, character traits develop as the plot proceeds. From his omniscient viewpoint Hardy describes no more of their qualities than would be apparent to a casual acquaintance. He lets their actions work, not only to show individual character traits, but also to help create those traits. As Hardy wrote in a notebook entry of 1890, "I am more than ever convinced that persons are successively various persons, according as each special strand in their characters is brought uppermost by circumstances."[30]

Character is thus not predetermined; rather it is potential only. All Hardy's heroes and heroines have great potential, as is emphasized especially by their youth and inexperience. As circumstances act to realize some of this

[30]Early Life, p. 301.

potential, the characters in turn affect circumstances, so that an intricate pattern of cause and effect arises. Man is not entirely the helpless victim in this pattern, for he has the intelligence to understand it and use it for his own purposes. Certainly he is limited by heredity and environment, but he is not made completely powerless by them. Hardy makes it clear in a notebook entry that he does not believe man is wholly determined by forces beyond human control: "Life is what we make it as Whist is what we make it; but not as Chess is what we make it; which ranks higher as a purely intellectual game than either Whist or Life."[31] Forces beyond man's control deal Hardy's characters their cards, but the playing of those cards is their own responsibility. Too often they lose the game by their own poor playing; they give up just a moment too soon, play their trump at the wrong time, or refuse to play it at all. To the reader of Hardy's tales, the element of human error is obvious. From his perspective as an objective observer, the reader sees that Tess should have told Angel sooner, or that Bathsheba should not have allowed herself to be goaded into marrying Troy. Thus is created the pattern of all Hardy's work. What happens is set against a background of what should have happened. The

[31] Later Years, p. 96.

tragedy of Hardy's heroes and heroines is that so much of their potential remains unrealized. Limited by Time and Chance, by heredity and environment, and by their own unnecessary mistakes, they become like the twisted trees in the woods--evidence of the "Unfulfilled Intention."[32] Hardy's tales are thus a demonstration of his theory that "a perception of the FAILURE of THINGS to be what they are meant to be, lends them, in place of the intended interest, a new and greater interest of an unintended kind."[33]

Whether or not one accepts Hardy's work as didactic, it is evident that he spends much effort in pointing out human error as the cause of many failures to realize potential. He shows where his characters err, where they could have altered their lives, and thus illustrates his belief that "whatever may be the inherent good or evil of life, it is certain that men make it much worse than it need be."[34] With all the limitations imposed upon

[32] In the woods near Little Hintock, "as everywhere, the Unfulfilled Intention, which makes life what it is, was as obvious as it could be among the depraved crowds of a city slum. The leaf was deformed, the curve was crippled, the taper was interrupted; the lichen ate the vigour of the stalk, and the ivy slowly strangled to death the promising sapling." Thomas Hardy, The Woodlanders, Macmillan Library Edition (London, 1949), p. 59. Subsequent references will be to this edition.

[33] Early Life, p. 163.

[34] Archer, p. 46.

man by the outside world, he retains the power of choice. Often the choice is one between two evils or between two kinds of unhappiness, but the choice is nonetheless real. Hardy's characters make a variety of choices, from the simplest to the most complicated, and it is by making the wrong choices that they ruin the chance of happiness for themselves or for others. They err not out of evil intent, but because of carelessness, a lack of forethought, or misunderstanding. These are within the bounds of human control, and thus can be corrected through human endeavour. By pointing out human error as an element in the "Unfulfilled Intention," then, Hardy is taking the first step towards eliminating that error. His tales do not concentrate solely on those flaws in the world that lie outside man's remedies; rather they deal with what Hardy himself called "remediable ills," and illustrate his belief that "when we have got rid of a thousand remediable ills, it will be time enough to determine whether the ill that is irremediable outweighs the good."[35]

Hardy did believe, then, in a degree of human control over evil in the world, a belief that contradicts his alleged Deterministic philosophy. If man is determined by forces outside his control, then he has no power over his actions, but is good, evil, or indifferent as those

[35] Archer, p. 46.

forces decide. The villain cannot be blamed any more than the hero, for one is as much a puppet as the other. Hardy nevertheless does blame the villains of his tales, because he believes in human responsibility for action. Man has both the power of choice and the intelligence to direct that choice, and Hardy hoped that man would use both in an attempt to improve the imperfect world. In "He Wonders about Himself," Hardy postulates:

> Part is mine of the general Will,
> Cannot my share in the sum of sources
> Bend a digit the poise of forces,
> And a fair desire fulfil?[36]

Hardy answers his own question affirmatively in a later letter on the subject of "Free-will v. Necessity. The will of a man is . . . neither wholly free nor wholly unfree. When swayed by the Universal Will . . . he is not individually free; but whenever it happens that all the rest of the Great Will is in equilibrium the minute portion called one person's will is free, just as a performer's fingers are free to go on playing the pianoforte of themselves when he talks or thinks of something else and the head does not rule them."[37]

Since he did believe in man's power to "bend a digit the poise of forces," Hardy rejected the label of pessimist for the more appropriate "meliorist." His examination of man's place in the universe is an "exploration

[36] Collected Poems, p. 480.
[37] Later Years, p. 125.

of reality, and its frank recognition stage by stage along the survey, with an eye to the best consummation possible: briefly, evolutionary meliorism."[38] Hardy argued that what is "alleged to be 'pessimism' is, in truth, only such 'questionings' in the exploration of reality, and is the first step towards the soul's betterment, and the body's also."[39] Man is capable of improving living conditions in the world, and Hardy saw the ideal goal of his melioristic philosophy thus: "Pain to all upon the earth, tongued or dumb, shall be kept down to a minimum by loving-kindness, operating through scientific knowledge, and actuated by the modicum of free will conjecturally possessed by organic life when the mighty necessitating forces--unconscious or other--that have 'the balancings of the clouds,' happen to be in equilibrium, which may or may not be often."[40]

Conditional though it might be, then, Hardy does allow his characters the power to succeed or fail through their own actions. Certainly he concentrates more on the failures than the successes, but this is because he believed that "if way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst."[41] Hardy's tales point to the warped reality of great intentions; in doing so, they also provide an

38 Preface to Late Lyrics and Earlier, Collected Poems, p. 526.
39 Ibid., p. 526.
40 Ibid., p. 527.
41 Thomas Hardy, "In Tenebris," Collected Poems, p. 154.

intimation of the potential for a better world. Like the twisted trees of the woods near Little Hintock, Hardy's characters, compromised and defeated, hint at the greatness that could have been theirs, had the Intention only been fulfilled. Whereas it is difficult to see why the trees failed to grow straight, the choices that warped the intentions of Hardy's characters are more obvious. Especially in the shorter tales, which do not have the space for the whole series of choices, results, and new choices evident in the novels, the outcome of one or two crucial choices decides the characters' success or failure. The brevity of the tales emphasizes more pointedly the discrepancy between the intention and the reality. For this reason Hardy entitled one of the collections of tales Life's Little Ironies, and one critic complains that "the primary difficulty in reading Hardy's briefer fiction is its thematic sameness. He provides a variety of situation; but . . . a kind of grotesque irony is so constant as to be tiresome."[42] Whether one agrees with this judgement or not, the ironic tone of the tales is evident. It serves an artistic purpose in emphasizing Hardy's point that "nothing bears out in practice what it promises incipiently,"[43] and his hope that human endeavour

[42] Richard Carpenter, Thomas Hardy (New York, 1964), p. 79.
[43] Early Life, p. 201.

will make more of that promise reality.

This paper explores some aspects of human error in Hardy's tales. The short tales rather than the novels have been chosen, not only for their pervasive irony, but also because the characters of the tales seem to have more power over their destinies than do the characters of the later novels. None of them is hounded relentlessly by outside forces, as Jude and Tess seem to be. Rather their failures are almost always due to their own or other people's mistakes.

Hardy wrote most of the short tales during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, when he was writing his best novels. Although the tales have been largely ignored by critics, many of them are masterpieces of short fiction. They have a great variety of situation and mood, and a few are notable for special qualities--"The Three Strangers" for the compact intensity of its situation, "The Withered Arm" for its eerie, supernatural mood, "To Please his Wife" for its treatment of a self-alienated soul, and "A Few Crusted Characters" for comedy verging on farce. Although Rutland dismisses the tales as products of "much ingenuity and even power directed merely to leaving a nasty taste in the mouth,"[44] a few critics,

[44] W.R. Rutland, Thomas Hardy: A Study of his Writings and their Background (New York, 1962), p. 219.

such as Irving Howe and Richard Carpenter, recognize the shorter tales as the work of a master of fiction. "Hardy not infrequently manages to construct a story that can keep children from play and old men from the chimney corner."[45] The short tales, then, merit a closer study than they have yet received.

[45] Carpenter, p. 69.

II

Limited as it is, the power that Hardy's characters have over their own actions forms an important element in the tales. The act of choosing one course instead of another is often the turning point in a protagonist's life. In two of the tales, "A Tragedy of Two Ambitions" and "Fellow-Townsmen," Hardy makes the moment of choice the mechanical and emotional climax. For a moment of tension, both past and present struggles and dreams for the future are crystallized in the consciousness of those who must make the choice. For a brief and intense moment, the whole course of a life is at stake, dependent upon the act of choice.

"A Tragedy of Two Ambitions" deals with the two ambitious sons of an alcoholic millwright. As children, Joshua and Cornelius Halborough set their goals in life and their course towards the attainment of these goals. They want to become clergyman, and so gain social prestige. They also want to educate their sister Rosa to become "an accomplished and refined woman . . . for moving onwards and upwards with us."[1] To achieve their goals the brothers are willing to study when other children are playing, and

[1] Thomas Hardy, "A Tragedy of Two Ambitions," Life's Little Ironies, Macmillan Library Edition (London, 1952), p. 82. Subsequent references are to this edition.

they continue their ascetic way of life even when they become young men. The embodiment of all opposition to the brothers' plans is their father, who has spent the money that their mother had saved to send them to university, and who seems to the boys a disgrace to their reputations. In spite of all Joshua's attempts to keep their father away from them, old Halborough consistently shows up, drunk and threadbare, until Joshua finally borrows the money to send him to Canada. This done, the brothers begin to realize their ambitions. Joshua becomes the curate of a small church; Cornelius, a step behind his older brother, is studying at the theological college; and Rosa, returning from the Brussels school where her brothers had sent her, wins the admiration of the squire of Joshua's parish. On the very night that the squire is intending to propose marriage to Rosa, the father arrives from Canada. He meets his two sons on the road to the village and tells them he intends to make himself known to the squire and the villagers. Although Joshua and Cornelius try to dissuade him, he continues on his way to the manor house, and the brothers wait in despair for the destruction of their hard-won positions.

As usual, however, the father is drunk and falls into a stream. He struggles and calls for help several times, and the brothers face a painful decision. The

choice is the climax of both the tale and the brothers' lives, and the two alternatives are physically manifested in the scene: "as they stood breathless the splashing and floundering in the weir continued; over it they saw the hopeful lights from the manor house conservatory winking through the trees."[2] Contrasted to the sordid picture of their drunken father drowning is the manor house, a representation of their ambitions: "they fancied they could see figures moving in the conservatory. The air up there seemed to emit gentle kisses."[3] Caught in a conflict between moral obligation and ambition, the Halborough brothers hesitate. Only when it is too late to save their father do they attempt to rescue him, so that they have literally chosen ambition over moral obligation. This choice is not only the climax of their former struggles, but also the determining element in the creation of their future. Unhindered by their father's frequent reappearances, Joshua and Cornelius come into quick possession of all their goals. Rosa marries the squire, Joshua obtains a living in a small town, and Cornelius takes his brother's place as curate in the village. Thus their choice to let their father drown has brought about the desired results. Once realized,

[2] Ibid., p. 99.
[3] Ibid., p. 100.

however, the goals for which they sacrificed their father and their own humanity seem less desirable than they did from afar. Discontented with their new positions, the Halborough brothers regret their choice and contemplate suicide as a release from their guilt. Their profession as churchmen is contrasted ironically with their un-Christian act, and Cornelius emphasizes the discrepancies in their position when he tells Joshua: "Ah, we read our Hebrews to little account, Jos! . . . To have endured the cross, despising the shame--there lay greatness."[4]

Even though they contributed to their father's death, Hardy portrays the Halborough brothers sympathetically. Their ambitions are understandable if not admirable, and their care for their motherless sister gives them an element of humanity otherwise conspicuously absent from their characters. The choice that they must make is forced upon them by circumstances they had no part in creating--their father's weakness, his strategic return from Canada, his fall into the stream. The society that measures a person's worth by his background rather than by his own merit is also partly to blame for old Halborough's death. Joshua tells Cornelius: "For a successful painter, sculptor, musician, author, who takes society by storm, it is no

[4] Ibid., p. 105.

drawback, it is sometimes even a romantic recommendation, to hail from outcasts and profligates. But for a clergyman of the Church of England! Cornelius, it is fatal! To succeed in the Church, people must believe in you, first of all, as a gentleman, secondly as a man of means, thirdly as a scholar, fourthly as a preacher, fifthly, perhaps, as a Christian,--but always first as a gentleman."[5] Thus when the brothers are forced to choose between their father's life and their own ambitions, they are caught in such a web of societal and moral pressures that they can only choose between two kinds of unhappiness. The basic choice is nonetheless their own responsibility, and in compromising moral principle for social ambition the brothers become weak and culpable rather than heroic and self-sacrificing, as they could have been. Knowing this, the Halboroughs cannot accept their roles as moral teachers, so that their father has effectively accomplished what he promised he would do when he warned his sons, "I'll spoil your souls for preaching."[6]

A similar choice between moral responsibility and desire is presented to George Barnet, the hero of the tale "Fellow-Townsmen." Barnet, one of the best-realized characters of Hardy's shorter fiction, is married to a

[5] Ibid., p. 87.
[6] Ibid., p. 98.

shrew who makes his life miserable. He is in love with a girl, Lucy, whom he intended to marry years before, until a misunderstanding separated them. Barnet attempts to live in peace with his wife, but fails, and Lucy will have little to do with him while his wife is still alive, so that Barnet seems condemned to an unhappy life. He is given a chance of reprieve, however, when his wife apparently drowns in a sailing accident. She is brought home and pronounced dead by a doctor, and Barnet realizes that he is free to marry Lucy. He glances at the supposed corpse of his wife, and suddenly notices signs of life in her. Concluding that the doctor was mistaken, Barnet realizes that he might be able to save his wife. If he does so, he will ruin his chances of marrying Lucy.

Like the Halborough brothers, then, Barnet must choose either to save the life of one he does not love, or to let her die. As in "A Tragedy of Two Ambitions," there is an agonizing moment of hesitation, and again physical setting underlines the two alternatives. "Pulling up the blind for more light, his eye glanced out of the window. There he saw that red chimney of [Lucy's house] still smoking cheerily, and the roof, and through the roof that somebody. His mechanical movements stopped, his hand remained on the blindcord, and he seemed to become breathless, as if he had suddenly found himself treading a high

rope."[7] Hardy makes the importance of Barnet's choice even more explicit by an intrusion of the omniscient narrator: "Barnet had a wife whose presence distracted his home; she now lay as in death; by merely doing nothing--by letting the intelligence which had gone forth to the world lie undisturbed--he would affect such deliverance for himself as he had never hoped for, and open up an opportunity of which till now he had never dreamed."[8] In the light of these remarks, Barnet's choice stands out in marked relief: "He withdrew his hazel eyes from the scene without, calmly turned, rang the bell for assistance, and vigourously exerted himself to learn if life still lingered in that motionless frame."[9] His wife lives, and Barnet never marries Lucy.

Barnet's choice, like that of the Halborough brothers, is one between alternate routes to unhappiness. After a quarrel with his wife, Barnet regrets his choice, just as the Halborough brothers regret theirs. Regret for past choices is a common theme in Hardy's tales, and illustrates the thought that Lucy voices to Barnet: "It is a very common folly of human nature, you know, to think the course you did not adopt must have been the best."[10] As the

7 Thomas Hardy, "Fellow-Townsmen," Wessex Tales, Macmillan Library Edition (London, 1952), p. 138. Subsequent references are to this edition.
8 Ibid., p. 138.
9 Ibid., p. 139.
10 Ibid., p. 123.

Halborough brothers learned, goals attained do not have the glory that they seem to have from the distance. It is therefore natural to look back and regret the choice that led to the realization of those goals while eliminating other possibilities. From the distance offered by memory, the possibilities that might have been fulfilled had the choice been different take on a desirability that is contingent upon their remaining possibilities.

The regret of the Halborough brothers and George Barnet is not simply a matter of perspective, however, for it is further complicated by the moral issue. Both old Halborough and Mrs. Barnet not only hinder the heroes' dreams, but also have no redeeming qualities as individuals. They are nevertheless human, subject to the same consideration that Hardy urges for all living creatures. In letting their father drown, the Halborough brothers abnegate their responsibility to another human being. Their self-recriminations for this lapse are far more desperate than Barnet's passing regret for having saved his wife. He at least knows that he remains blameless, and his integrity stands out in contrast to the moral laxity of the doctor, Charlson, who plays a minor role in the tale. Knowing of Barnet's affection for Lucy and owing Barnet some money, which both men know the doctor will never repay, Charlson tries to show his gratitude by declaring Barnet's wife

dead after the accident. Hardy gives no indication that Charlson regrets his decision, and the doctor even admits the act to Barnet. In the two tales, then, Hardy presents three levels of moral consciousness. Barnet acts according to a strict moral code; the Halborough brothers disobey the code and feel guilty; and Charlson refuses to recognize the existence of such a code. As Hardy states in "Fellow-Townsmen," "There are honest men who will not admit to their thoughts, even as idle hypotheses, views of the future that assume as done a deed which they would recoil from doing; and there are other honest men for whom morality ends at the surface of their own heads, who will deliberate what the first will not so much as suppose."[11] Hardy understands the latter, but saves his admiration for the former. It is only when choice takes into consideration consequences for others as well as self that it can be constructive. Barnet stands out as an admirable figure because he is willing to sacrifice his own happiness to ethical considerations, and so acts as an advocate for the simple morality of human helping human.

Barnet's choice to revive his wife shows more of his character than a basic regard for humanity. At a crucial moment, Barnet displays both the perceptive power

[11] Ibid., p. 138.

to see that his wife is still alive, and the persistence to revive her. This is no easy task, for "much care and patience were needed to catch and retain [the spark of life] and a considerable period elapsed before it could be said with certainty that Mrs. Barnet lived."[12] Later in his life, Barnet faces a similar situation, and reacts in an entirely different manner. Both he and Lucy have become free to marry, and he returns home from abroad to ask her to marry him. Taken by surprise, Lucy refuses, although she tells Barnet she would rather marry him than anyone else. It is obvious that Lucy's refusal is not definite; yet Barnet, lacking both that perception and persistence he had displayed in reviving his wife, leaves the town immediately. Lucy does change her mind and decide to marry him, but only when she can no longer tell him so. The last sentence of the tale summarizes the rest of her life in simple terms: "She did wait--years and years--but Barnet never reappeared."[13]

A question remains unanswered: why would Barnet assume that Lucy's love for him was dead when he would not accept the declared corpse of his wife as dead? Why does Barnet not persist in reviving the spark in Lucy as he had with his wife? Though the reasons for his uncharacteristic surrender are obscure, the results are not.

[12] Ibid., p. 139.
[13] Ibid., p. 173.

The irony of the final situation stems partly from its avoidability. Barnet could easily have asked Lucy once more, or even stayed within her reach for a few days, so that she could have told him of her change of mind. Like many of Hardy's characters, Barnet misses his ideal by a very narrow margin, and that margin consists of his own error.

Throughout "Fellow-Townsmen," the loneliness and emptiness of Barnet's life is underlined by the large mansion he is building--huge, modern, and very empty. Barnet's view of the house changes with its associations; he hates it at first because his wife decided to have it built and then begins to take an interest as his wife's fades. Lucy and the children she looks after visit the house occasionally, and Barnet's interest in it increases. Finally, the most important later scenes of the tale occur in the house. Barnet is there when he learns almost simultaneously of his wife's death and Lucy's remarriage, and the last scene between Lucy and Barnet takes place in the same room. In a sense the house represents an interest in the future; yet Barnet's hopes for the house, as for his own future, are few. As he leaves the planning of the house to a hired architect, caring little whether it will ever be furnished, so he regards his own future without interest or faith. He neither looks ahead very far nor

expends his energy in hoping. His failure to take an interest in the future makes him blind to obvious future possibilities, and so partly causes his unhappiness.

Had Barnet considered probable developments, he would have seen the possibility of Lucy marrying her employer, Charles Downe. Lucy is young, pretty, and lonely, and Downe has been left a widower with several small children, since his wife was killed in the same sailing accident that almost freed Barnet. At first Downe seems less interested in Lucy than in the grandiose plans he is making for a tomb for his wife. As time progresses, however, the plans for the tomb become increasingly modest. Downe consults Barnet about the plan changes, so that Barnet has the chance to realize that Downe is losing interest in his wife's memory. A marriage of convenience between Lucy and Downe thus seems probable, but Barnet, blind to the hints that the plan changes give, does not see the possibility and take steps to prevent the marriage. The announcement of their intended marriage comes as a complete surprise to Barnet. Worse yet, it comes just after Barnet has received word that his wife has died in London.

The chance conjunction of announcements pitches Barnet from the extreme of joy, when he realizes he is finally free to marry Lucy, to the extreme of bitterness,

when he finds Lucy is no longer free to marry him. He sees the almost simultaneous announcements as a demonstration of "that curious refinement of cruelty . . . which often proceeds from the bosom of the whimsical god at other times known as blind Circumstance."[14] Neither the death of Barnet's wife nor Lucy's marriage is in itself an extraordinary event. Since Barnet never considered the possibility of either, however, he has made himself vulnerable to the whimsy of Circumstance, which so conjoins two plausible events as to maximize the misery Barnet feels. Thus Circumstance does not bring about Barnet's unhappy situation, but merely shows him more dramatically what his own blindness to possibilities has allowed. It is his own refusal to look ahead and to interfere with the course of events that ultimately brings him unhappiness. Thus Barnet's story fulfills Hardy's early definition of tragedy: "A Plot, or Tragedy, should arise from the gradual closing in of a situation that comes of ordinary human passions, prejudices, and ambitions, by reason of the characters taking no trouble to ward off the disastrous events produced by the said passions, prejudices, and ambitions."[15]

In both "A Tragedy of Two Ambitions" and

[14] Ibid., p. 157.
[15] Early Life, p. 157.

"Fellow-Townsmen," then, Hardy makes it clear that the heroes have the power to influence their own lives and the lives of others. In some of the tales the power over others extends to almost supernatural proportions. "The Withered Arm," for example, deals with a milkwoman who has had a child by a prosperous farmer. The farmer marries a young girl instead of the milkwoman, and the milkwoman's hatred of the new wife is so strong that it results in a withering blight on the wife's arm. In "An Imaginative Woman" Hardy explores the extraordinary power of love rather than hatred. The heroine of the tale, a young married woman, becomes so infatuated with a poet she has never met that the child she has by her husband resembles the poet rather than the child's real father.

In other tales Hardy deals with man's power for good or evil that remains within more ordinary limits. "The Son's Veto" tells of the unhappiness a son causes his mother. Sophy, a young maid, marries her clergyman employer and has a son by him. The son becomes a social snob who is ashamed of his mother's humble background. After the clergyman's death, Sophy has a chance to escape her loneliness by marrying a man from her own class. The son, however, forbids the marriage, because he is ashamed to be known as the stepson of a greengrocer. His snobbish attitude prevents the happiness of both his mother

and her lover when "his mother might have led an idyllic life with her faithful fruiterer and greengrocer, and nobody might have been anything worse in the world."[16]

The power over other people's lives must accompany a responsibility to use that power well, as Hardy shows in both "The Son's Veto" and "A Tragedy of Two Ambitions." The Halborough brothers feel guilty for misusing their power, and Hardy condemns the son in "The Son's Veto" for his lack of humanity: "Somehow her boy, with his aristocratic school-knowledge, his grammars, and his aversions, was losing those wide infantine sympathies, extending as far as the son and moon themselves, with which he, like other children, had been born, and which his mother, a child of nature herself, had loved in him."[17] It is not only sympathy, however, that man needs to use, but also intelligence and forethought. Without forethought, Barnet forfeited happiness, and many of Hardy's other characters make wrong choices through a blindness to possibilities.

Thus Joanna Jolliffe of "To Please his Wife" risks the lives of her husband and sons for the sake of her own ambitions. The family owns a grocery store,

[16] Thomas Hardy, "The Son's Veto," Life's Little Ironies, p. 51.
[17] Ibid., p. 42.

but Joanna wants to have more money than the store produces. She therefore sends her husband, a retired sailor, on a speculative voyage, although she knows that the sea is dangerous. Her husband returns from the voyage a month late, and Joanna is thus given time to realize the possible consequences of such ventures. In spite of the warning, Joanna sends her sons as well as her husband on a final voyage, and they all drown. Although his name is Shadrach, Joanna's husband is not indestructible, and her repeated venturing of his life almost invites an accident. Joanna ignores the glaring possibilities of such an accident because she is more concerned with her rivalry with Emily Hanning than with her family's lives. Engrossed in comparing her own situation with the wealthy Emily's, Joanna closes her eyes to the really important elements in her life--her husband and sons. Only when it is too late does she realize that she has forfeited her real fortune for money.

Although Joanna does not realize it, the affectionate relationship of the Jolliffe family fulfills for her what is for Hardy the most basic human need--the need to love and be loved, an evident theme throughout Hardy's work. Too often, however, his characters, like Joanna, subordinate this need to more superficial concerns. Thus Joshua and Cornelius let their father drown for the sake of their ambitions, and the son of "The Son's Veto" cannot see that his mother's lack of refinement is of "true infinitesimal

value beside the yearning fondness that welled up and remained penned in her heart till it should be more fully accepted by him."[18] One of the most notable of these misdirected people is Squire Petrick of "Squire Petrick's Lady." His wife has died in childbirth, after admitting that the child, a son, is not Petrick's but a nobleman's. At first Petrick hates the child, but begins to love him as his need for human affection takes precedence over indignation. Out of this love grows a pride in the boy's noble parentage. When Petrick eventually discovers that he himself is the father of the child, he reacts as strongly against the news as he had formerly against his wife's confession. The real parentage of the boy, however, is not so vital an issue as Petrick thinks. Petrick needs the affection of the child as the boy needs a father. The technicalities of the boy's conception are irrelevant in view of their mutual craving for affection and human companionship.

The need for human love in all its aspects is a general theme in Hardy's tales. Many of the tales deal with lovers, but some consider the love between older people and children, as do "Squire Petrick's Lady" and "Lady Mottisfont." Brother-sister affection appears in

[18] Ibid., p. 43.

"A Tragedy of Two Ambitions" and "Anna, Lady Baxby." Hardy saw love, not law, as the force that would prompt man to improve the world, so that "pain to all upon the earth, tongued or dumb, shall be kept down to a minimum by loving-kindness."[19] Hardy believed that most people were sympathetic to the misfortunes of others, noting that it is strange "we should talk so glibly of 'this cold world which shows no sympathy', when this is the feeling of so many components of the same world--probably a majority--and nearly everyone's neighbour is waiting to give and receive sympathy."[20] Thus, though he rejected Christian dogma, Hardy retained a belief in the Christian virtue of charity. In the last poem of Late Lyrics and Earlier, Hardy chides himself for not emphasizing more the lesson of human love:

> "You taught not that which you set about,"
> Said my own voice talking to me;
> "That the greatest of things is Charity. . . . ."[21]

In spite of this self-deprecation, however, Hardy does teach the importance of charity throughout the tales. The tales help to express Hardy's hope that "Altruism, or The Golden Rule, or whatever 'Love your Neighbour as Yourself' may be called, will ultimately be brought

[19] Preface to Late Lyrics and Earlier, Collected Poems, p. 527.
[20] Later Years, p. 17.
[21] Thomas Hardy, "Surview," Collected Poems, p. 661.

about . . . by the pain we see in others reacting in ourselves, as if we and they were a part of one body."[22]

For Hardy, then, man has both the power and the good intentions to improve the world. Each time a person makes a choice, the outcome depends on the extent to which he uses these powers. As a creative process, the exercise of choice leads to a new situation, and is therefore man's part in what Hardy calls the "becoming" of the world. "It is the on-going--i.e. the becoming--of the world that produces its sadness. If the world stood still at a felicitous moment there would be no sadness in it. The sun and moon standing still on Ajalon was not a catastrophe for Israel, but a type of Paradise."[23] The world does not stand still, however, and man must exercise his power of choice to create a future. Often the act of choosing is a painful one, as it is for Joanna Jolliffe and the Halborough brothers. Many of Hardy's heroines try to avoid this pain by remaining passive and letting the situation decide for them.

More successful than such passive heroines are those bold heroes who take even the most desperate situations into their own hands. One of these is Stephen Reynard of "The First Countess of Wessex." Reynard,

[22] Early Life, p. 294.
[23] Early Life, p. 265.

returning from Europe to claim his child-wife, finds that she has eloped with a lover. The lover sends the girl home when he discovers she has smallpox, and Reynard takes the opportunity to prove his love for the girl and win her admiration for his courage by kissing her in spite of her disease. Hardy describes Reynard as "of all men then living one of the best able to cope with such an untimely situation . . . . A contriving, sagacious, gentle-mannered man, a philosopher who saw that the only constant attribute of life is change . . . ."[23] Accepting the conditions of change and choice, Reynard wins the bride who until then had hated him. On his arrival at his wife's home, Reynard realizes that appearances are unfavourable. His father-in-law hates Reynard, while the girl herself purposely catches smallpox to keep her husband away from her. Reynard refuses to be balked from his purpose, however, and takes advantage of the girl's illness to further his own cause. A similar daring hero is the escaped convict of "The Three Strangers," who takes shelter in a cottage only to find himself sitting next to the hangman who was supposed to hang the convict on the following day. The convict carouses so successfully with the hangman that he escapes detection. The success of both Reynard and the convict in overcoming unfavourable circumstances shows that, with courage and patience, man can cope with even the most difficult situations.

[23] Thomas Hardy, "The First Countess of Wessex," A Group of Noble Dames, Macmillan Library Edition (London, 1952), p. 43. Subsequent references are to this edition.

III

Hardy viewed the world as imperfect, and in his tales it is axiomatic that the heroes and heroines are discontent with reality and the present. The heroines especially yearn towards an ideal world offering an outlet for the emotions that, for Hardy, seemed to "have no place in a world of defect."[1] The heroines attempt to create a world of their own imaginations, thus escaping for a time the world of mundane reality.

One such heroine is Marjory Tucker of "The Romantic Adventures of a Milkmaid." Marjory is engaged to a solid English yeoman when she meets and becomes infatuated with a mysterious foreign baron, who, in return for saving his life, treats Marjory to a dream-like evening that includes a ball and beautiful new clothes for her. Entranced by the romantic world that the baron represents, Marjory can no longer accept the yeoman Jim as her lover. The baron himself may or may not be real. He destroys all the physical evidence of his night with Marjory, and appears and disappears so mysteriously that the community regards him "as one who [has] something about him magical and unearthly."[2] Real or

[1] Early Life, p. 192.
[2] Thomas Hardy, A Changed Man, Macmillan Library Edition (London, 1951), p. 399. Subsequent references are to this edition.

not, the baron represents a world far removed from Marjory's everyday life, and one that Marjory can never enter for more than an enchanted moment. She cannot accept this limitation, and returns to mundane reality and her English lover only after the baron disappears.

The triangular situation of Marjory, Jim, and the baron represents the dilemma of all sensitive and romantic minds in an imperfect world. The dreamer Marjory is confronted with two opposite worlds represented by her two lovers. Physical reality manifests itself through Jim, the reliable and sturdy lime-burner who remains staid even in love. The baron signifies an ideal and romantic world that is somehow beyond the physical, and whose instability is apparent from the baron's extreme moods and sudden disappearances. To the romance of this world Marjory is completely subject; yet the baron keeps trying to show her her error in rejecting Jim's world, and finally forces her to marry Jim. Still Marjory shows no interest in her husband, until Jim takes on a more romantic aspect by joining the Yeomanry and wearing a scarlet uniform, as well as flirting with another woman. Thus, though Jim can never compete with the baron's mysterious charm, he becomes more able to satisfy Marjory's romantic yearnings. Nevertheless Marjory still feels dissatisfied when the Baron disappears and she must return to the mundane reality represented by Jim.

A similar conflict of the mundane and the romantic occurs in "An Imaginative Woman." Ella Marchmill, the heroine of the tale, is trapped in a prosaic marriage with an unimaginative gunmaker, who "[speaks] in squarely shaped sentences, and [is] supremely satisfied with a condition of sublunary things which made weapons a necessity."[3] Ella is not as satisfied as her husband is with "sublunary things," and only keeps "her heart alive by pitying her proprietor's obtuseness and want of refinement, pitying herself, and letting off her delicate and ethereal emotions in imaginative occupations, day-dreams, and night-sighs . . . ."[4] She also writes third-rate poems as an outlet for her stagnating emotions. When Ella and her family go on a vacation, they occupy the rooms of a young poet whose work Ella has admired, and for whom she gradually conceives a love that is fed by frequent conversations about him with the landlady. Ella dreams over the young man's picture and poems and plans methods of meeting him. Although she never sees the poet, Robert Trewe, her passion for him grows, since "being a woman of very living ardours, that required sustenance of some sort, they were beginning to feed on this chancing material, which was, indeed, of a quality far better than chance usually offers."[5]

Unlike the romantic fancies inspired in Marjory by

[3] Thomas Hardy, "An Imaginative Woman," Life's Little Ironies, p. 5.
[4] Ibid., p. 4.
[5] Ibid., p. 12.

the baron, Ella's dreams have as their centre finished art products--the photograph and poems--rather than an actual imperfect human. Her dream world therefore depends even less on physical reality than does Marjory's, since Ella's image of Trewe is almost totally a creation of her own imagination. While Trewe remains unknown to her, Ella can bestow on her image of him any romantic flourish that pleases her. The absent poet thus becomes the perfect vehicle for Ella's expression of her vision of the ideal.

Ella concentrates so intensely on her image of Trewe that she actually affects the poet. He writes a series of erotic poems entitled "Lyrics to a Woman Unknown," presumably addressed to Ella. Later he commits suicide in despair over an unfavourable review, but even more because he has been unable to establish communication with the woman he has dreamed of, and who remains "to the last unrevealed, unmet, unwon."[6] Deprived of her romantic ideal by Trewe's death, Ella finds nothing to live for in a commonplace world and dies in childbirth a few months later. Ironically, the child resembles the poet rather than his real father, who as a result rejects the child.

Both Ella Marchmill and Marjory Tucker are drawn towards a romantic dream world for the realization of their emotional capacities. On one hand, Hardy condemns a world

[6] Ibid., p. 25.

that offers little satisfaction to these highly emotional heroines. The heroines' dilemma gives evidence that man's consciousness and capacity for feeling are too highly developed for the imperfect world. On the other hand, however, Hardy also condemns the heroines themselves, even while sympathizing with their plight. Both Marjory and Ella hurt innocent people in their attempt to satisfy their own romantic longings. Marjory repudiates the faithful Jim, while Ella's child suffers for his likeness to her illusory lover.

Eventually the heroines must accept, as Marjory does, the tangible if unexciting world, or else repudiate life itself, as Ella does. Hardy insists that there remains comfort in mundane reality: "There is enough poetry in what is left (in life), after all the false romance has been abstracted, to make a sweet pattern."[7] It is only when one accepts mundane reality that he can enjoy the smaller joys of everyday life, which are eclipsed when one focuses on the lavish promises of the imagination. Indeed, much of Hardy's work deals with simple pleasures, with the joys of a village gathering or story-telling around the fireplace. One of his poems, "Great Things," asserts

> . . . . Joy-jaunts, impassioned flings,
> Love, and its ecstasy,
> Will always have been great things,
> Great things to me![8]

Those who spend their time dreaming of a romantic world apart

[7] Early Life, p. 150.
[8] Collected Poems, p. 446.

from their own context miss these smaller pleasures as well as those of the illusive dream world. Thus any kind of joy eludes them, as it does those whom they hurt by their dreaming. Their fancies thus become a destructive force because they threaten rather than complement the real world. However imperfect that world might be, however out of tune with man's sensitive consciousness, it is nonetheless the best man is allowed, and only when he accepts it as such can he begin to strive towards its improvement.

One of the qualities of the imperfect world that Hardy and his heroes find most difficult to accept is time. In an effort to escape time, many of Hardy's characters focus on the distance of past or future. The world of memory or anticipation offers, like the world of the imagination, a timeless and incorruptible ideal. In "Barbara of the House of Grebe," for instance, the heroine falls in love with a beautiful young man far below her in the social scale. They elope, but later Barbara's parents accept the marriage and send their son-in-law, Edmund Willowes, to Europe for an education. While there, Willowes is present at a fire in a theatre, and is critically injured when rescuing others. Though he survives, the burns have made him so ugly that Barbara cannot accept him, and he leaves her and dies in Europe shortly afterwards. Barbara marries Lord Uplandtowers, but the past and Willowes' physical beauty return to her when she receives a sculpture of Willowes made in Italy before the fire. Barbara conceives

an almost psychotic passion for the statue, enshrines it in a cupboard, and visits it at night to try to make love to the cold marble.

This is essentially a variation on Keats's "Grecian Urn." Like the figures on the urn, Willowes is caught at a given moment and suspended forever in that moment. Barbara's memory of Willowes is also suspended at a moment before the fire, so that idealized as it is, it represents the real Willowes no more than the statue does. The difference between Willowes in the flesh and in marble, between present consciousness and absent memory, is great. Barbara's attempts to enter the timeless world of the statue lead only to frustration, since the statue cannot respond to her as Willowes had. In a sense Barbara has always loved a statue, as she loved Willowes not for his intrinsic worth but for his beauty. Hardy makes it clear that the beauty Barbara admires is "the least of his recommendations, every report bearing out the inference that he must have been a man of steadfast nature, bright intelligence, and promising life."[9] Although Willowes returns from Europe as a hero, Barbara ignores this and his newly-acquired refinement in her horror at his ugliness. She is thus in love with Willowes as an art form rather than as a person, and his death preserves the aura that would otherwise

9 Thomas Hardy, "Barbara of the House of Grebe," A Group of Noble Dames, p. 91.

have crumbled under everyday contact with the real Willowes. Unhindered by his presence, Barbara is able to create through the statue and her idealized memory a mental world that is outside time, and that satisfies her aesthetic sense as Willowes himself had done.

Barbara's cruel husband, Lord Uplandtowers, destroys Barbara's memory of Willowes by forcing her to accept the realities of Willowes' life beyond the point where her selective memory had stopped. Altering the statue to look like Willowes after the fire, Uplantowers shows the mutilated statue to Barbara every night until she has a nervous breakdown. When she recovers, she shows a repulsion for both the statue and the memory of Willowes, and cannot bear to be away from her husband. Uplandtowers has shown Barbara that the world contains ugliness as well as beauty. In mutilating the statue, he represents not only what Chance has done to Willowes, but also what Time would have done eventually, though not so harshly. This Barbara cannot accept, as she could not have accepted an aged and ugly Willowes. Forced to reject her beautiful memory and acknowledge the existence of ugliness, Barbara becomes increasingly weaker and finally dies.

Like Barbara, the protagonists of "The Grave by the Handpost" and "A Committee Man of 'The Terror'" concentrate on the past rather than the present, and therefore cannot cope with present reality. Similarly, some of Hardy's heroes and heroines focus on the future, and anticipation becomes their

common response to life. One such character is the heroine of "The Waiting Supper," Christine Everard. A squire's daughter, Christine is in love with Nicholas Long, a neighbouring yeoman, who keeps pressing her to marry him. Christine wants Nicholas to improve his education by studying in Europe for a few years. If he were away, Christine tells Nicholas, "the realities would not stare so. You would be a pleasant dream to me, which I should be free to indulge in without reproach of my conscience; I should live in hopeful expectation of your returning fully qualified to boldly claim me of my father."[10] This remains Christine's attitude towards her lover throughout the tale. Nicholas persuades her to marry him secretly, but the clergyman refuses to perform the ceremony because Christine is underage. The clergyman's refusal is the first of several hindrances to the couple's marriage, and it almost seems that Christine welcomes the barriers between herself and Nic, so that she will not have to trade hopeful expectation for disappointing reality.

Eventually Nicholas leaves for Europe, returning after several years to look for Christine. He does not ask about her immediately, because he shares with Christine "an absurd dread of extinguishing hopeful surmise."[11] Finally he discovers that Christine has married someone else, but her husband has disappeared and is presumed dead. Nicholas meets Christine, and

[9] Thomas Hardy, "The Waiting Supper," A Changed Man, p. 31.
[10] Ibid., p. 60.

once again the two decide to marry. This time they advertise their intentions in the Wessex papers, as if seeking the intrusion of Christine's long-lost husband to hinder their union. The advertisement brings a note from her husband telling Christine he is still alive and on his way to her, and the lovers' plans are once again ruined. The husband never arrives, however, for on his way to Christine's house he falls into a nearby waterfall and drowns. Not knowing this, Nicholas and Christine spend seventeen years waiting for the barrier to their union to materialize. Finally the husband's body is discovered, and the two are at last free to marry. By this time, however, "their wills were somewhat enfeebled . . . , their hearts sickened of tender enterprise by hope too long deferred."[11] For the rest of their lives their union remains a future prospect, never realized in the present.

This constant state of anticipation dulls the lovers' consciousness of time. Just before Christine receives the letter from her elusive husband, the old family clock suddenly falls to the floor and breaks. As the clock no longer tells the time, so do Nic and Christine ignore its passing. "A curious unconsciousness of the long lapse of time since [the husband's] revelation of himself seemed to affect the pair. There had been no passing events to serve as chronological milestones, and the evening on which she had kept supper waiting for him still loomed out with startling nearness in

[11] Ibid., p. 82.

their retrospects."[12] Although time continues its "ceaseless scour over them, wearing them away without uniting them,"[13] Christine and Nicholas remain impervious to the haunting time-sense that plagues so many of Hardy's characters.

By living in a constant state of anticipation, the lovers miss the pleasures of the present, and realize in retrospect that they have accomplished nothing. When the body of Christine's husband is found, Nic tells Christine, "You would now have been seventeen years my wife, and we might have had tall sons and daughters."[14] They never realize their union, and therefore never become disillusioned with their ideal. At the same time they deprive themselves of the pleasures that that ideal, realized, would have brought. Thus focusing too much on the future is as destructive to present joy as is thinking too much of the past. As Hardy observed in a notebook entry: "To-day has length, breadth, thickness, colour, smell, voice. As soon as it becomes yesterday it is a thin layer among layers, without substance, colour, or articulate sound."[15] The insubstantial quality of both the past and the future cannot compare with the physical reality of the present. Too often, however, man ignores present enjoyment to anticipate the future or regret the past. Hardy

[12] Ibid., p. 81.
[13] Ibid., p. 80.
[14] Ibid., 82.
[15] Later Years, p. 58.

makes this tendency the subject for poems as well as tales. "The Self-Unseeing" states:

> Childlike, I danced in a dream;
> Blessings emblazoned that day;
> Everything glowed with a gleam;
> Yet we were looking away![16]

"The Minute before Meeting" elaborates the theme:

> The grey gaunt days dividing us in twain
> Seemed hopeless hills my strength must faint to climb,
> But they are gone; and now I would detain
> The few clock-beats that part us; rein back Time,
>
> And live in close expectance never closed
> In change for far expectance closed at last,
> So harshly has expectance been imposed
> On my long need while these slow blank months passed.
>
> And knowing that what is now about to be
> Will all <u>have</u> <u>been</u> in O, so short a space!
> I read beyond it my despondency
> When more dividing months shall take its place,
> Thereby denying to this hour of grace
> A full-up measure of felicity.[17]

Of course, to evade the present is to evade its pain as well as its pleasures. To Hardy, pain seemed one of the most pervasive qualities of the imperfect world. Even in "The Waiting Supper" "the waterfall hissed sarcastically of the inevitableness of the unpleasant."[18] Some of Hardy's characters try to suspend the inevitable unpleasantness by prolonging a moment of pleasure to its utmost. Thus Car'line Aspent of "The Fiddler of the Reels" cannot resist the fiddle of the romantic stranger, Mop Ollamoor, but must dance in a Bacchic-

[16] <u>Collected Poems</u>, p. 152.
[17] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 219.
[18] "The Waiting Supper," p. 51.

like ecstacy whenever Mop plays. Similarly in "On the Western Circuit" the young girl Anna repeatedly rides the merry-go-round at a fair. Fascinated by the "pleasure-machine," Anna sees the world from her vantage point as "moving around . . . , countermoving in the revolving mirrors on her right hand, she being as it were the fixed point in an undulating, dazzling, lurid universe."[19] A young man watches the girl, "dreading the moment when the inexorable stoker clearly an image of time grimly lurking behind the glittering rococo-work, should decide that this set of riders had had their pennyworth, and bring the whole concern . . . to pause and silence."[20]

Time is also suspended briefly for John Lackland of "A Few Crusted Characters." In a short trip by carrier's van to the village John left as a boy, he returns to the world of his childhood when his fellow passengers tell him tales of the people he had known in the village. The suspension is only temporary, however, and when the trip ends John finds a changed village. The people John knew are now dead, and a new generation has succeeded them. Unlike the carrier's van, which stops and waits for the late Lackland to catch up to it, in the actual village "Time had not condescended to wait his pleasure, nor local life his greeting."[21] Similarly the real world intrudes to halt the

19 Thomas Hardy, "On the Western Circuit," Life's Little Ironies, p. 113.
20 Ibid., p. 112.
21 Thomas Hardy, "A Few Crusted Characters," Life's Little Ironies, p. 259.

momentary ecstasy of both Car'line and Anna. Car'line must stop dancing through sheer physical exhaustion, while Anna must get off the merry-go-round when she has no more money.

Thus many of Hardy's characters have a strong impulse to escape the world of time and unpleasantness. Through anticipation and memory, they create an image of the ideal, which, as an image only, cannot be compromised by time and space. It thus seems much more desirable than the imperfect world of physical reality. Hardy does not deny the beauty of the gesture towards such an ideal world. Nevertheless he realizes that these aspirations remain outside human possibilities of realization. Hardy once observed, "All men are pursuing a shadow, the Unattainable."[22] To translate the image of the ideal into reality is to destroy the ideal by compromise with reality. Thus Christine prefers not to marry Nic, even when she is free to do so. For her the image of an ideal union with her lover is more satisfying than the union itself.

Guerard complains of Hardy's characters that "in their blind pursuit of happiness they blindly refuse to live."[23] Hardy himself saw that "the human race is too extremely developed for its corporeal conditions, the nerves being evolved to an activity abnormal in such an environment."[24] He therefore portrays

[22] E. Brennecke, ed., Life and Art (New York, 1925), p. 134.
[23] Albert Guerard, Thomas Hardy: The Novels and Stories (Cambridge, Mass., 1949), p. 31.
[24] Early Life, p. 285.

many of his characters seeking satisfaction for their emotional needs outside the context of their corporeal conditions. At the same time Hardy also points out that there are means of realizing a qualified happiness in the actual world. The dreamers have their solid English lovers, who are the closest approximation of the romantic hero that the world offers. In refusing to accept these sturdy lovers, prefering the romance of their dream heroes, the dreamers imitate the optimists whom Hardy criticized: "The optimist appears to be one who cannot bear the world as it is, and is forced by his nature to picture it as it ought to be; and the pessimist one who can not only bear the world as it is, but loves it well enough to draw it faithfully."[25] The optimists and dreamers are ineffectual to improve what lies within their power of correction, because they refuse to admit the world's imperfections. It is only when one accepts one of Hardy's basic premises, that the world was not made a comfortable place for man, that he can use what power he has to improve its comfort.[26]

[25] Pinion, p. 179. The words are a quotation from Galsworthy, which Hardy had on the framed photograph of Galsworthy at Max Gate. William Archer in Real Conversations, p. 46, quotes Hardy as stating: " . . . I believe, indeed, that a good deal of the robustious, swaggering optimism of recent literature is at bottom cowardly and insincere."

[26] Early Life, p. 234. In a notebook entry Hardy objects that "these venerable philosophers seem to start wrong; they cannot get away from a prepossession that the world must somehow have been made to be a comfortable place for man."

Thus Hardy objected to Nietsche's philosophy because "the universe is to[Nietsche]a perfect machine which only requires thorough handling to work wonders. He forgets that the universe is an imperfect machine, and that to do good with an ill-working instrument requires endless adjustments and compromises."[27] Those who are willing to accept compromise, qualified happiness, and limited aspirations as the bases for their existence can cope with the imperfect world and achieve their moderate goals, as those who refuse these conditions and concentrate on unattainable ideals can never do.

Later Years, P. 160.

IV

In Hardy's tales it is not only the natural world, but also society, that frustrates the individual's search for happiness. The Halborough brothers battle a societal hierarchy that dictates degenerate millwrights' sons cannot achieve much success in the church. Hardy blames the loneliness of Edith Harnham of "On the Western Circuit" on the predominant attitude that "a bad marriage with its aversions is better than free womanhood with its interests, dignity, and leisure."[1] Similarly Ella Marchmill's husband cannot satisfy her emotional needs because his love for her has faded "in the natural way of passion under the too practical conditions which civilization has devised for its fruition."[2] Those who feel societal pressures especially are the young men and women who dare to love across social boundaries. There are many of these in Hardy's tales, including the heroines of "Barbara of the House of Grebe," "The Marchioness of Stonehenge," "The Son's Veto," and "The Waiting Supper." As a natural process of sexual selection, love does not take into account the false barriers that society has created. It therefore often conflicts with societal dictates, and the lovers are torn between marrying and becoming displaced persons on the social scale, or forfeiting love to marry within

[1] "On the Western Circuit," p. 125.
[2] "An Imaginative Woman," p. 12.

their own social class.

Christine Everard faces this dilemma in "The Waiting Supper." Her lover Nicholas, though a yeoman, is far superior to her suitor from her own class, Bellston. Christine realizes the absurdity of her situation when she argues with herself that Nic is "handsome, able, and the soul of honour; and I am a young woman of the adjoining parish, who have been constantly thrown into communication with him. Is it not, by nature's rule, the most proper thing in the world that I should marry him, and is it not an absurd conventional regulation which says that such a union would be wrong?"[3] Christine eventually capitulates to the social pressure represented by her father, the clergyman, and even the gossiping peasants. She marries Bellston, because their backgrounds are similar: "In great things Nicholas was closest to her nature; in little things Bellston seemed immeasurably nearer than Nic; and life was made up of little things."[4] Christine's reasoning proves false, however, as Bellston turns out to be a poor husband. In choosing convention rather than love, Christine marries a class, not a man, and so forfeits whatever happiness she might have achieved by marrying Nicholas for his own good qualities.

In Hardy's work society and convention are interwoven so that they become almost synonymous. For convention as such

[3] "The Waiting Supper," p. 46.
[4] Ibid., p. 47.

Hardy has little respect. In "The Melancholy Hussar," for instance, Hardy shows the error of an excessive regard for meaningless conventions. The heroine of the tale, Phyllis Grove, is engaged to Humphrey Gould, a bland middle-aged bachelor whom she does not love. The society of Phyllis' town considers the girl fortunate, since Gould "was of an old local family, some of whose members were held in respect in the county, [and] Phyllis, in bringing him to her feet, had accomplished what was considered a brilliant move for one in her constrained position. . . . In those days unequal marriages were regarded rather as a violation of the laws of nature than as a mere infringement of convention."[5] Gould lives in another town from Phyllis, and their communication is sporadic and formal. Phyllis hears a rumour that Humphrey does not intend to keep their engagement, and since the rumour seems confirmed by Humphrey's cool attitude towards her, Phyllis allows herself to recognize her love for a German soldier of the York Hussars, Matthäus Tina. She agrees to flee to Germany with Tina, who is deserting the army because of his intense homesickness.

As Phyllis is waiting by the highway to meet Tina and sail with him, she sees Gould apparently on his way to her home. She hears Gould talking to his companion, and his remarks lead her to believe that Gould has come to honour their engagement.

[5] Thomas Hardy, "The Melancholy Hussar," Wessex Tales, p. 48.

He has brought her "a handsome peace offering,"[6] and admits that Phyllis has been on his mind a great deal. After overhearing these remarks, Phyllis decides not to elope with Tina, but to go home and marry Gould. She retreats from her unconventional position and persuades herself that "her promise [to Gould] must be kept, and esteem must take the place of love. She would preserve her self-respect."[7] She waits for Tina and tells him she cannot go with him, then returns home only to find that Gould has not come to marry her, but to tell her that he has just married someone else. Without Phyllis to help guide them, Tina and his three companions try to sail to the French coast and blunder into Jersey. They are caught and returned to England. Two of the deserters, Tina and his best friend Christoph, are shot, and Phyllis spends the rest of her life tending their graves.

In refusing to go with Tina, then, Phyllis has retreated into set standards of conduct dictated by convention. One of the remarks she overhears Gould making forces her to realize society's view of her elopement: "It cannot be that she is so bad as they make out. I am quite sure that a girl of her good wit would know better than to get entangled with any of those Hanoverian soldiers."[8] In view of Gould's own shoddy treatment of Phyllis and the engagement, Gould hardly has the right to

[6] Ibid., p. 59.
[7] Ibid., p. 60.
[8] Ibid., p. 59.

judge Phyllis' conduct. In this sense he is a fair representation of the collective mass of individuals known as society, each of whom is far from guiltless, and therefore all the more willing to combine with the mass in disclaiming against offenders such as Phyllis. Phyllis, too, blames herself, when Humphrey's remark makes her see herself through society's eyes and realize "as by a sudden illumination, the enormity of her conduct."[9] More particularly she sees the dangers inherent in the planned escape from England and from conventional modes of conduct. She begins to fear Tina's proposal, "so wild as it was, so vague, so venturesome."[10] Phyllis lacks the courage to defy convention and give up the approved match with Gould. It is safer and easier to return to the familiarity of home and Gould than to flee to an unknown country with a foreign soldier. Although she almost changes her mind and goes with Tina, "the courage which at the critical instant failed Cleopatra of Egypt could scarcely be expected of Phyllis Grove,"[11] and she stays behind.

Unlike Phyllis, Tina gambles his life in an effort to break out of the pattern society has set for him. Tina is serving in the army of an English king whose cause means nothing to the German. He hates England, where he has been brought against his will, and England's war with France holds no interest for him, since Tina's own country is at peace with both England

[9] Ibid., p. 59.
[10] Ibid., p. 59.
[11] Ibid., p. 60.

and France. Nevertheless convention rules that as a soldier Tina must remain with his regiment and serve for England, or else become a coward and traitor. Throughout the tale Hardy portrays Tina not with the contempt usually due to a deserter, but with admiration. Certainly Tina defies convention, but only because the brave soldier image is empty and meaningless to him without the emotional force of patriotism behind it. Unlike Phyllis, Tina has the courage to defy empty conventions, even when it is dangerous for him to do so. This means, of course, that lacking the familiar patterns set by convention, Tina has fewer rules to rely on as the basis for action. His dilemma is expressed physically in the deserters' attempted escape by boat, when they blunder through unknown waters in the dark. Phyllis remains safe because she follows the already charted course set by convention. She does not gain any happiness, however, through her rigid regard for safety and convention. Tina at least follows an aggressive course of action in seeking satisfaction for himself on his own, not society's, terms. Although this makes action more difficult for him, since he is both defying society and acting without the comfort of rules, it is only when such people as Tina have the courage to challenge the intrinsic worth of conventions that those without meaning can be discarded. Thus Hardy noted that "Conservatism is not estimable in itself, nor is Change, or Radicalism. To conserve the existing good, to supplant the existing bad by

good, is to act on a true political [and social] principle."[12]

Although Tina shows no loyalty to conventions, he is loyal to more than his own gratification. When Phyllis tells him she has decided not to elope with him, Tina wants to abandon his planned desertion. He does not, however, because Christoph is waiting for him at the shore, and he tells Phyllis, "I cannot break faith with my friend."[13] Although he could have persuaded Phyllis to go with him by applying "unscrupulous pressure," he does nothing to "tempt her unduly or unfairly."[14] Later, when the four deserters are caught, Tina and Christoph save the lives of their two fellow-deserters by taking all the blame for the escape on themselves. Thus Tina shows none of the careless self-interest that his desertion might imply. To those whom he knows personally he remains considerate and selfless, because he values his friends as he does not value conventions.

Society, however, in the form of the military, does not take into account Tina's basic heroism and condemns him to death. This action illustrates Hardy's belief that "society, collectively, has neither seen what any ordinary person can see, read what every ordinary person has read, nor thought what every ordinary person has thought."[15] It is almost as if individuals,

[12] Early Life, p. 191.
[13] "The Melancholy Hussar," p. 60.
[14] Ibid., p. 60.
[15] Early Life, p. 294.

when massed together to form "society," take on a sinister collective identity that is greater than and different from the sum of the individual identities involved. Thus, viewed as a mass, society seems a formidable body that is opposed to the individual and his search for happiness.

One cannot forget, however, that society is comprised of individuals, none of whom, Hardy has shown, are basically evil. Rather when individuals interact, their good intentions go awry through misunderstanding. Hardy once noted that "the shrinking soul thinks its weak place is going to be laid bare, and shows its thought by a suddenly clipped manner. The other shrinking soul thinks the clipped manner of the first to be the result of its own weakness in some way, not of its strength, and shows its fear also by its constrained air. So they withdraw from each other and misunderstand."[16]

Hardy's tale, "On the Western Circuit" explores the miscarriage of good intentions in the microcosmic society formed by the three protagonists. A young lawyer, Charles Raye, has a passing affair with an illiterate servant-girl, Anna. Anna falls in love with Raye, although she knows her education and social status are far below his. The girl persuades her married employer, Edith Harnham, to write to Raye in Anna's name, since the girl is too ashamed to tell her lover that she cannot read nor write. The motives of all three people are clear and

[16] Ibid., p. 232.

understandable, and Hardy portrays all three sympathetically. Raye's seduction of Anna springs from a natural attraction that defies the social barriers separating them. Anna chooses to deceive Raye because she is ashamed of her illiteracy and afraid of losing her lover. Edith Harnham assists the deception because she wants to protect Anna by keeping Raye's interest in the girl alive.

The actions of all three lead to unhappiness for each other. Edith, a lonely woman married to an elderly wine merchant, falls in love with Raye herself, and Raye is so impressed with the intelligence of the letters that his fancy for Anna changes to love. When Anna reveals she is pregnant, Raye decides to marry her. From her letters he concludes that she has the ability to become a professional man's wife, so that he will not be committing professional suicide by marrying a servant-girl. Only after the wedding does Raye find that it was Edith, not Anna, who wrote the letters and, therefore, it is Edith that he loves. He tells her, "Legally I have married her--God help us both!--in soul and spirit I have married you, and no other woman in the world."[17]

Thus when even these few people interact, their actions frustrate each other and ultimately become triply destructive. It is not surprising, then, that the collection of an even greater number of people into society results in a proportionate

17 "On the Western Circuit," p. 135.

increase in frustration of action. Each of the three protagonists of "On the Western Circuit" is partially balked by social norms dictating that Edith should marry the merchant just for the sake of marriage, and that Raye should not marry a servant-girl, even if she is pregnant. This is not the point, however. Raye is willing to defy convention and marry Anna, a course of action that would probably have brought him happiness if the assumptions he had been led to make about Anna had been correct. Hardy also points out that the society which condemns illiteracy had given Anna the chance to learn to read through national schooling, though her aunt had not sent her to school. Thus neither society nor a strict adherence to convention brings about the final tragedy of the tale. Rather it derives from the mutual deception of the three protagonists. Raye begins his relationship with Anna under an assumed name, and remains silent about his profession and life as a whole. Mrs. Harnham deceives not only Raye, but also her unsuspecting husband and Anna herself, since she does not tell Anna of all Raye's letters. Even Anna, the relatively innocent country girl, is capable of pretending that she wrote the letters by herself.

This lack of frankness between people is evident throughout Hardy's tales, and leads to misapprehension and sometimes disaster. Often one person will spy on another, making false assumptions from the scene he witnesses but does not fully comprehend. Thus in "What the Shepherd Saw," the

Duke sees from a distance an innocent meeting between the Duke's wife and her cousin, and, mistaking the meeting for a lovers' reunion, murders the cousin in unwarranted jealousy. Similarly Roger of "Master John Horseleigh, Knight," murders his sister's husband because appearances lead him to believe that the husband is a bigamist. Such misapprehensions could be easily corrected by simple explanations, but the spies prefer to act without ascertaining the validity of their assumptions.

Grandiose schemes for the improvement of society as a whole do little to erase these basic errors in human-to-human relationships; yet these errors are at the centre of many of society's ills. Hardy therefore concentrates on the individual unit of society, using the larger mass only as background. Thus in "For Conscience' Sake" a subtle interplay between the hero's own conscience and society's interpretation of his actions emphasizes Hardy's distinction between respectability and actual guiltlessness. Millborne, a middle-aged man of means, becomes conscience-stricken over an affair he had had with a woman several years before. Millborne had promised to marry the woman, and had never kept his promise, even when the woman had borne him a daughter. Millborne seeks out the woman and the daughter, now a young woman herself, and finds that they have become respected members of the small town where they live. The older woman, posing as a widow, has never told the daughter of her true parentage. When Millborne offers to marry the supposed widow

for his own conscience' sake, she accepts. Although she does not love Millborne, she realizes that her marriage to the wealthy bachelor might encourage her daughter's suitor to marry the girl.

The suitor, a clergyman named Cope, typifies society's admiration for both money and respectability. He is delighted with the daughter's new wealth, but becomes disgusted when he notices a resemblance between Millborne and his daughter. Although Cope is engaged to the girl, he refuses to visit the family until Millborne establishes his wife and daughter in a comfortable home and leaves the town. The clergyman then marries the girl, not because her actual worth and respectability have been altered, but because her irregular parentage can no longer be proved. Thus in trying to satisfy the dictates of a retrospective conscience, Millborne jeopardizes the reputations and happiness of those he is trying to help. Millborne's story emphasizes not only the gap between actions and reputation, but also the far-reaching consequences of a single mistake. Millborne writes to his wife: "Our evil actions do not remain isolated in the past, waiting only to be reversed; like locomotive plants they spread and re-root, till to destroy the original stem has no material effect in killing them."[18]

Again and again Hardy's tales point out how one person's fault affects many other people. His characters frustrate one

[18] Thomas Hardy, "For Conscience' Sake," Life's Little Ironies, p. 74.

another's actions because each individual in his own search for happiness does not consider the misery he is causing others. Hardy hoped that each person would look around him and see the pain of others, feeling it as his own, so that "Altruism, or The Golden Rule, or whatever 'Love your Neighbour as Yourself' may be called," would be brought about. His tales force his readers to see and sympathize with the unhappiness of his characters, as Hardy hoped these readers would do with actual people. If each individual incorporated into his own view of life, not the desire for his own happiness at all costs, but Hardy's doctrine of "Altruism," the society made up of those individuals would naturally become humanitarian. Thus Hardy addresses the individual rather than society as a whole. He preaches basic humanity rather than social reform. Such consideration for others on an individual level will naturally bring about social reform, not for the sake of reform, but because each member of society will share Hardy's ideal goal, that "pain to all upon the earth, tongued or dumb, shall be kept down to a minimum by loving-kindness, operating through scientific knowledge, and actuated by the modicum of free will conjecturally possessed by organic life."

V

Throughout his tales Hardy proves himself to be one who "has most steadily refused to be comforted in an age in which the temptation to seek comfort has been greatest. The comfort of forgetfulness, the comfort of beliefs, he has put both these away."[1] Hardy sees clearly the unhappiness of the human lot, but does not retire into the despair of defeatism. Rather he portrays his characters battling against an indifferent natural world, a restricting society, and their own mistakes and blindness. He shows the beauty of man's aspirations and ideals, and the narrow margin by which man fails to realize these. Hardy also points out the tragedy of "man's inhumanity to man," and its destructiveness to the oppressor as well as the victim.

In a deleted part of Tess of the D'Urbervilles Hardy gives as the moral justification of his honesty the consideration that it might help others to avoid Tess's trap.[2] Similarly his portrayal of man's unnecessary mistakes and cruelty to others may help his readers realize such errors in their own lives and take steps to correct them. Through his writing Hardy forces the reader to face the pain of the world, but also demonstrates how he can help to erase such pain. His tales affirm that every individual has a degree of power over his

[1] I.A. Richards, quoted by Douglas Brown, Thomas Hardy, p. 159.
[2] Rutland, p. 226.

own life, the natural world, and the society of which he is a part. Hardy urges man to accept the conditions of life offered by an imperfect world, and to use his intelligence and humanitarian instincts to improve whatever lies within his power.

Roy Morrell cites the influence of T.H. Huxley and John Stuart Mill on Hardy's meliorist philosophy.[3] According to Mill it is man's purpose, not to drift with nature's will, but to strive "perpetually . . . to amend the course of nature."[4] Mill argued that "a man is only partly limited by time and place: he is free to use and interpret experience in his own way, to cultivate some things in his past and in his environment, and weed out others."[5] Like Hardy, Mill was interested in the Unfulfilled Intention, or "not only all that happens but all that is capable of happening, the unused capability of causes . . . ."[6] Both Mill and Hardy argue that man should strive to make more of the unfulfilled potential reality, and so to improve the world for mankind and other creatures as well.

Hardy noticed the extra effort that all of nature is willing to expend in "the determination to enjoy. We see it in all nature, from the leaf on the tree to the titled lady

[3] Roy Morrell, Thomas Hardy: The Will and the Way (Kuala Lumpur, 1965), pp. 88-104.
[4] Ibid., p.92.
[5] Ibid., p.93.
[6] Ibid., p.93.

at the ball . . . . It is achieved, of a sort, under superhuman difficulties. Like pent-up water it will find a chink of possibility somewhere. Even the most oppressed of men and animals find it, so that out of a thousand there is hardly one who has not a sun of some sort for his soul."[7] If man is capable of finding "a chink of possibility" for enjoyment under such adverse circumstances, surely he is able to discover similar possibilities for improving the world as a whole. Indeed Hardy himself points out the chinks of possibility by showing his characters' unnecessary mistakes and how such mistakes could have been avoided. Thus he is following his dictum that "If way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst," and advocating the practical steps towards an improved world that he urges in the poem "To Sincerity:"

> Life may be sad past saying,
> Its greens for ever graying,
> Its faiths to dust decaying;
>
> And youth may have foreknown it,
> And riper seasons shown it,
> But custom cries:"Disown it:
>
> "Say ye rejoice, though grieving,
> Believe, while unbelieving,
> Behold, without perceiving!"
>
> --Yet would men look at true things,
> And unilluded view things,
> And count to bear undue things,
>
> The real might mend the seeming,
> Facts better their foredeeming,
> And Life its disesteeming.

[7] Early Life, p. 279.
Collected Poems, p. 262.

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