THOMAS HARDY

THE FUNCTION OF THE MINOR RUSTIC CHARACTERS IN FOUR OF THOMAS HARDY'S MAJOR NOVELS IN RELATION TO THE THEME OF MARRIAGE, CHASTITY, THE DOUBLE-STANDARD AND SEXUAL FREEDOM

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS: In this thesis, I attempt to examine the function of the minor rustic characters in four of the major novels of Thomas Hardy. The four novels are, Far from the Madding Crowd, The Mayor of Casterbridge, Tess of the d'Urbervilles and Jude the Obscure.

The purpose of this examination is to show to what extent the minor rustics help to reveal the theme of marriage, chastity, the double standard and sexual freedom. They do this either by furthering, or by not influencing, the plot; through the delineation of the characters of the protagonists; by their contribution to the humour, comic relief, and the chorus of the novels; and finally, by their rural values.

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

In this thesis I wish to examine the function of the minor rustic characters in four of the major novels of Thomas Hardy: Far from the Madding Crowd, The Mayor of Casterbridge, Tess of the d'Urbervilles, and Jude the Obscure. The minor rustic characters[1] can be identified by their general functions in the novels (especially in relation to the theme with which this thesis is concerned), their rural occupation, their class, their peculiar humour, their speech and more significantly their values. Each group of minor rustics is different and each has a peculiar function, in each novel. For example, the minor rustics in Far from the Madding Crowd probably represent human nature at its most felicitous, and a society which has attained harmony between one man and another based on a respect for each individual's humanity, and harmony between man and his physical environment, nature. Like the Brangwens in D. H. Lawrence's novel, The Rainbow, the minor rustics in Far from the Madding Crowd get their living from the land, that is, from farming. In The Mayor of Casterbridge and in Jude the Obscure, the minor rustics reveal the less attractive aspects of human nature. In these two novels, the minor rustics represent a society that tends to impose its values on the individual. The protagonists in these two novels, Lucetta, Sue, Jude,

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[1]There are major rustics like Gabriel Oak and Giles Winterbourne.

and to a lesser extent, Henchard, represent the individual who is trying to grasp personal happiness and to fulfil a personal dream. More particularly in The Mayor of Casterbridge, but also in Jude the Obscure, the minor rustics represent the ignorance, the malice, the cruelty, the injustice, the irresponsibility and the insensitivity of the public at large. In Tess of the d'Urbervilles, the minor rustics probably represent a society of men and women who are not inherently evil, but who have their share of human frailty and weakness. In this novel, more than in any of the other three, man seems almost a pitiable figure who probably cannot help himself.

However, this thesis is not concerned primarily with the rich diversity of each group of minor rustics in each of the four novels; but with their function in developing the theme with which this work is concerned. The theme which is dealt with in this thesis has four aspects: marriage, chastity, the double standard, and sexual freedom. The minor rustics are an integral part of Hardy's development of the theme because Hardy wishes to present the reader with three different standards of values in relation to this theme, so that the reader is compelled to use his own judgment. The protagonists can be said to act out their part at the front of the stage, while the minor rustics form a setting in that they live their lives and play their part at the back of the stage. In this way, Hardy juxtaposes rural values with conventional Victorian middle-class values, and with the more modern humanitarian and romantic values based on scepticism of accepted Christian ethics. The minor

rustics are also integral to the development of the theme because they represent the workfolk. This is important because conventional Victorian ideas on marriage, chastity and the double standard are based on class distinction, and also because Hardy wishes to arouse the social consciousness of the reader by presenting the working-classes, that is the minor rustics, as human beings in their own right. This is especially true of the minor rustics in Far from the Madding Crowd and in Tess of the d'Urbervilles, in which the double standard and the concept of chastity, as constituting technical virginity, are questioned and their basis on class distinction exposed.

The minor rustic characters in the four novels under consideration are an integral part of the development of the theme by their very existence, as well as by their various technical functions. The minor rustics help to develop the theme in their relation to the plot: this is done in a positive as well as in a negative manner. Either they develop the theme by furthering the plot, or, very significantly, they help to develop the theme by not influencing the direction of the plot. The part they play in developing the theme by delineating the characters of the protagonists is also both positive as well as negative, in that they help to delineate character either by their relationship and knowledge of the protagonists, or, interestingly enough, they reveal the character of a protagonist when the protagonist does not identify himself with the minor rustics, so that the minor rustics know little of him, or have a superficial relationship with him. Two such cases spring to mind, Troy and

Lucetta. But whereas Hardy uses the minor rustics to treat Troy unsympathetically on the whole,[2] he uses them quite differently in The Mayor of Casterbridge, to show his sympathetic treatment of Lucetta and the romantic notion of the individual's right to pursue his own happiness, even at the cost of flaunting social conventions.

The minor rustics help to develop the theme to some extent by their contribution to humour and irony, the comic relief and the chorus in the novels. Finally, but most important, the minor rustics are an integral part of Hardy's technique in developing the theme by providing their rural values and their own attitudes on the concepts of marriage, chastity, and sexual freedom, while the double standard is significantly non-existent amongst them.

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[2]Troy is a flat character who comes alive and gains dimension, briefly, when he speaks of his love for Fanny after her death. Hardy's own views on the need for the dissolubility of marriage when it becomes a burden to one party, and the genuine love that can exist outside of the institution of marriage, would seem to come through in his treatment of Troy in this particular example.

CHAPTER I

THE MINOR RUSTICS IN RELATION TO PLOT

In each of these four novels of Thomas Hardy's, that is Far from the Madding Crowd, The Mayor, Tess and Jude, the plot tends to focus attention on four aspects of the themes which are interrelated, namely, the double standard, the concepts of chastity and marriage, and the question of sexual freedom, especially as it is possible to discern in the plot a pattern of crisis followed by a violent climax, so that the reader is often shocked into an emotional response that may not always coincide with the reaction expected from conventional middle-class Victorian morality. The minor rustic characters play their part in bringing about these two focal points in the plot, that is, crisis and violent climax, but interestingly enough, the role they play may quite often be a negative one. The effect of this negative role is as significant as is their function in furthering the plot by active intervention, as in the case of the skimmington-ride in The Mayor. This negative role is important because when they make a futile attempt to influence the course of events, or when they withdraw into the background of the action and merely comment on the main action, the effect is to emphasise the status of the protagonist, who would seem to follow the path of his destiny with apparently no hindrance by lesser mortals, as represented by the

rustics. However, this[1] seeming sense of doom, the feeling apparently conveyed that man is a small helpless creature unable to escape the path laid down for him by an all-powerful and possibly irresponsible god, is misleading. To the extent to which the minor rustic characters do not manage to influence the course of the plot and hence the events in the lives of the protagonists, to that extent it is each individual who is in control to a remarkable extent, in these novels, of his own destiny. And what really influences events in his life is seen to be the consequences of his own actions which, in turn, are the result of his own character. Hence the relevance of Hardy's statement in The Mayor: "Character is Fate."[2]

In Far from the Madding Crowd, The Mayor of Casterbridge, and Tess of the d'Urbervilles, but not Jude the Obscure, the pattern of crisis followed by a violent climax also reflects one aspect of the theme, that of premarital chastity, with its corollary, the double standard. But in the first of these four novels, one finds that Hardy contrives the plot in order to avert a direct confrontation with the question of the double standard with its basis on class distinction.[3] Hardy also avoids the problems of an indissoluble marriage bond, juxtaposed with a relationship between lovers that is based on mutual love and may therefore be more meaningful to the parties concerned. It will be seen that the minor rustic characters

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[1]Thomas Hardy, Far from the Madding Crowd, New York: Macmillan 1968, pp. 408-419.

[2]Thomas Hardy, The Mayor of Casterbridge, New York; Macmillan, 1965, p. 117.

[3]This will be discussed at greater length in Chapter IV.

play a part in influencing the course of events. They may do this obviously by direct intervention; they may do it less obviously but very importantly by not intervening.

The crisis in the plot of Far from the Madding Crowd occurs when Bathsheba learns that her husband Troy has had an affair with her former maid-servant, Fanny, who apparently died soon after the birth of their child, who is, significantly, in the same coffin with her. The minor rustic characters provide the occasion for the discovery of Troy's secret, but Bathsheba's own actions result in the actual discovery. She confirms her suspicions as a result of her curiosity and what may be admitted to be a kind of desperate courage in opening the coffin in order to find out the truth. It is also her false sentimentality (a contrast to the more healthy realism and philosophical attitude to death revealed by Coggan and his company at the Buck's Head Inn[4] which makes her decide that "It is unkind and unchristian to leave the poor thing in a coach-house all night"[5] in spite of Oak's advice to the contrary. So much for Bathsheba's own responsibility. Oak rubbed out the chalk-written words "and child" from the coffin but it must be stressed that it is the rustic Joseph Poorgrass who delayed at the Buck's Head Inn so that by the time Oak found him and the coffin finally reached Weatherbury, it was too late to bury the corpse (since the coffin was assumed to contain only Fanny's corpse) that evening. An explicit comment on the serious consequences of this

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[4] Hardy, Far from the Madding Crowd, p. 317. This attitude can be compared to that of the gravedigger in Hamlet.

[5] Ibid., p. 323.

delay is made by Hardy:

> Oak imagined a terrible discovery resulting from this afternoon's work that might cast over Bathsheba's life a shade which the interposition of many lapsing years might but indifferently lighten, and which nothing at all might altogether remove.[6]

This event in the plot, Bathsheba's discovery of her husbands affair with Fanny before her marriage, is made more relevant to the theme in that Bathsheba is able to confirm that the lock of hair that her husband carried definitely belonged to Fanny, and this mental infidelity is made more blatant by Troy's actions after her death (not to mention his speaking to her by the roadside). First of all he kisses Fanny[7] and tells Bathsheba to her face that this woman means more to him than she does:

> 'This woman is more to me, dead asshe is, than ever you were, or are, or can be. If Satan had not tempted me with that face of yours, and those cursed coquetries, I should have married her. I never had another thought till you came in my way. Would to god that I had; but it is all too late! I deserve to live in torment for this!'
>
> He turned to Fanny then. 'But never, mind, my darling,' he said: 'in the sight of heaven you are my very, very wife!'

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[6] Ibid., p. 324.

[7] Ibid., p. 333.

And he goes on,

> 'You are nothing to me - nothin, 'said Troy, heartlessly. A ceremony before a priest does not make a marriage. I am not morally yours.'[8]

There are two themes touched upon but developed more fully in the other three novels. First, the whole question of love versus marriage. Should a marriage be dissoluble when it becomes a burden to one of the parties? Secondly, an extension of this idea, that a relationship between a man and a woman who are not married to each other may be more meaningful to the two parties concerned than one between two people who are married but who do not love each other. There is of course nothing new in this idea: marriage ideally creates a workable basis on which an enduring relationship may grow, but it is naïve to assume that the corollary may not also be true.

Hardy contrives the plot in such a way that he shelves the problem of whether or not Bathsheba and Troy should continue living together as man and wife after they have realised that there is no longer love, and what is more important, mutual respect, by the rather weak expedient of making it appear that Troy has drowned.[9] It is worth mentioning here that Bathsheba does not really believe that her husband is dead[10] since

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[8] Ibid., pp. 334-335.

[9] Hardy, Far from the Madding Crowd, p. 361. But it is worth noting that Bathsheba believed that "She belonged to him: the certainties of that position were so well defined, and the reasonable probabilities of its issue so bounded, that she could not speculate on contingencies."

[10] Ibid., pp. 362-363.

there is little evidence of his actual drawning.[11] Boldwood may be assumed to be too emotionally involved with Bathsheba to view the case dispassionately, as his reading into Liddy's answers to his questions exactly what he wants to hear would seem to indicate.[12] It is somewhat surprising that Oak is not more sceptical of the news of Troy's drowning. But what is significant is that the majority of the people on Weatherbury Farm, as represented by the minor rustic characters, seem inclinedto accept the news as a fact quite uncritically. To some extent at least, this is exemplified by Liddy's persuading Bathsheba that she should wear mourning - a concrete expression of acceptance - even though Bathsheba has her doubts.[13] In the circumstances, perhaps Bathsheba would be fighting a losing battle, but for a woman of her strong will and independence as well as in her position as mistress of Weatherbury Farm, it is disappointing that she is inclined to be rather easily influenced on matters of importance to her life.

If the minor rustic characters help, at this stage, to shelve a development of the questions of an indissoluble marriage bond versus a relationship between lovers, by their willingness to accept the news that Troy has died of drowning, it is they who help Troy to return to Weatherbury and hence to make the denouement, the violent climax, possible.

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[11] Ibid., pp. 364-365.

[12] Ibid., p. 371.

[13] Ibid., p. 364.

The minor rustic characters help to further the plot in this case mainly by their ineffectual attempts to do something positive. First of all, it is Pennywise who recognises Troy at Casterbridge in the role of Turpin. He tries to inform Bathsheba, first verbally and then in writing, but without success.[14] Then Troy snatches the note away from Bathsheba, and close physical proximity revives his passion for her, in one of the sensational contrivances which tend to mar Hardy's story-telling. That it is Bathsheba's pride that prevents her from getting the news from Pennywise is best revealed in his own words to Troy:

> 'Oh, she took no great heed of me, ye may well fancy; but she looked well enough, far's I know. Just flashed her haughty eyes upon my poor scram body, and then let them go past me to what was yond, much as though I'd been no more than a leafless tree.[15]

Pennywise makes a significant assessment of Bathsheba's character, and[16] the minor rustic characters often reveal the extent to which the protagonists are responsible for what befalls them. Hence, the very inaction and seemingly ineffectual attempts of the minor rustics to direct the plot are of great importance in revealing that the plot develops from character, and so the development of both plot as well as character help in turn to focus attention on the theme.

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[14] Ibid., p. 386.

[15] Hardy, Far from the Madding Crowd, p. 402.

[16] This will be discussed more fully in the next chapter.

The direct result of the failure of Pennywise to inform Bathsheba that her husband is not only alive but in Casterbridge, is that events in the plot move further towards the violent climax which will focus attention for the second time on the question of the indissoluble bond of marriage. The effect of Bathsheba's ignorance is that she indirectly encourages Boldwood, whereas this encouragement could have been nipped in the bud.[17]

Pennywise continues his function as a means of linking the crisis of the disappearance of Troy, and the violent climax for which the re-appearance of Troy, unexpected by the protagonists, is essential. Pennywise acts as a contact between Troy and the outside world. He has to find out for Troy his legal position. He doesn't; but he contributes towards motivating Troy's reappearance, by telling him of Boldwood's party in Bathsheba's honour.[18] It is this information that makes Troy decide: 'I must go and find her out at once'. Added to the passion which Bathsheba had already evoked in him, nothing could make Bathsheba more desirable than the news that his legal wife was much sought after by a suitor of good standing. Too late, Pennywise makes a futile attempt to dissuade Troy from making his reappearance: 'A good wife is good, but the best wife is not so good as no wife at all.'[19] This argument sounds weak and a trifle forced. Troy is piqued that Bathsheba should 'be in

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[17]The minor rustic characters also intensify the dramatic irony and help to heighten the effect of an impending catastrophe.

[18]Hardy, Far from the Madding Crowd, p. 402.

[19]Ibid., p. 406.

such a hurry to get rid of his name!' More important, the minor rustic characters had recognised Troy that very afternoon,[20] and were not sure about the legal implications of his disappearance.[21] Once again Pennywise tries to dissuade Troy from turning up at Weatherbury; but again his attempt is feeble and strained. The minor rustic characters do not succeed in driving away the invader. Lamely, Pennywise concludes by allowing Troy a free hand: 'I'll do as you tell me.'[22]

At Warren's, Samway, Tall and Smallbury discuss the situation.[23] That they realise the significance, and in fact help to draw attention to the situation, will be discussed in Chapter III in an examination of the function of the minor rustic characters in their role as a chorus. Troy's pressing his face against the pane of the window at Warren's, while the minor rustic characters discuss whether or not it is their business to interfere and inform Boldwood, emphasises their role in furthering the plot, especially given the academic detachment of their discussion. Disaster can be averted if the rustics act decisively and promptly. But Laban, accompanied by Samway, does not have the courage to inform Bathsheba:

> 'I didn't like to ask her after all,'
> Laban faltered out. 'They were all in

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[20] Ibid., p. 408.

[21] Ibid., p. 401.

[22] Ibid., p. 407.

[23] Ibid., pp. 410-411.

> such a stir, trying to put a little spirit into the party. Somehow the fun seems to hang fire, though everything's there that the heart can desire, and I couldn't for my soul interfere and throw damp upon it - if 'twas to save my life, I couldn't'.[24]

An element of the fatalistic is discernible in the ineffectual attempts of the minor rustics consciously to influence the action. Sometimes the effect created is that the character of the protagonist influences his destiny. Otherwise, the feeling conveyed is that there is a power greater than man, who consequently feels small and trapped in the relentless action of a force greater than himself but which he doesn't understand. But to stress this effect is to misunderstand Hardy's point of view, which tends, at least to some extent, to emphasise man's moral responsibility for the consequences of his own actions.

Hence, in Hardy's novels, disaster can usually be averted by timely action of the kind which the rustics significantly, do not take in this example. He does not deal with disaster like the flood in The Mill on the Floss, but rather with the consequences that follow when a protagonist like Maggie Tulliver allows herself to be borne along the river past Mudport. Neither does Hardy deal with the natural disasters like earthquakes which interest Voltaire in Candide. Timing is extremely important in Hardy's novels. While the rustics procrastinate, Bathsheba, ignorant of Troy's ironic proximity, commits herself to Boldwood: 'If he does not return, I'll marry you in six years from this day, if we both live,'

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[24] Hardy, Far from the Madding Crowd, p. 412.

she solemnly promises. Bathsheba cannot escape responsibility for encouraging, for the second time, a man whom she respects but does not love. Like Sue, she is wrong in trying to make up for her initial folly in encouraging him by committing him further. In The Mayor, it will be seen that Hardy similarly feels that Henchard was wrong in remarrying his wife, and that Lucetta was right in choosing Farfrae even though it meant breaking her word to Henchard. The point of view expressed is that in relationships between a man and a woman, only the existence of mutual love should count, not the false prolonging of a relationship based on promises and obligations as a result of such vows as the marriage vow, which, Hardy would seem to be saying, become meaningless once the foundation of mutual love crumbles. The comment this provokes is that there seems to be some confusion between what is ideal and therefore prone to defect, and the real or actual; in other words between the is and the ought questions.

Meanwhile, evil can still be stalled if the rustics will only inform Boldwood of Troy's reappearance. While Tall and Samway waste precious time assuring Boldwood that nobody is either married, engaged, born or dead,[25] and neglect the second opportunity of speaking to Bathsheba, she is called outside. The rustics are used with particular effect in controlling the pace of the action in order to intensify the suspense created by the dramatic irony.[26]

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[25]Hardy, Far from the Madding Crowd, p. 416.

[26]This technique is reminiscent of the comparable function of the servants in Byron's Don Juan. The humour, the comic relief, and the chorus effect will be discussed in Chapter III.

By their very inaction, the minor rustics help to allow the creation of a situation that leads to the violent climax, although Bathsheba is at least partly responsible for heightening Boldwood's expectations when she is not even sure of Troy's death, and for making a promise the qualifications of which make it useless except to give Boldwood a false sense of hope. The significance in terms of the development, or rather, the continuation of the theme, is that for the second time, Hardy contrives a situation in order to shelve a direct confrontation of the problem of the indissoluble nature of marriage. The disappearance of Troy is necessary in order that he can return the more effectively towards the conclusion. But this shelving of the problem is only apparent. As in The Mayor, Hardy's violent climax leads to a contrived happy ending that tends, on the surface, to obscure the real issues. But the dramatic violence of the climax provokes, to any but the superficial reader, the question of whether Bathsheba would have still felt that there was no doubt as to her duty to stick to her husband: "She belonged to him; the certainties of that position were so well defined, and the reasonable possibilities of its issue so bounded, that she could not speculate on contingencies".[27] Her instinctive reaction to Troy's: 'Come home with me; come!', would seem to belie this assumption: "She writhed, and gave a quick, low scream."[28] Secondly, the unceremonious elimination of

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[27] Far from the Madding Crowd, p. 361.

[28] Ibid., p. 418.

Boldwood further exempts Bathsheba from the responsibility of her own actions, and gives her a third opportunity to find happiness with Oak. This is indeed chance at its most felicitous. Indirectly, the minor rustics have been instrumental in bringing about these chance occurrences. One cannot help feeling that Hardy is being ironical; it is seldom that a woman manages to get rid of a husband from whom she recoils physically, and also of a persistent lover whom she does not love but whom she has seemingly inadvertently encouraged, partly because of her pride and her vanity, so that the man she has ignored and snubbed repeatedly is not only once more at her feet; but, from being her employee, is turned into her equal in wealth, position, and status. Jane Austen could hardly have favoured a favourite heroine more. Selfishness, vanity and snobbery could hardly have been better rewarded.

In The Mayor, the crisis in the plot occurs in the first chapter. In a discriptive scene which reveals Hardy at his best, the crisis[29] exposes the theme of whether or not marriage should be dissoluble when it becomes a burden to either of the two parties. Hardy's descriptive, rather than argumentative, treatment of his theme (with the exception of Jude, he tends to depict rather than to intellectualize a problem), owes much of its brilliance to the apparently casual manner in which minor rustic characters are used to introduce the theme so that it is woven into the plot, as well as into the development of character of two of the protagonists,

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[29]Hardy, The Mayor, pp. 13-19.

Henchard, and, to a lesser degree, Susan. Not only do the rustics provide an authentic setting for the auctioning of his wife by Henchard; but the introduction of the furmity woman is important at this stage in that she serves as a useful motif in linking the plot. She recurs at the next important stage in the plot when Susan learns from her that Henchard has left a message to say that should anybody enquire about him, the furmity-woman should say that he is at Casterbridge.[30] Thirdly, she makes her unexpected appearance at that brilliantly comic court-house scene,[31] when her revelation of Henchard's auction of his wife some twenty odd years ago, followed by Henchard's admission of the truth of this statement and of the furmity-woman's opinion that he is no better than she is, results in Henchard's downfall. Fourthly, to some extent at least, the skimmington-ride is motivated by people like the furmity-woman, who feels that Lucetta should be brought down a peg or two because, in her own words, 'I saved her from a real bad marriage, and she's never been the one to thank me.'[32]

Besides acting as an audience, the minor rustics contribute in furthering the plot and hence developing the theme, by entertaining Henchard's idea of auctioning his wife:

> The auctioneer selling the old horses in the field outside could be heard saying, 'Now this is the last lot - now who'll take the last lot for a song? Shall I say

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[30] Ibid., p. 27.

[31] Ibid., pp. 202-203.

[32] Hardy, The Mayor, p. 259.

forty shillings? 'Tis a very promising broodmare, a trifle over five years old, and nothing the matter with the hose at all, except that she's a little holler in the back and had her left eye knocked out by the kick of another, her own sister, coming along the road.'

'For my part I don't see why men who have got wives and don't want 'em, shouldn't get rid of 'em as these gipsy fellows do their old horses,' said the man in the tent. 'Why shouldn't they put 'em up and sell 'em by auction to men who are in need of such articles? Hey? Why, begad, I'd sell mine this minute if anybody would buy her!'

'There's them that would do that,' some of the guests replied, looking at the woman, who was by no means ill-favoured.

'True,' said a smoking gentleman, whose coat had the fine polish about the collar, elbows, seams, and shoulder-blades that long continued friction with grimy surfaces will produce, and which is usually more desired on furniture than on clothes. From his appearance he had possibly been in former time groom or coachman to some neighbouring county family. 'I've had my breedings in as good circles, I may say, as any man,' he added, 'and I know true cultivation, or nobody do; and I can declare she's got it - in the bone, mind ye, I say - as much as any female in the fair - though it may want a little bringing out.' Then, crossing his legs, he resumed his pipe with a nicely-adjusted gaze at a point in the air.

The fuddled young husband stared for a few seconds at this unexpected praise of his wife, half in doubt of the wisdom of his own attitude towards the possessor of such qualities. But he speedily lapsed into his former conviction, and said harshly-

> 'Well, then, now is your chance; I am open to an offer for this gem of creation.'
>
> She turned to her husband and murmured, 'Michael, you have talked this nonsense in public places before. A joke is a joke, but you may make it once too often, min!'
>
> 'I know I've said it before; I meant it. All I want is a buyer.'[33]

The rustics seem to provide the occasion for the auction. One of them agrees to be auctioneer; and 'a buxom staylace dealer in voluminous petticoats', does not manage to dissuade Susan from taking her husband at his word: "'Don't, my chiel,' 'yer good man don't know what he's saying.'" And neither does she succeed in bringing Henchard to his senses and thus preventing the auction:

"'Behave yerself moral, good man, for Heaven's love! Ah, what a cruelty is the poor soul married to! Bed and board is dear at some figures, 'pon my' vation 'tis!'"[34] Hardy's treatment of the theme consists to a great extent of the manner in which he uses the minor rustics to develop, to its logical conclusion, Henchard's initial opinion that an unwanted wife[35] should be got rid of in the same manner that the gipsies get rid of their horses. This "reductio ad absurdum" argument would seem to indicate Hardy's reluctance to treat the subject seriously as yet. In Far from the Madding Crowd he could be said to have introduced the

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[33]Hardy, The Mayor, pp. 13-14.

[34]Ibid., p. 15.

[35]Does the corollary hold ture, one wonders.

subject of whether the institution of marriage should be permanent or capable of dissolution; in The Mayor Hardy goes to the extent of suggesting that the problem is not so simple by drawing attention to the dignity of the individuals involved. This he does by his ironical treatment of the wife as though she were in fact nothing more than some form of chattel. It is significant that it is only at the end of the transaction that it dawns on Henchard to ask Susan for her consent to be sold to a perfect stranger for five guineas: "'Now then - five guineas and she's is yours. Susan, you agree?'"[36]

It is a minor rustic, the furmity-woman, who is used to further the plot, in Chapter XXVIII, so that it develops from this early crisis in the story. In what must be one of the well-remembered court-scenes in English fiction, the comedy of which ironically undercuts the seriousness and the importance of the scene to the story, the furmity-woman makes her unexpected disclosure about Henchard's auction of his wife at the fair in Weydon Priars some twenty years ago.[37] The importance of this episode is that it is as a result of Henchard's admission of the truth of her story, and more significant, his confirmation of her opinion that, as a result, he is no better than she is and therefore should give up his position as magistrate,[38] that Henchard brings about his downfall. This illustrates to a striking degree, the point I wish to emphasise at this

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[36]Hardy, The Mayor, p. 15.

[37]Ibid., p. 202.

[38]Ibid., p. 203.

stage: to the extent to which the minor rustics are not responsible for influencing the course of events in the lives of the protagonists, to that extent, it is the main characters themselves who direct their destiny.

The skimmington-ride provides the most dramatic example of a violent climax which focuses the reader's attention on the situation and characters with a moral awareness that is prompted by Hardy's own point of view. It is also the most striking illustration of the part played by the minor rustic characters in the development of the plot. The idea is initiated by Nance Mockridge after Jopp has read Lucetta's love letters to Henchard to the assembly of rustics at Peter's Finger in Mixen Lane.[39] As mentioned before, the furmity-woman shows her grievance that Lucetta has not thanked her for saving her from a bad marriage with Henchard. She would have been more accurate had she said that she had given Lucetta a pretext for breaking her engagement with Henchard. More significant is the point that seemingly trivial events and supposed grievances against Henchard and Lucetta can help to spark off an event that will have important repercussions on the lives of four of the protagonists. Mrs. Cuxsom agrees; perhaps at the back of her mind is the memory of Henchard's insulting allusion to her, in her own presence, as a woman of no character. But the rustics, excluding a small caucus who make futile efforts to avert the event, are really prompted by the desire for a good laugh. "'Tis

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[39] Ibid., p. 259.

the funniest thing under the sun!" the landlady of Peter's Finger informs Newson, who promptly offers a sovereign towards the expense.[40] Nance also has the same view as the landlady, "A good laugh warms my heart more than a cordial, and that's the truth on't."[41] The point is that the rustics have no idea of the consequences of their action. They are to some extent motivated by envy and the desire to take Lucetta down a peg or two. This I find significant, because it illustrates that whereas Farfrae is accepted by the rustics, Lucetta is not. He is a stranger when he first comes to Casterbridge, but the rustics are fascinated by him when he sings at the Three Mariners on his arrival. They praise him when his dance is so successful, and report favourably on his cleverness and his ability to get on with people. An example is what is told to Henchard by the little boy and later, Whittle's favourable comment of him as an employer[42] (albeit a pretty fight-fisted one!). Lucetta remaines an invader in the sense that she neither identifies herself nor finds favour with the rustics. On the other hand, it could be said that Elizabeth-Jane does. For one thing, she can come down to the level of serving at the Three Mariner's when economy demands it[43] (not that she does not have her own ideas of respectability, as revealed by her reluctance that her mother

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[40] I don't think Newson can be called a rustic, and why he should turn up at this point, and have something to do with the Skimmington-ride, even though he is to show up later in the plot, I don't know.

[41] The Mayor, p. 261.

[42] Ibid., p. 222.

[43] Ibid., p. 47.

should speak to the furmity-woman).[44] She also tries to save their servants unnecessary trips and bother; she serves Nance Mockridge with ale and cheese; and most significant of all, she let slip the local dialect - all to Henchard's mortification.[45]

But it is Lucetta who incurred Jopp's feeling for vengeance by refusing to speak to Farfrae on his behalf.[46] She shows curious lack of judgment in not being alert to the significance of Jopp's statement that he knew her in Jersey.[47] She also offends Henchard by denying that her husband has been Henchard's protégé. I find that Lucetta's ignorance, both of Farfrae's debt to Henchard,[48] and of Jopp's losing his job through no fault of his own because Farfrae was given it by Henchard, betrays her lack of contact and assimilation with the life and people in Casterbridge. To some minor but nevertheless significant extent, Lucetta is to blame for the unsympathetic attitude of the planners of the Skimmington-ride towards herself.

In this particular incident, I feel that the rustics represent public opinion and the conventional code of morality with its rough and ready justice. Their behavior is as irresponsible as that of any public, who are easily roused for the sake of something to do, who do not stop

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[44] Ibid., p. 26.

[45] Ibid., pp. 131-133.

[46] Compare Bathsheba and Pennywise.

[47] Hardy, The Mayor, pp. 252-3

[48] Ibid., pp. 266-267.

to ask themselves what lies beneath the surface, and whose "justice" is as indiscriminate as that of the skimmington-ride. The most significant point is that not even Solomon Longways, Christopher Coney and the other of Farfrae's men who send him the anonymous letter in order to prevent him from learning the scandal,[49] feel it necessary to bother about the possible effect on Lucetta: "For poor Lucetta they took no protective measure, believing with the majority there was some truth in the scandal, which she would have to bear as she best might."[50] The double standard involved is implicit, and is further illustrated in the ironical incident of how Henchard was prevented from committing suicide, so that, in his own words, "That performance of their killed her, but kept me alive!"[51] Even those who say that Hardy's treatment of the rustics lends them a romantic glow[52] must admit that there is nothing idealistic about the view of human nature as depicted in the behaviour of the rustics in this incident. Shamefacedly, they realise that their joke has had repercussions they little dreamed of, and they slink away rather like mice who have crept out of their various hide-outs to live it up a bit in the dark of night only to vanish at day-break. And this ability of the rustics to fade away into the background and to leave the protagonists to lead their own lives, tends to enhance their function as the chorus, the setting.

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[49] Ibid., p. 276.

[50] Ibid., p. 277.

[51] Ibid., pp. 297-298.

[52] This is a point which will be discussed further in Chapter IV.

However, there can be little doubt that the skimmington-ride sweeps over the fortunes of the four main characters in the novel like a flood that has been gaining in momentum silently and without the knowledge of the protagonists, that it takes them completely unaware like that famous flood in The Mill on the Floss, and that it subsides equally quietly; but leaving behind the wreckage it has wrought. And I feel that it shocks the reader into an emotional response that, when examined, is seen to reflect a moral attitude. Nowhere else, and especially in these four novels, has Hardy succeeded so well in putting forward a point of view that undercuts that of conventional Victorian middle-class morality. The reader of his day, and of ours, could so easily have been on the side of the plotters at Peter's Finger, could so easily have been Newson with the ready sovereign in expectation of some apparently harmless entertainment to while away a short stay in these unknown parts. But with Lucetta's sudden and tragic death, the reader is as shocked as are the originators of the skimmington-ride. Those who planned the skimmington-ride cannot be held directly responsible for her death, and this is significant, because it shows that even in this case the minor rustics were not directly responsible for the development of the plot. Had Lucetta not been with child, the epileptic fit itself would not have killed her. But when a woman dies of a miscarriage brought on by the fear of the consequences to her love and her marriage should her husband know of certain indiscretions in her past life, it does make one ask whether Lucetta deserves to die at the height of her married happiness.

When Farfrae is made to react by expressing his feeling that it was best she died because they couldn't possibly have been happy after this revelation,[53] the reader's shock turns to anger: the same kind of anger, which even an understanding of the disease can only palliate to a contemptuous and cold pity, which the reader may feel when confronting a Knight or, worse still, an Angel Clare. This anger is only intensified at the injustice by which fate [54] sacrifices on the sanctimonious altars of these various prigs, the best of women. For example, innocent Elfride was sacrificed. And Lucetta who came so alive in that house over-looking the market in High Street, that for a time it seemed as if it was not only Henchard and Farfrae who were charmed, but the writer of the story as well. But, with a pang of conscience, it would seem as if Hardy turned fairy godfather, and turned that heroine painted in the most delicate of tints, Elizabeth-Jane, into the good woman. But what about that different type of good woman, Tess?[55]

We are educated from childhood to react with the stock moral response: the good earn our pity, love and admiration; the wicked, our hatred, fear, and horror. And Hardy exploits this basic response for his own purpose. Before you realise it, you pity Lucetta and you hate Farfrae. It is as simple as that. I hate him because it does not even occur to him that all he needed to do was to forgive. Instead he seems to feel that

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[53] Hardy, The Mayor, p. 301.

[54] As depicted by Hardy in his novels and which is no doubt true, to a certain extent at least, to life.

[55] Or are all of them merely the same woman in her different moods, shapes, guises?

the very fact of Lucetta's past behavior, and, presumably, her not having told him of it, constitutes an utter negation of happiness. Not for a moment does he think either of her love for him (which motivated her secrecy) and which Hardy revealed so explicityly by Lucetta's attitude towards Farfrae on the very day of her death on the occasion of the royal visit, and by the use of that striking simile by which on an earlier occasion when Henchard and Farfrae both come to court Lucetta, he describes her eyes as going to him like a bird to its nest.[56] Farfrae wanted to wreak vengeance on the perpetrators of the skimmington-ride, but prudence prevented him.[57] Not a word of pity either for Lucetta, or for the loss of their child. And then Hardy makes this statement, the matter-of-fact tone of which betrays Hardy's own feeling. It would seem that he wants to make it appear that he is merely the narrator describing what happened. I think he wants to trap the Victorian reader by apparently giving him what he wants, for example, the happy ending, while all the while keeping his tongue in his cheek. Since the Victorian reader will not have Candour in English Fiction,[58] this is Hardy's revenge:

> He could not but perceive that by the death of Lucetta he had exchanged a looming misery for a simple sorrow. After the revelation of her history, which must have come sooner or later

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[56]Hardy, The Mayor, p. 183.

[57]Ibid., p. 300.

[58]Thomas Hardy, Candour in English Fiction in Harold Orel, (ed.), Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings, Lawrence:University of Kansas Press, 1966.

> in any circumstances, it was hard to believe that life with her would have been productive of further happiness.[59]

And Hardy continues in a tone the very gentleness of which accentuates the ironic effect:

> But as a memory, notwithstanding such conditions, Lucetta's image still lived on with him, her weaknesses provoking only the gentlest criticism, and her suffering attenuating wrath at her concealment to a momentary spark now and then.[60]

Much good may his memory of her image do Lucetta, and how fortunate to escape with only "the gentlest criticism" and only "a momentary spark" of wrath. What is infuriating is the complete lack of consciousness in men of the Knight-Farfrae-Clare type that they may be found wanting, in generosity, for example, and in the capacity for accepting love. The two are complementary. I think whether or not Lucetta was right in marrying Farfrae without revealing an indiscretion in her past which was relevant to their relationship, and without which a foundation for a mutual trust and confidence necessary in marrigge could hardly be built, is not the point at issue. Until the double standard is eliminated as it is being to some extent to-day, women will be faced with the problem which Tess so agonisingly faces: whether to tell and lose the prospect of love and happiness, or whether to risk discovery later and grab happiness with both hands when

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[59]Hardy, The Mayor, p. 301.

[60]Ibid., pp. 301-302.

the opportunity affords. Incidentally only a happy marriage can "rehabilitate" a "fallen woman".

I think Hardy gave his contemporary public the happy ending they clamoured for with his tongue in his cheek, in that virtue is rewarded by Elizabeth-Jane's acquiring for her self-effacing patience and prudence the very man whom no woman with any spirit would want for a husband after the revelation of his attitude towards his wife's death, namely, Farfrae.

The minor rustics are directly responsible for the skimmington-ride, although a small group make the characteristic ineffectual attempt to avert Farfrae's knowledge of it. On the other hand, another group of minor rustics, namely servant, are responsible for Lucetta herself hearing a commentary on it in spite of her not looking out of the window at the time. Otherwise she might never have known anything about the Skimmington-ride, since the anonymous letter from Solomon Longways and his cronies was effective in getting Farfrae away. Hardy's technique here is brilliant, and has to be quoted to illustrate the effect:

> The reverie in which these and other subjects mingled was disturbed by a hubbub in the distance, that increased moment by moment. It did not greatly surprise her, the afternoon having been given up to recreation by a majority of the populace since the passage of the Royal equipages. But her attention was at once riveted to the matter by the voice of a maid-servant next door, who spoke from an upper window across the street to some other maid even more elevated than she.

'Which way be they going now?' inquired the first with interest.

'I can't be sure for a moment,' said the second, because of the malter's chimbley. O yes -- I can see 'em. Well, I declare, I declare!'

'What, what?' from the first, more enthusiastically.

'They are coming up corn Street after all! They sit back to back!'

'What -- two of 'em -- are there two figures?'

'Yes, two images on a donkey, back to back, their elbows tied to one another's! She's facing the head, and he's facing the tail.'

'Is it meant for anyone in particular?'

'Well -- it mid be. The man has got on a blue coat and ketseymere leggings; he has black whiskers, and a reddish face. 'Tis a stuffed figure, with a falseface.'

The din was increasing now -- then it lessened a little.

'There -- I shan't see, after all!' cried the disappointed first maid.

'They had gone into a back street -- that's all,' said the one who occupied the enviable position in the attic. 'There -- now I have got 'em all endways nicely!'

'What's the woman like? Just say, and I can tell in a moment if 'tis meant for one I've in mind.'

> 'My -- why -- 'tis dressed just as she was dressed when she sat in the front seat at the time the play-actors came to the Town Hall!'[61]

It continues thus. This is a unique example of the way in which the minor rustic characters serve to further the plot, and, in this particular case, to make the Skimmington-ride effective.

In Tess, the minor rustics play a much less dramatic and conspicous part in furthering the plot. A careful examination shows that the minor rustics are significant because they give the protagonists a choice of two actions rather than because they direct the course of events in any definite manner. Hence, the function of the minor rustics is more important in helping to reveal the characters of Tess and Clare, thus developing the theme.[62]

The crisis in the plot is closely related to the themes of what constitutes chastity, the incongruity and the social injustice of the double standard, and the meaninglessness of a marriage which is legally valid even when there is no longer mutual love between the two parties.[63] The focal point of the crisis is Tess's revelation to Clare of her past: her seduction by Alec and her consequent pregnancy and motherhood.[64]

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[61]Hardy, The Mayor, pp. 277-278.

[62]This function of the rustics will be dealt with in the next Chapter.

[63]But since the marriage between Tess and Clare was not consummated, it may be assumed that if they could prove this fact, the marriage could be annulled.

[64]Thomas Hardy, Tess of the d'Urbervilles, New York: Macmillan, 1966, p. 257.

The minor rustics, Marian, Izz and Retty, are used as the pretext for this confession. Jonathan informs Clare and Tess of the reaction of the girls to their unrequited love for Clare, once he has married Tess:

> 'I am so sorry you should have heard this sad story about the girls,' he said. 'Still, don't let it depress you. Retty was naturally morbid, you know.'
>
> 'Without the least cause,' said Tess. 'While they who have cause to be, hide it, and pretend they are not.'
>
> This incident had turned the scale for her. They were simple and innocent girls on whom the unhappiness of unrequited love had fallen; they had deserved better at the hands of Fate. She had deserved worse -- yet she was the chosen one. It was wicked of her to take all without paying. She would pay to the utmost farthing; she would tell, there and then. This final determination she came to when she looked into the fire, he holding her hand.[65]

What is significant is that Hardy does not leave the revelation to chance. This is the significance of the letter of confession written by Tess to Clare remaining under the carpet and not being either found or read by Clare,[66] So that Tess has to decide to confess about her past in the most direct and deliberate of manners, that of telling him personally. Mrs. Durbefield, that most alive and likeable of peasant women, because she has

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[65] Ibid., p. 254.

[66] Ibid., p. 241.

a zest for life and living and a sense of proportion that is the secret of her capacity for survival, wrote to her daughter advising her categorically not to reveal her past; but she is not able to over the plot crisis that results from the confession:

> But with respect to your question, Tess, I say between ourselves, quite private but very strong, that on no account you say a word of your Bygone Trouble to him. I did not tell everything to your Father, he being so Proud on account of his Respectability, which, perhaps, your Intended is the same. Many a woman -- some of the Highest in the Land -- have had a Trouble in their time; and why should you Trumpet yours when others don't Trumpet theirs? No girl would be such a Fool, specially as it is so long ago, and not your Fault at all. I shall answer the same if you ask me fifty times. Besides, you must bear in mind that, knowing it to be your Childish Nature to tell all that's in your heart -- so simple! -- I made you promise me never to let it out by Word or Deed, having your Welfare in my Mind; and you most solemnly did promise it going from this Door. I have not named either that Question or your coming marriage to your father, as he would blab it everywhere, poor Simple Man.[67]

Neither did the Trantridge man turn the course of the plot when he recognised Tess and made a remark on the basis of her past. To save Clare's feelings as a gentleman[68] he said to Clare:

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[67] Ibid., p. 219.

[68] Ibid., p. 238.

> 'I beg pardon, sir; 'twas a complete mistake. I thought she was another woman, forty miles from here.[69]

The other significant fact is that Clare planned to farm either in the midlands or in one of the "colonies",[70] so that the chances of his hearing about Tess's past would have been remote, especially as it was not very likely that Clare, a gentleman, would come into social contact with the kind of workfolk who knew of her past.

What makes the crisis in the plot also the focal point of the theme is that Tess's revelation should have occurred immediately after Clare's confession about:

> that time of his life to which allusion has been made when, tossed about by doubts and difficulties in London, like a cork on the waves, he plunged into eight-and-forty hours' dissipation with a stranger.[71]

The irony of the double standard becomes explicit especially when Tess begins her confession with the naïve assumption:

> 'O, Angel -- I am almost glad -- because now you can forgive me! I have not made my confession. I have a confession, too -- remember I said so.'[72]

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[69] Hardy, Tess, p. 237.

[70] Ibid., p. 187.

[71] Ibid., p. 256.

[72] Ibid.,

Later, Izz helpts to suggest that Clare's aberration, his "momentary levity" was probably not as isolated as it seems, because, very deliberately, he asks Izz to go with him to Brazil, apparently as his mistress. Izz does manage to prevent the folly of this plan, which could make a reconciliation between Clare and Tess more difficult in the future. Clare decides against the idea of taking Izz as abruptly as he suggests it in the first place. But even though Izz assures him that no woman could love him as much as Tess, who would give her life for him and no woman could do more[73] -- a statement that the violent climax proves to be remarkably accurate -- Clare is not capable of that understanding of the essential purity of Tess's love that would avert this estrangement between him and his wife.

Both the crisis as well as the violent climax are concerned with Tess's seduction by Alec. It must be noted that Mrs. Durbeyfield informs Clare that Tess is at Sandbourne,[74] and secondly, that the warning letter of Marian and Izz[75] arrives too late, Clare getting it only on his return to England. It may help Clare decide to look for Tess; but it is already too late. What really influences Clare, besides the opportunity for rational thinking unfettered by the specifically Christian environment of his home, is the advice of his fellow traveller in Brazil.[76] And this man

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[73]Hardy, Tess, pp. 306-307.

[74]Ibid., p. 420.

[75]Ibid., p. 410.

[76]Ibid., pp. 381-382.

is not a rustic. I cannot help feeling that the events leading up to the murder of Alec can be understood from a comprehension of the characters of the three people concerned, especially Tess and Clare. So again, the minor rustics serve as some kind of sign posts along a road; but they are not really responsible for the protagonists finding themselves on the road or for the turn they take.

It would be an oversimplification, though neat, to say that the violent climax draws attention to the irrationality of the double standard and to the truth of Tess's purity. Fortunately, neither life not Hardy's art is that simple, and this climax has a much more profound effect on the reader, and, like the pebble thrown into the pool, it evokes an emotional response that is wider and more difficult to define. I find that after the climax, the rest of the story is an epilogue which is irrelevant to the main theme.

An important point about Jude is its relative and significant lack of minor rustic characters.[77] Whereas Phillotson and Arabella begin as rustic characters,[78] they cease to be as the story progresses, and once they get involved with the protagonists, Jude and Sue, they are no longer minor characters. In this novel, minor rustic characters are Drusilla

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[77]The significance of this point will be discussed in Chapters III and IV.

[78]Thomas Hardy, Jude the Obscure, New York: Macmillan, 1966, pp. 14 and 43.

Fawley, who only manages to make Sue appaar attractive to Jude even before he finally meets her, and who doesn't manage to dissuade Jude from giving up his relationship with Sue even afterwards;[79] Anny, Arabella's confidante; Widow Edlin who cannot blame them for not getting married and who is singularly unsuccessful in preventing Phillotson from marrying Sue a second time;[80] Arabella's father who helps her seduce Jude on both occasions before each of her two marriages to Jude, by leaving the key and by leaving the door open;[81] and Taylor, Jim and Joe who act as passive spectators to Jude when he tells of his dream to be a scholar at the Tavern and who then see Jude consent to marry Arabella a second time.[82]

The crisis in the plot occurs, when Sue leaves Phillotson to live with Jude.[83] The minor rustic characters play no part in her leaving because Phillotson lets her.[84] The only people who are on Phillotson's side are some people from a neighbouring fair.[85] The

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[79] Ibid., pp. 70 and 218.

[80] Ibid., pp. 55-56 and 325-326.

[81] Ibid., pp. 60 and 387.

[82] Ibid., pp. 128-130 and 396-397. But Jim is not present on the second occasion.

[83] Ibid., pp. 244-245 and p. 260.

[84] Ibid., pp. 246 and 257.

[85] Ibid., p. 259.

importance of Sue's leaving her husband because she has a physical aversion to him[86] in relation to the theme is that it puts forward, and examines to a greater extent than in any of the three other novels, the question of the dissolubility of marriage.[87] In Tess, the woman was the innocent party; but poor Phillotson loses a wife as well as status, and his very means of livelihood [88] merely because he is compassionate enough to give Sue her freedom. The crisis draws attention to the injustice of a society that will not let two people decide what is to a great extent personal according to their own agreement.

The violent climax centres round Sue's wanting to return to Phillotson as a result of the shock and feelings of guilt she has had after the hanging of the three children and the loss of her third child.[89] Again it is only the protagonists who are responsible; widow Edlin being unsuccessful in preventing the marriage. Arabella plays a part in informing Phillotson that Sue and Jude were not lovers at the time that he gave her the divorce; and she also informs him that Sue thought she was still his wife.[90] It is the courageously frank and realistic description of Sue's aversion to any sexual relations with Phillotson[91] that compels

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[86] Ibid., p. 264.

[87] Hardy, Jude, p. 246.

[88] Ibid., p. 264.

[89] Ibid., p. 347 and 363.

[90] Ibid., p. 369.

[91] Ibid., pp. 218, 221, 230-231, 412.

the reader to a sharpened moral awareness of whether or not it is right to think that Sue belongs to Phillotson. And it is by conveying the impression that Sue and Jude are kindred spirits that Hardy arouses the reader's moral consciousness. For example, Arabella notices this at the Fair,[92] Phillotson admits it to Mr. Gillingham after eavesdropping on them[93] and the otherwise conservative Widow Edlin comes to the conclusion that Sue should not go back to Phillotson[94]. The description of both Sue and Jude waking up to set free the trapped rabbit[95] is symbolic and recalls the brilliant realism of the pig-sticking episode that so sharply showed the incompatibility between Jude and Arabella.[96] And the result of the violent climax, Sue's madness and re-marriage to Phillotson[97] as well as her rejection of Jude which practically sends him to his grave[98], arouses the reader's moral consciousness. Unlike the treatment of the theme of whether or not marriage should be dissoluble in The Mayor, the treatment in this novel is both sensitive and uncomfortably honest. There is no attempt at all to simplify the issue, or the complexity of a

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[92]Hardy, Jude, pp. 300-307.

[93]Ibid., p. 241.

[94]Ibid., p. 409.

[95]Ibid., pp. 69-74.

[96]Ibid., p. 223.

[97]Ibid., pp. 373 and 386.

[98]Ibid., p. 403.

subject that is so pertinent to human happiness. There is no attempt to gloss over the injustice that must result to one or other of each of the two married couples or to the child involved, except that perhaps Phillotson's unhappiness would seem to spring almost solely as a result of the reaction of the public, and not at all because of the intrinsic situation. Secondly, there is an attempt to make out that Jude and Sue are made to lose their means of livelihood and to look for other ways of making a living, like keeping a gingerbread stall, so that they would seem to be the victims of a bigoted society as represented by the minor rustics in the novel. But in fact they are to a remarkable extent free of the compelling influences of society. In the next chapter I point out to what extent the relative lack of minor rustic characters, and their minimal if not negligible influence on the plot, show that it is often the protagonists themselves who are largely responsible for what happens to them. Also, it will be shown that the questions of marriage, chastity, the double standard and sexual freedom are illustrated and developed by means of the delineation of the characters of the protagonists. And it is very often the minor rustics themselves who are used to develop their character.

CHAPTER II

THE MINOR RUSTICS IN RELATION TO CHARACTER

In the first chapter, the theme of marriage, chastity, the double standard and sexual freedom was illustrated in the development of the plot, which was partly furthered by the minor rustic characters and partly by the actions and desires of the protagonists themselves. In this chapter I wish to examine to what extent the delineation of character, as revealed by the minor rustic characters, helps to develop the theme.

There are two ways in which the minor rustics help delineate the character of the protagonists. Through close association with them, they may often bring out a point about the protagonists by acting either as a foil and contrast, or by revealing similarities. Further, Hardy shows a sympathetic attitude towards a main character when he portrays him in a rustic setting in which he is at home. But his treatment of Lucetta is sympathetic even though she is shown to be an alien in Wessex. Then, the rustics describe a character by giving information about his actions or behaviour. This may take the form of comment, gossip, or information.

In Far from the Madding Crowd, the minor rustic, Fanny, helps to reveal the character of Troy in her meeting with him outside the barracks in the snow.[1] The significance of this encounter in terms of the theme is that Troy is shown in his relationship with a maid servant to exhibit that class distinction on which the double standard is founded. That Fanny

[1]Hardy, Thomas, Far from the Madding Crowd, New York: MacMillan, 1968, pp. 98-103.

should have to meet him outside the barracks and in the snow, and that she should further have to speak to him on such a personal subject as marriage, while he has forgotten to seek permission from his superiors, shows the plight of a girl in Fanny's position. Sympathy is gained for Fanny because the reader has already made her acquaintance when she meets Gabriel Oak,[2] and Oak's favourable impression of her, and the concern of Bathsheba[3] and of Boldwood for her welfare,[4] tend to focus attention on her worth as a human being regardless of her social class. The setting is also significant: Hardy disliked the cold,[5] and especially in juxtaposition with the idyllic environment of the scenes in the rest of the novel, the physical background in this scene is especially harsh, symbolic of the ruthless treatment meted out to Fanny by Troy, and hence by society, later in the book. I find the "Ho-ho - Sergeant - ho-ho!" and the "low peal of laughter"[6] which greets Troy from his colleagues throws light on the fact that they merely felt that this was a good joke and something to tease him about, whereas it cost Fanny her job (in that she hadn't the face to stay on), her position in the society or community in which she lived, and finally, as with Lucetta, her life and possibly that of her child.

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[2] Ibid., pp. 61-62.

[3] Ibid., pp. 80-82.

[4] Ibid., p. 88.

[5] Hardy, F.E., The Life of Thomas Hardy, London: MacMillan, 1962.

[6] Hardy, Far From the Madding Crowd, p. 103.

The next scene in which Fanny also helps, by her relationship with Troy, to show up his unreliability and his quickly hurt pride, is that in which she meets him after she has waited for him at the wrong church.[7] That Troy turns up at all is surprising; that he refuses to marry her on the pretext that she did not turn up at the right church only goes to show further that Troy is unreliable. Hardy's delineation of Troy's character seems a trifle forced and inconsistent. He seems to contrive his character to fit in with the plot. Troy comes alive only when he affirms his love for Fanny and plants the flowers on her grave, having set up a tomb for her.[8]

In The Mayor, the furmity-woman brings out an important aspect of Henchard's character in her court-scene disclosure.[9] It is astounding that Henchard should not only have admitted his guilt in auctioning his wife; but more especially, have admitted what was not true, that he was no better than she was, and hence not fit to be magistrate.

The relevance of Henchard's deep-rooted guilt, comparable to that of Tess and Sue, in terms of the theme, is that it is Henchard's excessive act of atonement for what he believes to have been a wrong act on his part that makes the reader see Henchard's personal problem as well as the theme

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[7] Ibid., p. 133.

[8] Ibid., pp. 333-335 and pp. 346-347.

[9] Hardy, Thomas, The Mayor of Casterbridge, New York: Macmillan, 1965, pp. 202-203.

of whether marriage should be dissoluble, in proportion. In the first place, Susan could be said to be almost as much to blame for the auction as her husband. Whereas Henchard is drunk, and therefore not fully responsible for his actions, Susan is sober. The Staylace dealer does appeal to her to take no notice of his behaviour.[10] Further, not only does Henchard try to find her when he is sober,[11] and leave word with the furmity-woman concerning his whereabouts;[12] but he also keeps his vow not to drink any liquor for twenty-one years.[13] More significant, he remarries Susan on her reappearance purely out of a sense of duty, just as he is later ready to marry Lucetta primarily because he feels it is his duty as well. But on the theme of the permanency of marriage, Hardy would seem to have been against Henchard's remarriage, as is shown by his treatment of the courtship:

> The visit was repeated again and again with business-like determination by the Mayor, who seemed to have schooled himself into a course of strict mechanical rightness towards this woman of prior claim, at any expense to the later one and to his own sentiments.
>
> One afternoon the daughter was not indoors when Henchard came, and he said drily, 'This is a very good opportunity for me to ask you to name the happy day, Susan.'[14]

Hardy's attitude is revealed in the use of his diction and syn-

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[10] Ibid., p. 15.

[11] Ibid., p. 23.

[12] Ibid., p. 27.

[13] Ibid., pp. 39 and 264.

[14] Ibid., p. 85.

tax. The words 'repeated', 'again and again' and 'business-like determination' accentuate the idea expressed in 'strict mechanical rightness', and also convey the feeling of Henchard doing something, as did Sue in returning to Phillotson, that was against 'his own sentiments' and, Hardy suggests, human nature. The use of the cliché 'to name the happy day', betrays the emphasis on convention and on formality at the expense of feeling. Hardy seems to evoke a natural repugnance against the concept of doing one's duty in such cases, when it goes completely against the feelings of the victim. This is further developed in Jude the Obscure when Sue returns to Phillotson out of a similar sense of duty and much greater disinclination - revulsion. Hardy continues to make Henchard's motives more explicit:

> He pressed on the preparations of his union, or rather, reunion, with this pale creature in a dogged, unflinching spirit which did credit to his conscientiousness. Nobody would have conceived from his outward demeanour that there was no amatory fire or pulse of romance acting as a stimulant to the bustle going on in his gaunt, great house; nothing but three large resolves - one, to make amends to his neglected Susan; another, to provide a home for Elizabeth-Jane under his paternal eye; and a third, to castigate himself with the thorns which these restitutory acts brought in their train; among which the lowering of his dignity in public opinion by marrying so comparatively humble a woman.[15]

That he succeeded in his last aim is borne out by the comment of Coney:

> ' . . . 'Tis five and forty years since I had my settlements in this here town,' said Coney; 'but daze me if ever I see a man wait so long before to take so little! There's a chance even for thee

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[15]Hardy, The Mayor, p. 86.

after this, Nance Mockridge.'[16]

If the furmity-woman has been used as a tool to provide the occasion on which Henchard shows most clearly his black-and-white concept of morality that requires him to place duty before the gratification of personal desires in a ruthless and unflinching manner, what Irving Howe would call Hardy's romanticism[17] is revealed in the character of Lucetta. As I have said in Chapter I, Lucetta keeps herself remarkably aloof from the minor rustic characters, and this itself indicates that this alien to Casterbridge has not identified herself with Wessex and she remains the invader who disrupts the life of three main characters, Henchard, Farfrae and Elizabeth-Jane. It is fitting that to the rustics, Lucettas is an unknown quantity, and as such they do not help (except in a negative manner) to delineate her character with one or two relatively unimportant exceptions. But they help to bring out in high relief Lucetta's foreignism. Her fashionable clothes, of which the planners of the skimmington-ride take notice only to taunt her more conspicuously,[18] even the very furniture is such that is not seen in those parts.[19] It is in her relationship with Henchard, Farfrae and Elizabeth-Jane that Lucetta's character is developed so

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[16] Ibid., p. 87.

[17] Howe, Irving, Thomas Hardy, New York: MacMillan, 1967, pp. 24 and 63.

[18] Hardy, The Mayor, pp. 176, 279.

[19] Ibid., p. 176.

that it helps to develop the theme. In her actions and behaviour, Lucetta represents a reversal of the old and stable sense of values based on a clearly-defined code of ethics like that which governs Elizabeth-Jane.[20] She has the courage or the wilfulness and lack of prudence, depending on one's point of view, to decide to marry the man she loves rather than the one to whom she is in all honour bound to marry when he will have her, as the following passage shows:

> 'You came to live in Casterbridge entirely on my account,' he said. 'Yet now you are here you won't have anything to say to my offer!' He had hardly gone down the staircase when she dropped upon the sofa and jumped up again in a fit of desperation. 'I will love him!' she cried passionately; as for him - he's hot-tempered and stern, and it would be madness to bind myself to him knowing that. I won't be a slave to the past - I'll love where I choose!'[21]

It is clear that Lucetta is looking for a pretext to give up Henchard. She summarises his character very accurately, and shows that she can see Henchard's violent temper in perspective, when she speaks to Elizabeth-Jane near Susan's grave about the sort of man she thought Henchard was.[22] The furmity-woman is wrong in thinking that she saved Lucetta from a bad marriage,[23] as Hardy points out:

> But in respect of her subsequent conduct - her motive in coming to Casterbridge to unite herself with Henchard - her assumed justification in abandoning him

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[20] Ibid., pp. 172, 215.

[21] Ibid., p. 179.

[22] Ibid., p. 139.

[23] Ibid., p. 259.

> when she discovered reasons for fearing him (though in truth her inconsequent passion for another man at first sight had most to do with the abandonment) - her method of reconciling to her conscience a marriage with the second when she was in a measure committed to the first: to what extent she spoke of these things remained Farfrae's secret along.[24]

Possibly the only two occasions when minor rustic characters help to reveal her character have been referred to in Chapter I. Briefly, Jopp's request to Lucetta to ask Farfrae to give him a reference that he might find a job, and his hint that he knew her in Jersey,[25] as well as her reply in answer to the comment of one of the ladies seated with her on the occasion of the royal visit, that Farfrae was not Henchard's protégé and owed him nothing,[26] indicates an all-too-common human failing: an inclination to take no notice of people who do not seem to be within the orbit of the small circle of people we love, and a tendency to make a false statement as a result of ignorance of the facts. Perhaps Elizabeth-Jane would not have behaved with the same haste and lack of discretion; but Hardy took particular pains to make of Elizabeth-Jane an exemplary woman, with one exception, her not forgiving Henchard.[27] It is significant that even Lucetta's indiscretion in this case is the result of her utter absorption in Farfrae and her over-readiness to credit him with

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[24] Ibid., p. 288.

[25] Hardy, The Mayor, pp. 252-253.

[26] Ibid., pp. 266-267.

[27] Ibid., pp. 316-326.

every possible point in his favour.

Lucetta is yet another of those Hardy women who love passionately, often indiscreetly, and almost always squander their love on a man who is incapable of returning such wholeheated affection. The point then is whether or not Hardy's treatment of Lucetta and, therefore, of the values she represents, is sympathetic, or not. Hardy's treatment of the character of Lucetta shows that he tends to use the rustic characters to represent the old order and its values. But in Far From the Madding Crowd, the sense of values of the minor rustics are a standard by which to judge the other characters, so that their acceptance of Oak when he shows no fastidious partiality to cleanliness[28] is an indication that Oak is a good chap, and Troy's inability to fit in with the farming world of Wessex, as exemplified by his wrong forecast of the weather,[29] his neglect of the hay-picks,[30] and his introduction of brandy at the second half of the 'stag' celebration of his wedding.[31] In The Mayor, the rustics are depicted with a harsher realism portraying human nature in all its sordid potential, and with none of the 'romantic glow' of the earlier novels. I would say that this is because Hardy moves towards Jude, where the minor rustic characters are no longer used as some kind of moral shock absorbers to act as a buffer between the reader of his day, (who could be supposed to be firmly entrenched in the stable values of conventional Christianity),

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[28]Hardy, Far From the Madding Crowd, pp. 62-68.

[29]Ibid., pp. 270, 272.

[30]Ibid., p. 278.

[31]Ibid., p. 270.

and the newer questioning based on intellectual scepticism which began in the 1860's, when England went through an "Intellectual Crisis".[32]

Two aspects in particular show that Hardy is sympathetic to Lucetta, and, by implication, to the romantic values which emphasise the role of the individual and his right to happiness. The shocking nature of Lucetta's death would seem to indicate that Hardy wishes to evoke sympathy for Lucetta, because to feel sympathy, or even merely pity, is a step closer towards understanding. Secondly, it is in the style of his writing that Hardy reveals a sympathetic attitude towards Lucetta. It is this which makes her so fascinatingly alive that she becomes the centre of interest while Elizabeth-Jane is ignored.[33] Hardy conveys Lucetta's attractive personality by showing the effect it has on the two men in the story: first Henchard and then Farfrae, until both are totally absorbed in Lucetta. What makes this point more forceful is that before her arrival, Elizabeth-Jane was considered something of a beauty in Casterbridge,[34] and it is significant that Farfrae takes renewed notice of her as soon as, by her death, Lucetta's presence is no longer a more attractive distraction.[35] The effect she had on Farfrae's first visit, which was meant for Elizabeth-Jane, can be summed up in the sentence that occurs at the end of his visit: "Farfrae was shown out, it having entirely

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[32]Rutland, W.R., Thomas Hardy, New York: Russell and Russell, 1962.

[33]The Mayor, p. 179.

[34]Ibid., p. 98.

[35]Ibid., p. 303.

escaped him that he had called to see Elizabeth.[36] Hardy captures the petty dishonesty and the airs of a coquette: when the Mayor is announced just after Farfrae has left, what would have been a triumph for Lucetta is now merely an anti-climax: " 'Oh! Then tell him that as I have a headache I won't detain him today.' "[37] This is the second time that Lucetta has not been in to the Mayor, a man of respect and importance in Casterbridge. Another trait in the coquette that Hardy frequently notices is remarked upon:

> Lucetta had come to Casterbridge to quicken Henchard's feelings with regard to her. She had quickened them, and now she was indifferent to the achievement.[38]

Hardy's portrayal of Lucetta does not gloss over her dishonesty,[39] her unfairness and self-centred egoism in her relationship with Elizabeth-Jane,[40] and yet the very failings of Lucetta make her more human and more credible, in many ways much more so than Elizabeth-Jane. She uses the innocent Elizabeth-Jane as a cover in order to facilitate Henchard's visits to her,[41] but as soon as she discovers from Elizabeth-Jane that the last person Henchard would be likely to visit is his supposed daughter, she has no scruples in feeling, initially, that she must go. She does not tell Elizabeth-Jane that Farfrae has come to visit her,[42] and later she expropriates him to such an extent that it never seems to dawn on her that

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[36] Ibid., p. 165.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid., p. 166.

[39] Ibid., p. 197. But she is shown to be honest as well, p. 153. On the other hand, she is inclined towards self-deception and a tendency towards rationalization. p. 285.

[40] Ibid., p. 157.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Hardy, The Mayor, p. 152.

Elizabeth may have had a prior claim to Farfrae's interest, not to mention wonder what could have been the nature of the relationship between them. She is self-centred and wholly occupied with her own emotional life, and lacks to a remarkable degree even a tenth part of that insight into other people's feelings and mind that Elizabeth-Jane possesses to an unusual extent. It is this self-centredness, which extends merely to embracing the man she loves, Farfrae, that makes her so unimaginative as to the needs of her husband's employees, for example, Jopp,[43] or to the claims of others, for example, her husband's patron, Henchard,[44] much less is she aware of the population of the rest of Casterbridge as represented by the minor rustic characters. Lucetta lacks social consciousness: this could be one aspect of her romanticism. She lacks that awareness of, and that sense of duty towards, the less fortunate, which ideally in the nineteenth century, those with property would have felt towards those without. She represents that comparatively modern class of person who feels that his economic prosperity does not require any social (in a broad sense) obligations. In these two attitudes, Lucetta represents a newer type of individual who is a threat to the older social and economic order. The minor rustic characters recognize this instinctively. What could have saved her would have been her acceptance by Casterbridge in the way Farfrae was accepted for his worthwhile qualities; or in a manner comparable to the way in which Oak was accepted by the work-folk at Weatherbury farm. In this sense, I wish to stress that the very fact that Lucetta has nothing to do

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[43] Ibid., pp. 252-253. Contrast this with Henchard's personal involvement with his employees, e.g. Whittle.

[44] Ibid., pp. 266-267.

with the minor rustic characters is significant in revealing aspects of her character important to the development of the theme of marriage, chastity, the double standard and sexual freedom.

When I say that Hardy's treatment of Lucetta's character is sympathetic, I mean that it would seem that he presents the romantic view that the attainment of personal happiness is the legitimate aim of an individual, so that duties conflicting with this aim may be considered of secondary importance. And it is in his style of presenting doing one's duty for its own sake, especially when it represents a direct negation of the attainment of personal happiness, for example in the case of Henchard and of Sue, that this is revealed most clearly. Further, his delineation of her character is sympathetic in the sense that he shows an insight and an understanding of the character of woman. The portrayal of Lucetta's character is so attractive because it is so true to life.

If Lucetta is vividly portrayed - she is not irrelevantly associated in our minds with a bright cherry red[45] - Elizabeth-Jane is portrayed with the fine delicacy of a Chinese painting. The minor rustic characters play a minor but significant part in delineating those aspects of her character that help to develop the theme of the attitude of society towards illegitimacy, which is an extension of the theme of chastity and sexual freedom. Elizabeth-Jane's contact with the minor rustics is important because she is an alien to Casterbridge who has been accepted by the people as a result of her own worth, as shown by her social consciousness and her adaptability, as well as her modesty, patience, prudence, unselfishness

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[45]Hardy, The Mayor, p. 167.

and willingness to serve others and to do her best in any situation. In the delineation of her character Hardy makes one of the most subtely effective points in the development of the theme of illegitimacy: namely, that an illegitimate child can be "a flower of Nature".[46] Hence the significance of the portrayal of the character of Elizabeth-Jane and in particular, of her acceptance by society as represented by the minor rustic characters.

To some extent, I get the impression that Hardy's delineation of Elizabeth-Jane is a bit strained by the burden of having to make her a paragon of virtue in order to make her acceptable in spite of, in a conventional sense, her stain of illegitimacy.[47] Also, in keeping with conventional opinion, she has to be made worthy of Farfrae. I have discussed the irony of this in Chapter I. I think it is partly because of this that Elizabeth-Jane has only the one major fault of not forgiving Henchard,[48] and this very absence of human failings makes her a little less credible than Lucetta, and she only narrowly escapes being a prig like Jane Austen's Fanny in Mansfield Park. In contrast with Lucetta, Elizabeth-Jane represents the old values. I feel that Hardy has to make her credible and likeable because she is the flower of nature, and at the same time he cannot emphasise Lucetta's romantic values, with which I have suggested he is in sympathy, without at the same time making the opposite values seem unacceptable. But in order that Elizabeth will be socially

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[46] Ibid., p. 318.

[47] Of course, the public do not know this; but the reader does.

[48] Hardy, The Mayor, pp. 316 and 326. But p. 329 ". . . her heart softened towards the self-alienated man."

acceptable, she has to embody those very values that convention reveres. Hence the dichotomy: Elizabeth has to be undoubtedly a good girl whom everybody will immediately praise, and she has also got to stand for those very conventional values that Hardy is questioning. That Hardy succeeds in achieving what would seem to be the impossible is to a great extent because of his essential integrity.[49] Here is the relevance of the minor rustic characters. They represent the old order, for better, for worse, and newer ideas can be seen in perspective against this more stable background. Hence, those critics who say that the minor rustics are used as a tool, that Hardy is condescending towards them,[50] that they merely present a romantic view of rural life, are missing the main point.

The minor rustics help to delineate the character of Elizabeth-Jane whenever they are seen in association with her. In a sense, the now familiar furmity-woman is the occasion for revealing one of the most important and significant traits in the character of Elizabeth-Jane; her preoccupation with respectability.[51] When her mother speaks to her, (and gets the very important information concerning Henchard's whereabouts, and the hint that Henchard wants her to know this is an indication of his repentance), she feels that it is not respectable: "Don't speak to her - it isn't respectable!"[52] Also, it is at the Three Mariners that the minor

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[49]It is because Hardy, living in an age when basic values were questioned and newer ones were asserting themselves - a social and intellectual phenomenon that continues to the present day - was inclined to experience the sort of ambivalence that many of us still feel today, caught up as some of us are between the old and the new. I feel that this is one aspect of the special relevance that the writing of Hardy has for people today. Hardy's point of view is basically one of honest intellectual enquiry.

[50]Howe, Irving, Thomas Hardy, New York: MacMillan, 1967, p. 50.

[51]It may be commented in passing that this is probably the concern of those people who feel insecure of their identity. In the case of Elizabeth this has ironical undertones. But in a sense, the perennial philosophical problem of man's identity and of his place in the universe was one of Hardy's concerns which is so peculiarly modern as well. (Howe also mentions this as being one of Hardy's concerns).

[52]Hardy, The Mayor, p. 26.

rustics help to reveal three other important aspects of her character. The landlady sizes her up and decides to allow her to serve at the inn. The shrewd business-woman realised that Elizabeth was reliable, and this is later seen to be one of her most important characteristics. Elizabeth can be trusted; she can adapt herself to a situation, and she is ready to be useful and to be economically self-reliant if need be. She is unselfish, and thinks of others before herself. In an intrusive comment, Hardy remarks:

> If there was one good thing more than another which characterized this single-hearted girl it was a willingness to sacrifice her personal comfort and dignity to the common weal.[53]

Further, she feels quite at home amongst the rustics at the Three Mariners and shares both their appreciation for music as well as their admiration of the stranger, Farfrae:

> Elizabeth-Jane was fond of music; she could not help pausing to listen; and the longer she listened the more she was enraptured. She had never heard any singing like this; and it was evident that the majority of the audience had not heard such frequently, for they were attentive to a much greater degree than usual. They neither whispered, nor drank, nor dipped their pipe-stems in their ale to moisten them, nor pushed their mug to their neighbours.[54]

As in Shakespeare, a character is often judged by his fondness for music; as in the novels of Jane Austen, the sharing of a similar taste in music helps to bring people together.

In her relationship with one of the rustics, namely Nance Mockridge,[55] and with the maid servants,[56] Elizabeth-Jane shows a lack of class distinction. That she has adapted herself to her environment is shown by her picking

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[53] Ibid., p. 47.

[54] Ibid., p. 55.

[55] Ibid., p. 133.

[56] Ibid., p. 132.

up the local dialect.[57] Although the minor rustics acclaim her as something of a beauty in Casterbridge,[58] Elizabeth-Jane is still modest about herself. Finally, in their role as commentators, the minor rustics praise her:

> Mrs. Stannidge, having rolled into the large parlour one evening and said that it was a wonder that such a man as Farfrae, 'a pillow of the town' who might have chosen one of the daughters of the professional men or private residents, should stoop so low, Coney ventured to disagree with her. "No, ma'am, no wonder at all. 'Tis she that's stooping to he - that's my opinion. A widow man - whose first wife was no credit to him - what is it for a young perusing woman that's her own mistress and well liked? But as a neat patching up of things I see much good in it. When a man have put up a tomb of best marble-stone to the other one, as he've done, and weeped his fill, and thought it all over, and said to hisself, 'T'other took me in; I knowed this one first; she's a sensible piece for a partner,' and there's no faithful woman in high life now'; - well, he may do worse than not to take her, if she's tender-inclined.[59]

The comment is ironic is so far as it reflects on the propriety of a widower's second marriage.

The minor rustics play no part in developing Elizabeth-Jane's conservative point of view, other than by helping to introduce to the reader her preoccupation with respectability when her mother speaks to the furmity-woman, because, as I have already stated, this important

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[57] Ibid., p. 131.

[58] Ibid., p. 98.

[59] Hardy, The Mayor, p. 308.

aspect of her character is developed mainly in her relationship with Lucetta, especially in her role of confidante to Lucetta. Hardy's treatment of Elizabeth's conventional views is significant because it reveals his own attitude to the issue of pre-marital sexual freedom. Whether or not Henchard and Lucetta ought to marry each other regardless of their own feelings, merely because Lucetta has compromised herself with him[60] and because, in Henchard's own words, he has a duty, (as a gentleman, no doubt), to silence her old Jersey enemies, depends on the extent to which it is considered that premarital sex is wrong; and secondly, on the extent to which a woman's technical virginity belongs only to the man who marries her.[61] I would like to suggest that the relatively static response which Elizabeth-Jane betrays towards the issue of whether Lucetta should keep her word to marry Henchard, juxtaposed with the more spontaneously emotional reaction of Lucetta, would seem to indicate that Hardy's own feelings are inclined towards those of Lucetta. That Lucetta is selfish is irrelevant: the romantic concern for the gratification of personal happiness is essentially egoistic, and it is assumed that the happiness of an individual is of relatively more importance than the integrity of society. There is a certain inflexibility, a complete lack of partiality that is both the strength and the weakness of a rigid ethical code, in Elizabeth-Jane's moral response to this issue that betrays a lack of that sensitivity and imagination which is required to make our moral awareness a growing response, not merely a reflex action. Because when habit conditions us to moral reflex actions, we cease to examine an issue

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[60] Ibid., p. 173.

[61] This problem recurs in Tess.

both intellectually and emotionally, and our moral awareness is inclined to deaden and slowly die, until we have forgotten the reason for those precepts which society finds useful as a guide to social (in a broad sense) behaviour.

The minor rustics, Tess's family, help to reveal aspects of her character important to the development of the theme of chastity and marriage in their association with her: pride, a tendency towards excessive guilt and despair, and an inclination towards a peasant fatalism, whereas she has none of her mother's ability to make the most of what little life has to offer. I wish to show that these qualities in her character are used to develop the concepts of chastity and marriage. In the first place, it was Tess's family pride that made her decide to take the beehives to market herself, with only the twelve-year-old Abraham to accompany her, instead of adopting her mother's suggestion: "'Some young feller, perhaps, would go? One of them who were so much after dancing with 'ee yesterday'".[62] The wisdom in allowing a young and pretty girl to make a relatively long journey along a lonely road at night, accompanied only by a sleepy child, is questionable. Also, her excessive guilt for the accidental death of Prince, is out of all proportion to the circumstances. Was it not just as much, if not more so, the fault of the head of "the Durbeyfield ship", as Hardy would seem to suggest?[63] Or even of her mother, in allowing the daughter to over-rule her wiser suggestion? It is Tess's behaviour as a

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[62]Hardy, Thomas, Tess of the d'Urber-Villes, New York: MacMillan, 1966, p. 38.

[63]Ibid., p. 32.

result of her needlessly excessive guilt, and her very strongly developed sense of responsibility for the welfare of her family, which is important in studying her character and how it helps to develop the theme of chastity and marriage later in the story. It is the minor rustics who first reveal significant aspects of her character. Directly as a result of feeling that she was responsible for the death of Prince, on which, to a great extent, the haggling business depended,[64] Tess decides it is her duty to make amends to her family and contribute to their means of livelihood by giving in to her mother's plan that she should go to Tratridge and claim kin with their supposed relatives there.[65] But earlier, Tess quite rightly feels that she would prefer to get work.[66] What is significant is that Tess's guilt makes her forget a proper sense of pride - "But Tess's pride made the part of poor relation one of particular distaste to her"[67] - and makes her give in to the suggestions of both her father and her mother when she knows they are both wrong. Earlier, her family pride makes her angry that her girl friends should so much as suggest that her father is inebriated[68] and she decides to take the beehives to market rather than let the village know why her father cannot make the trip himself[69] and now here she is giving in to the foolishness of her parents. The pattern of self-pity and independence, followed by guilt, the need to

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[64] Ibid., p. 44.

[65] Ibid., p. 45.

[66] Ibid.,

[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid., p. 22.

[69] Ibid., p. 38.

make some atonement for her guilt, and her final despair and the forgetting of her family pride appears later with tragic results. Later, after her first visit to Trantridge, Tess decides to go and work for the Stoke d'Urbervilles only in order to help her family and make up for killing Prince. I feel that Hardy wishes to emphasise Tess's fatalism and her refusal to give herself a chance by forgetting little things in the past and going boldly into the future, relying on her own intelligence and her own initiative, rather than making excuses for being a tool in the hands of her foolish parents, which is another way of abdicating responsibility for her own actions. But at the same time, Hardy seems to be inconsistent in that he wishes to remind the reader that sometimes circumstances are beyond our control. Tess knows that her mother's matrimonial designs are, to use her own word, 'silly'.[70] Why then does she not refuse to go? I feel that Hardy could be said to imply that Tess is responsible for her actions, but at the same time leaves room for doubt, in the following passage:

> Having at last taken her course, Tess was less restless and abstracted, going about her business with some self-assurance in the thought of acquiring another horse for her father by an occupation which would not be onerous. She had hoped to be a teacher in a school, but the fates seemd to decide otherwise. Being mentally older than her mother she did not regard Mrs. Durbeyfield's matrimonial hopes for her in a serious aspect for a moment. The light-minded woman had been discovering good matches for her daughter almost from the year of her birth.[71]

I have underlined the passage which I think is most significant, because Hardy's comment on fate could either be ironical or it could be taken at

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[70] Hardy, Tess, p. 58.

[71] Ibid., p. 59. Italics added.

face value. Either it was not fate that decided otherwise, in that Tess loses sight of her objective by being over-concerned about detail, or circumstances did indeed give her no real choice. This ambiguity is repeated later in the story after Clare leaves Tess. Psychologically, the characterization of Tess is very credible. Tess lacks ruthlessness; she slips back easily into a peasant fatalism; and she has a woman's inclination to allow trifles to deflect her from her main objective.

These significant aspects of Tess's character, which are revealed in her association with her family, help to develop the theme of chastity and marriage. At one level Hardy does not wish to minimise Tess's own responsibility either for her seduction by Alec, or of her return to Alec as his mistress. Hence the separation from her husband and her suffering afterwards are the consequences of her own actions and of her voluntarily revelation of her secret. And in spite of this, I wish to stress that Hardy feels that Tess is essentially a chaste and worthy woman. This is because Hardy does not feel that the experience of sexual intercourse between an adult man and a physically grown-up woman leaves a 'stain' on a person's character, and he shows that a generous love such as that which Tess had for Clare is not necessarily made the less worthy because she finally and weakly consents to become the mistress of her first seducer in order to alleviate the financial distress of her family, instead of going for financial help to the parents of the man who deserts her soon after they are married. Tess is wrong in going back to Alec; but her love for Clare still remained worthwhile. Tess does not have instinctively the middle-class notion of equating what is essentially a love relationship with the sordid notion of financial remuneration. She does not feel that

because she is married to Clare she is entitled to money from him even though he has deserted her. It is significant that she does not, unlike Alec and Clare, view their obligations to her solely in terms of money, as the Victorian middle-class were inclined to do.[72] She does not consent to live as Alec's mistress after her first seduction because she does not love him.[73] But the fact remains that Tess finally prostitutes herself to Alec solely for the financial and social betterment of her family, and incidentally, herself. This is the pathos and the irony of Tess's situation.

I wish to stress that Hardy does not really gloss over Tess's responsibility for her initial seduction, though, in order to be printed at all and read in serial form by all the members of a Victorian family, he had to be inexplicit about the seduction. In the first place, Tess was a tactless prig when she was so sweeping in her condemnation of Car and her friends: ". . . and if I had known you was of that sort, I wouldn't have so let myself down as to have come with a whorage as this is!"[74] she says with the recklessness of the young and the innocent. Then, having waited till that late hour in order to have their company on the way home, rather than risk being escorted by Alex, she loses her head and actually accepts his "proffered aid and company" with what seems like relief, if not gratitude.[75] And finally, and most significant of all, Tess is not

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[72]Marcus, Steven, The Other Victorians, New York: 1966. And Gordon Rattray Taylor, The Angel Makers, London: Heineman, 1958.

[73]Hardy, Tess, p. 96.

[74]Ibid., p. 83.

[75]Ibid., p. 84.

raped; she is seduced:

> She had dreaded him, winced before him, succumbed to adroit advantages he took of her helplessness; then, temporarily blinded by his ardent manners, had been stirred to confused surrender awhile; had suddenly despised and disliked him, and had run away.[76]

Because Hardy wishes to arouse the social consciousness of the middle-class Victorian reader, he has to stress the seduction and to minimise Tess's actual guilt. He wishes to show that there is no such thing as the low and vulgar passions of the working-class female[77] and hence his attempt to show Tess's ignorance of the extent of sexual encounter necessary to involve possible conception:

> 'How could I be expected to know? I was a child when I left this house four months ago. Why didn't you tell me there was danger in men-folk? Why didn't you warn me? Ladies know what to fend hands against, because they read novels that tell them of these tricks; but I never had the chance o' learning in that way, and you did not help me!'[79]

This passage is interesting and very relevant for the following reasons. First of all, Hardy surprises the Victorian middle-class reader with the notion that in the eyes of the working-class girl, it is the middle-class woman who has an opportunity of knowing about sex. The reference to the novel is ironical. It was no circulation library novel or serialised fiction that Hardy had in mind, but most probably he was referring

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[76] Ibid., p. 100.

[77] This will be discussed further in Chapter IV.

[78] This statement will be qualified in discussing the character of Arabelle.

[79] Hardy, Tess, p. 100.

to the vast amount of pornography that was read by the Victorian middle-and upper-classes (though it must have been relatively few women who managed to get hold of this underground literature). Tess is shown to be as innocent and as sensitive as any well-born girl: Alec finds her sensitivity suitably unappropriate for a girl of her class.[80] On the other hand, I wish to point out that it is unlikely that Tess cannot know, as a result of an instinctive fear, the perilous extent of the sexual encounter. To that extent Tess must be held responsible for her seduction. It is hardly likely that a girl who has been brought up in the country, shares a room with so many brothers and sisters, and has so many younger brothers and sisters, has no knowledge at all of sexual intercourse. It is much more probable that, not having ever experienced erotic titillation of the kind that Alex must have produced in her, Tess's natural response of pleasure is greater than her fear, and that it makes her incapable of considering as relevant the conventional moral implications. But to the extent that there is no evidence or indication that Alec uses force rather than different forms of persuasion in accordance with the nature of his pursuit, Tess must be held partially responsible for her first sexual encounter.

The whole point is that Hardy does not wish to show Tess as being completely unresponsible; rather he wishes to show that this incident in her life was not of itself a tragedy: her pregnancy may be considered to have been the result of an action, in accordance with causation, or the consequence of one's own actions. The significatn point which makes Tess essentially chaste is that she refuses to become Alec's mistress because she does not love him. Hardy wishes to show that a working-class girl

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[80] Ibid., p. 67.

has a sense of honour and that her integrity is as precious to her as it might be assumed to be to a woman of a higher class:

> 'I have said so, often. It is true. I have never really and truly loved you, and I think I never can.' She added mournfully, 'Perhaps, of all things, a lie on this thing would do the most good to me now; but I have honour enough left, little as 'tis, not to tell that lie. If I did love you I may have the best of causes for letting you know it. But I don't!'[81]

On the other hand, although Alec had not said a word on matrimony, Hardy remarks: "How a convulsive snatching at social salvation might have impelled her to answer him she could not say."[82] This draws attention to Tess's social humiliation, even though her mother, who is two hundred years behind Tess in her outlook[83] and whose mental age is lower than that of her daughter[84] makes the predominantly middle-class mistake of wanting to better the family financially and socially by means of an advantageous marriage for her daughter, and falls into the working-class trap of respecting a gentleman for his birth almost more than the gentleman prided himself for the same reason. On the other hand, both Mr. and Mrs. Durbeyfield really believe that Alec is their kinsman, and hence that they are of as good, in fact better, blood than he is. So much for the complexities of human motivation, so that too neat a compartmentalisation defeats its own purpose.

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[81] Hardy, Tess, p. 96.

[82] Ibid., p. 100.

[83] Ibid., p. 31.

[84] Ibid., p. 59.

Now just as Tess allows herself to be finally seduced by Alec because of her weakness at the last moment, after a long period of persevering against his snares, similarly she allowed herself to be seduced the second time after a long period of self-abnegation, mainly because she tends to despair at the last moment. Tess's weakness is that human vulnerableness that we are all subject to. Hers is that essential lack of self-discipline that is so universal that Christ dared one to throw the first stone. It is because Tess shares in that weakness that all humanity is prone to, that we suffer with her, and cannot help loving her. This is Hardy's achievement: no longer can the fallen woman be an object of scorn and ostracism; no longer can we be rigid about what constitutes chastity and is corollary. Each individual case has to be examined on its own.

The tendency towards excessive guilt, pride and despair that the minor rustics, Tess's family, reveal in the character of Tess, are used to develop the theme of marriage, chastity and the double standard later in the story. It is Tess's feeling of guilt, and the desire to punish herself, that makes her tell Clare her secret. I cannot help feeling that her guilt (which her mother did not agree with in the least, as her letter which I quoted in the previous chapter makes quite explicit)[85] is the result of that middle-class orientated National School education which Tess received to the sixth standard and which no doubt helped to inculcate the conventional interpretation of Christian sexual morality so that there was that two hundred year gap between Tess and her mother. Secondly, like Maggie Tulliver, Tess goes to unnecessary extremes in self-abnegation and

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[85] Ibid., p. 219.

in self-punishment that betray her lack of self-discipline and so that it begins to be evident that it is not so much Tess's original seduction, pregnancy and motherhood that are the cause of her misfortune and unhappiness now, but rather her refusal to allow the past to be a source of experience and to allow herself to live a full life when the tide turns, as it does in the story as well as, often enough, in life. The irony is that Tess believes in her loss of chastity[86] and in the double standard[87] even more than Clare does. Hardy implicitly condemns as false the conventional code of his day, based on an interpretation of Christianity. To some extent, the conventions of society are the cause of the misfortune of generous people like Tess, who instinctively respond to the desire for life and for living, but whose capacity for growing with every human encounter is often stifled into ugliness, and barreness, at least partly because of conventional attitudes. This is symbolised by her unnatural shaving of her eyebrows and, most poignantly, by Flintcomb Ash, which is poetically juxtaposed with the hope and fertility of the farm at Talbothays. How can Tess be conscious of her value as a human being when her education, at school and later under Clare, teaches her that the loss of her (technical) virginity, a commodity of the highest value in the middle-class orientated marriage market makes of her a fallen woman not fit for marriage; and that premarital sexual experience is socially acceptable so long as it is with a woman who is one's social inferior, so that the transaction can be neatly concluded, if need be, with a suitable sume of money.

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[86]Hardy, Tess, : She feels Marian, Betty and Izz are more worthy of Clare merely because they are virgins.

[87]She meekly accepts Clare's condemnation of her and feels she's not worthy to live with him.

On the other hand, Tess is to be blamed for allowing her sense of pride, which is sometimes inappropriate, make her leave home[88] and postpone going to Clare's parents to ask for help. When she does finally make the attempt, she despairs too easily and turns back when she hears the discouragingly uncharitable remarks of Clare's clerical brothers and the Evangelical Miss Chaunt, that model of Christian female purity and propriety. Significantly, Tess turns back at this crisis in her life, only to meet temptation in the guise of, appropriately enough perhaps, a preacher. Had Tess gone for help where she was entitled to seek it, she would not have found herself in the arms of her initial seducer, Alec. But by refusing to believe in her own essential purity and worth as a human being, by refusing to accept her seduction as contributing to that totality of experience that constitutes the life of any human being, Tess has willed herself into the position of the fallen woman. So fatalistic is her tendency, that she neither waits for a reply to her letter asking Clare to come back and save her from temptation, nor does she enquire from his parents whether there is news of him or whether he be dead or alive. And yet, how very natural are her reactions. The creation of Tess alone is a wonder that immortalises Hardy in the history of modern fiction.

The minor rustics at Talbothays Farm reveal Clare's middle-class sense of superiority to the workfolk; but it is in his relationship with Tess that he reveals that he is the embodiment of conventional middle-class morality, by upbringing and, more especially, by the rigid inflexibility and complete lack of generosity and his incapacity, until his

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[88]Hardy, Tess, p. 293. . . . that she gave her family twenty-five of her fifty pounds, and later sent some more towards the repair of the family home so that she had to work for a living is understandable.

encounter with the fellow traveller in far away Brazil, either to appreciate fully or to accept the wholeness of Tess's love. I have referred in the previous chapter to the part Izz plays in revealing his own uncertain hold of that tendency towards "forty-eight hours of dissipation with a stranger". To go into further detail here may prove repetitive as well as a tedious labouring of a point. I think it will be more revealing to explore in Chapter IV Clare's contribution to a depiction of conventional Victorian middle-class morality, which, in juxtaposition with the rural values of the workfolk, are an implicit revelation of Hardy's attitude.

The minor rustics do not help, in any significant way, to reveal the characters of Sue and Jude. Both Jude's sensitivity to animals (and birds) as well as his capacity for indulging in fantasy, are shown quite early in his contact with the farmer[89] and his aunt.[90] Phillotson and Arabella help to delineate the characters of Sue and Jude so that it develops the theme of marriage and sexual freedom, but neither of them can be called either minor characters, or, properly speaking, rustics. This noticeable absence of rustics, including minor rustics, occurs because Jude is a modern novel in comparison with the others, and because in Jude, Hardy uses a completely different technique. It is a novel of a different genre.[91]

A few comments on the characters in Jude which throw light on

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[89]Hardy, Thomas, Jude the Obscure, New York: MacMillan, 1966, p. 20.

[90]Ibid., p. 22.

[91] In the fourth chapter, I shall discuss the significance of the function of the rustics in relation to the effect of their absence in Jude.

the theme are appropriate. First of all, Jude. The point that stands out about Jude is that he does not shirk the responsibility of his own actions. He marries Arabella after a brief courtship, and shows a surprising degree of tolerance when he realises he married her on the false assumption of her pregnancy.[92] Also, Arabella's seduction of Jude is significant, first, because it betrays Jude's sexual inexperience, (and by implication, would seem to comment ironically on the excessively bookish leaning of his classical and self-taught education: a classical education based on the humanities which leaves a rural scholar remarkably ignorant of one all too practical aspect of life - women). Secondly, whereas Jude is to a certain extent tricked into his first marriage, just as to a certain extent Sue is inexperienced and makes a mistake in marrying Phillotson for the first time, both the second marriages, like that of Henchard in The Mayor, Hardy seems to find unjustified morally. The second marriages are used to emphasise that the first marriages were a mistake in the first place, and the sooner they were dissolved and remained so, the better. Henchard, Sue and Jude do quite nicely having freed themselves legally from their first spouses. So does Arabella. Phillotson suffers for his honesty in making public certain aspects of the arrangement between him and his wife[93] which, I think, he would have been justified in keeping to himself and in telling the public only what was good for them to hear. The public, as represented by the minor rustics in The Mayor and in Jude, reveal a level of intelligence and moral consciousness which is based on the lowest common denominator. The public is inclined to meddle with a

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[92] Ibid., pp. 63, 68.

[93] Ibid., p. 257.

person's personal concerns to an extent impinging on the privacy of the individual, and should not be treated as an equal unless you wish to become their victim. Either you put the public in its place or public opinion will control you. This is what happens in practice.

Secondly, it is remarkable to what extent Sue is, like a spoilt child, given what she wants. There is the long-suffering Phillotson, ready to have her or leave her, when practically no middle-aged school-teacher of his day would have had her after she had compromised her reputation in the first place,[94] not to mention the second instance.[95] And there is the even more long-suffering and incredibly continent Jude, especially incredible since we know his partiality for the passionate and earthy Arabella. After all, he did not have to sleep with her in that hotel at Aldminster[96] and she never did have to try too hard. Hardy plays down the fact that Jude finds Arabella sexually attractive and makes it seem like a weakness every time, and he creates a dichotomy between Sue the companion and Sue the woman he desires because he loves her, because in order to make Sue acceptable minimally to his Victorian public, she may be emancipated in every way but in that aspect which is significant, namely, sexually. I cannot help thinking that to some extent Hardy gives the impression that he too may be regrettably Victorian in that he refuses, as it were, to recognise Sue below the waist to us a phrase that is fittingly Victorian. Or he is afraid to. It is not too clear which,

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[94] Ibid., p. 164.

[95] That is, by living with Jude without being married to him.

[96] Hardy, Jude, p. 252.

because Hardy is ambiguous as to whether or not he shares the belief of Sue that Arabella is coarse, low and vulgar, although he probably does not. Sue, of course, thank Heaven, is free from such grossness; she only capitulates (notice the battle of the sexes type of Victorian terminology) like a woman of honour, when she is threatened by the loss of her man to the low, coarse and vulgar scheming of the fleshy Arabella who, of course, will stop at nothing to get her man! What a pity that Arabella adroitly manages to show Sue, the next morning at her hotel,[97] that they both belong to a common womanhood. What's more, Arabella has a remarkably shrewd insight into the relationship between her and Jude, and she gives her very good advice to marry Jude. Had she done it, she would have been a happy woman. I cannot help feeling that Arabella shows Sue up as something of an intellectual charlattan, and that the practical commonsense and the unerring sense of her objectives which Arabella displays are not only refreshing; but it breathes some sanity into Sue's type of mental confusion which is not only soul-destroying, but also self-destructive, and as such, false as a guide to behaviour.

She also manages to commit what is unforgivable in a woman because it tends towards the destruction of society: she castrates Jude, in the sense that Jude is not in control of a situation even when he is in the right. Hence she goes back to Phillotson even though Jude makes some feeble attempts to keep her.[98] But Sue has never managed to give

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[97] Jude, pp. 278-279.

[98] Ibid., pp. 358-367. Jude's lack of ability to make her see sense is a weakness of his.

Jude that authority over their joint fortunes which is the salvation of a woman's happiness once she has found a man whom she loves and whose judgement she has learnt to respect.[99] She goes back to Phillotson, she sacrifices three lives and a nearly perfect 'marriage', as Arabella shrewdly says:

> 'She may swear on her knees to the holy cross upon her necklace till she's hoarse, but it won't be true!' said Arabella. 'She's never found peace since she's left his arms, and never will again till she's as he is now!'[100]

Significantly, it is Arabella, not Sue, who shows a grasp of the situation as well as an instinctive ability for survival in society which, in spite of nearly six thousand years of civilization, is still at the stage of the survival, not of the most virtuous, which should be the criteria of morally conscious man; but of the most ruthless and self-seeking.[101]

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[99] By attempting to ignore the psychological difference between man and woman, in an attempt to treat them as equivalent, modern western society causes the frustration due to undefined identity between the sexes.

[100] Hardy, Jude, p. 423.

[101] Ibid., pp. 419-422.

CHAPTER III

DEVELOPING THE THEME BY HUMOUR, COMIC, RELIEF AND AS CHORUS

This chapter is mainly concerned with the function of the minor rustics in contributing to humour, comic relief, and as chorus in the forms both of commentary and of a setting, so that these aspects in the technique of the novels help in developing the four aspects of the theme. The secondary purpose of this chapter is an attempt to indicate how the relative absence of minor rustic characters in Jude is either helpful or detrimental to the novel as a whole, and as such, to try and assess the peculiar role of the minor rustics in the other three novels.

Jude can be viewed as a distinct development of Hardy's technique, which represents a view of society as he saw it. Whereas Far From the Madding Crowd, The Mayor and Tess deal with predominantly rural people in a rural setting, Jude is really the story of people who are moving away from their rural environment and occupations, and who are exposed to an intellectual scepticism which undermines those basic values in which they were brought up to believe. It is in this respect that Jude deals with a modern[1] society. And the relative absence of minor rustics reflects a modern approach to the novel. There is a stark nakedness in Hardy's treatment of his theme in this novel that relates it to fiction written after 1914. Whereas the other three novels would seem to have that basic form, a beginning, a middle and an end, which is the

[1]The word 'modern' is used here to mean the last hundred years.

artist's attempt to imitate life in that he moulds into his art that essential harmony, which he finds in nature; in Jude, the novel reflects that formlessness which the artist sees in life.

It is significant that Jude lacks much of that peculiar sense of humour which the minor rustics contribute to the other three novels, because, as humour is a perception of the incongruous, it infuses one's point of view with a sense of proportion. It is the unrelenting seriousness of Jude which is the most striking feature of Hardy's treatment of his theme of marriage and the double standard in this novel. To the extent that the humour in the novels deals with an aspect of the theme, the theme is seen in a controversial light, because it is not possible to see the humorous aspect of a theme without becoming aware of at least two dimensions of actuality.

In Far From the Madding Crowd, the humour of the minor rustics is an integral part of the mood; but for the purpose of this chapter it will be necessary to examine only that rustic humour which deals with an aspect of the theme of marriage. For example, in that famous meeting at the malthouse scene, Coggan tells the story of Miss Everdene's father:

> 'Well, now, you'd hardly believe it, but that man - our Miss Everdene's father - was one of the ficklest husbands alive, after a while. Understand, 'a didn't want to be fickle, but he couldn't help it. The poor feller were faithful and true enough to her in his wish, but his heart would rove, do what he would. He spoke to me in real tribulation about it once. "Coggan," he said, 'I could never wish for a handsomer woman than I've got, but feeling she's ticketed as my lawful wife, I can't help my wicked heart wandering, do what I will." But at last I believe he cured it by making her take off her wedding ring and calling her by her maiden name as they sat together after the shop was shut, and so 'a would get to fancy she was only his sweetheart, and not married to him at all. And

> as soon as he could thoroughly fancy he was doing wrong and committing the seventh, 'a got to like her as well as ever, and they lived on a perfect picture of mutel love.'[2]

This passage points out to one aspect of marriage which Troy[3] as well as Sue and Jude[4] later find so tedious: they find that either the legal and sacramental bond of marriage does not of itself ensure mutual love (only the naïve and immature must expect the reverse to be the case), or that the very binding nature of marriage before the law inhibits natural and spontaneous mutual affection - (it seems equally ridiculous to me to allow this legal aspect to influence a person's feelings one way or the other). The reason people no doubt find the legal bond inhibiting is probably associated with the double standard, in that a man whose introduction to sexual experience, (and presumably, excitement) was via the brothel,[5] would find himself physically inhibited with his lawful wife whom he had been brought up to treat with reverence, and to look up to as an 'angel' of purity and innocence. Also, there is the type of first generation intellectual, illustrated by Sue, who feels that legality is somehow incompatible with freedom, because she has associated intellectual freedom with the socially and conventionally unacceptable. The effect of the difference in treatment is that whereas a humorous handling of the topic leaves Hardy uninvolved so that, according to his own definition of

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[2]Hardy, Thomas, Far From the Madding Crowd, New York: MacMillan, 1968, pp. 73-74.

[3]Ibid., p. 335.

[4]Hardy, Thomas, Jude the Obscure, New York: MacMillan, 1966, p. 292.

[5]Marcus, Steven, The Other Victorious, New York: Basic Books, 1966. As Gordon Rattray Taylor and Steven Malthus point out in their authoritative studies on sexual practice and ideology in the Victorian era. Gordon Rattray Taylor, The Angel-Makers, London: Heineman, 1958.

the novel in his preface to Tess, "a novel is an impression, not an argument";[6] he is not involved with the discussion. This is what I meant when, in Chapter I, I referred to a descriptive as against an argumentative treatment of a topic. Hardy was, I think, more at ease in his technique and more felicitous in his style when, until Jude, he adhered to his own definition of the novel. For example, one can take the following passage from Jude, which occurs before the attempted marriage between Sue and Jude, and notice the difference in the treatment of what I have already argued to be essentially the same theme:

> The next morning, Sue, whose nervousnes intensified with the hours, took Jude privately into the sitting-room before starting. 'Jude, I want you to kiss me, as a lover, incorporeally,' she said, tremulously nestling up to him, with damp lashes. 'It won't be ever like this any more, will it! I wish we hadn't begun the business. But I suppose we must go on . . .[7]

In all fairness to Sue she comments immediately after, with the horror that comes so easily to her, that she would be repeating the same words to Jude in the marriage as she did to Phillotson, ". . . regardless of the deterrent lessons we were taught by those experiments!"[8] But I feel that she has unwittingly given away the real psychological reason. It is not that this time she'd mean what the previous time she later discovered she could not possibly have meant when she made the vow; it is that she associates marriage, and I shall go on to argue, sexual love in marriage,

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[6]Hardy, Thomas, Tess of the d'Urbervilles, New York: MacMillan, 1966, Preface, p. vii.

[7]Hardy, Jude, p. 292.

[8]Ibid.

as that which should be done out of a sense of duty and which is, therefore, unpleasant; and I think she feels that sexual pleasure is somehow incompatible with the legality of marriage. She married Phillotson on both occasions out of a sense of duty, and she gave Phillotson his conjugal rights after the second marriage out of a sense of duty which is stressed to the same extent as is her horror and loathing towards this sacrificial act. In contrast, it is illuminating to note her guilt for the sexual satisfaction she experienced in her extra-marital relationship with Jude, and for which she seems to feel she must do penance: the use of puritanical and typically Victorian diction in connection with sex, for example, 'indulging', is significant of the mentality of the time:

> We went about loving each other too much - indulging ourselves to utter selfishness with each other! We said - do you remember? - that we would make a virtue of joy. I said it was Nature's intention, Nature's law and raison d'etre that we should be joyful in what insticts she afforded us - instincts that civilization had taken upon itself to thwart. What dreadful things I said! And now Fate has given us this stab in the back for being such fools as to take Nature at her word!"[9]

The irony is that Sue[10] is unable to get rid of the beliefs she was brought up to believe and which she tried to shake off intellectually.[11] The shock of losing her two children and her premature baby, evoked those conventional Christian values which lurked beneath the sophisticated intellectual veneer.

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[9] Ibid., p. 350.

[10] like Tess.

[11] Neither did Hardy manage to free himself, emotionally, from the Christian values which he was sceptical of intellectually. This theme runs through Tess, in the character of Clare, and returns forcibly in Jude. Hardy's dichotomy, which is also a problem peculiar to moder times - though it happens probably in every age of ideological transition and change - is most poignantly revealed in that beautiful poem, On the Morning of Christ's Nativity, which conveys the feelings of a reluctant agnostic, who is actually deeply religious in his attitude.

I feel that it is not necessarily Fate which has given them a stab in the back. As in Tess, Hardy's references to Fate are to some extent ironical, and he really wishes to point out that it is character, or human nature, not merely blind chance, that is responsible for what happens to people, in the sense that it was not the hanging of her children, but her reaction to it - perfectly understable - that led Sue to become irrational and go back on her intellectual beliefs. Hardy achieves detachment, if at all, only to the extent that his irony affords it to him. But in spite of it, I find that either because he is too emotionally involved with the topic or because his attitude to the problems he discusses is so unrelievedly serious, the effect created is that of a loss of detachment. This involvement by Hardy I find detrimental to his definition of the novel: "an impression, not an argument". On the other hand, it is probably unfair to judge Jude by Hardy's definition because Hardy's technique is different in Jude. He probably meant the novel to be "an impression" in the novels before Jude, but in Jude itself, I think he was moving towards a new type of novel although he may well have tried to think of a novel as primarily an impression. Hence, Hardy was careful to stress that the marriage question in Jude took up only a few pages and that it was a discussion between the characters in the novel and so should not be taken as being his views.[12] We must say that he was trying to create a different kind of impression. Perhaps he meant to make a more startling impact, for example, and so it is still a different type of novel. The absence of rustic humour does seem to indicate this direct impact approach, without having the rustics and their stabilising values and background to act as

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[12]Hardy, F.E., The Life of Thomas Hardy, London: MacMillan, 1962.

some kind of moral shock absorbers for the delicately nurtured Victorian novel readers: (not fiction - pornography flourishes in the Victorian era in proportion to the propriety adhered to in the novel).[13]

The point that emerges is that, artistically, Hardy's treatment of his theme in a humorous vein through his minor rustic characters has the easy fluency of a master craftsman; the treatment of the same theme in Jude, involving as it does the highly-strung bundle of nerves which is the intellectually emancipated woman, Sue, suffers from awkward intellectualization that is little less forced and self-conscious than the theological discussion that emanates from the mouth of the milk-maid who does not know whether she belongs to the high church or the low church.[14] Hardy is not a systematic thinker or philosopher. Like Phillotson, he is safer when he says that he cannot argue a case but he merely feels instinctively, that, for example, it is wrong for a man to bind Sue to her marriage.[15]

The treatment of the marriage theme in The Mayor could be said to be grotesquely ironic in that the auctioning of Susan by Henchard, with the help of the minor rustics, betrays to some extent the incongruity of getting rid of a wife as if she were some worn-out mare. The skimmington-ride is also an example of rustic humour developing the theme of chastity

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[13]Steven, The Other Victorians.

[14]Hardy, Tess, pp. 198; 371.

[15]Hardy, Jude, p. 246.

and marriage. But this is not the light-hearted and completely unmalicious type of humour that readers of Hardy are inclined to associate with the Wessex novels. To those who feel that Hardy's treatment of the rustics is glamourised, the malicious minor rustics in The Mayor,[16] and the reality of the poverty of the Durbeyfield family,[17] should be sufficient refutation.[18] Apart from these two examples which have been discussed in the first chapter, the other examples of rustic humour in The Mayor do not develop the theme.

In Tess, class distinction is relevant to Hardy's theme in that the double standard is based on it, and the concept of marriage as a way of bettering the financial and social position of a family is dependent on the class system. Now in the humorous treatment of Mr. Durbeyfield, which is also reminiscent of Dickens' Mr. Micawber, Hardy reveals his own attitude towards the futility and the emptiness of social snobbery, especially in the scene between Sir John and the lad, in which the descendant of a knight resigns himself to chitterlings for dinner;[19] that in which Mr. Durbeyfield is prepared to sell his title for a rapidly diminishing figure;[20] the other in which Mr. Durbeyfield, the foot-haggler, is preoccupied about the 'true style' of the clergy and his 'own ancestry';[21]

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[16] Nance Mockridge and the furmity-woman.

[17] Hardy, Thomas, Tess, pp. 32;44.

[18] This question will be dealt with at greater length in the next chapter.

[19] Hardy, Thomas, Tess, pp. 16-18.

[20] Ibid., p. 61.

[21] Ibid., p. 292.

and perhaps finally, his proposal that the 'antiqueerians' should set up a fund to maintain him.[22] Similarly, the social pretensions of Mrs. Durbeyfield, and her ambition to brighten the prospects of the family by means of an advantageous match for her daughter with a gentleman,[23] is the cause of Tess's initial 'trouble', and ironically enough, also of her much greater tragedy, the separation from her middle-class husband and what ensued. I think it is worth pointing out that the majority of the work-folk would not dream of rising into the middle-class by means of marriage; but their reverence for the class system is indicated by the awe with which Tess is treated by her country-girl friends, because she is reputed to have had an affair with a gentleman.[24]

Dairyman Crick, at Talbothays, has an amusing anecdote about how Jack Dollup tried to escape marrying the girl whose innocence he ravaged, to use the phraseology of the girl's mother,[25] by hiding in the churn. This introduces the question of sexual freedom, especially before marriage. The story of Jack Dollup is continued[26]. The dairyman tells how he did not, according to rural custom and the promise forced out of him in the process of being churned to a pulp, marry the girl who conceived by him; but instead married a widow woman with an annuity of fifty pounds a year, only to discover, after the marriage, that the woman lost the annuity by marrying him. Hardy is obviously trying to point out, as Jane

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[22] Hardy, Tess, pp. 388-9.

[23] Ibid., pp. 29, 35.

[24] Ibid., p. 101.

[25] Ibid., pp. 156-7.

[26] Ibid., p. 206.

Austen did, that marriage is a risk in that the two parties concerned discover too late facts about each other which, if known earlier, would have prevented them from getting married in the first place. But, whereas Jane Austen accepts the fact that people marry without knowing each other as one of the unavoidable hazards of the institution, Hardy questions the injustice of a marriage based on insufficient knowledge of relevant aspects of the person one is marrying. Hence, the rustic humour in the example given above merely acts as a pointer to the theme dealt with more seriously in the case of Tess and Clare, and Lucetta and Farfrae. Hardy points out that it is because society stresses pre-marital virginity in a woman as an absolute value, that a woman is often tempted to conceal her past, rather than risk her only chance of happiness. He would seem to suggest that we take into consideration that sexual experience even before marriage is compatible with chastity, and that it need not be an indelible stain on one's character, since it can be an enriching experience which could help a person to grow emotionally. In the case of Jude and Arabella, Hardy points out that a marriage based on the deception of one party in order to bring about the marriage, is unfair. Arabella says, and she may be right, that she thought she was pregnant when she told Jude so before their marriage. But was it fair to use sex in order to trap Jude in the first place? Arabella is false and untruthful in many things, as symbolised by her false hair[27] and her equally false dimples.[28] And yet her sexual desires are natural and uninhibited by Victorian convention. Again, Hardy would seem to indicate that since Sue did not know, before her marriage, of that

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[27]Hardy, Jude, pp. 65; 278.

[28]Ibid., p. 67.

physically repugnant aspect of Phillotson's that Drusilla Fawley says no girl of any fastidiousness would be able to bear,[29] it would seem unfair that a marriage based on insufficient information as in this case, should be indissoluble.

It is becoming clear that although humour provided by the minor rustic characters can be served to introduce a theme or to see the ludicrous side of the question or merely to treat the theme light-heartedly for a change, a development of the theme needs a more serious approach as the previous paragraph pointed out. It is this serious approach, unrelieved on the whole by much rustic humour, that characterises Jude. The impact it makes is greater, the response it evokes is suitably uncomfortable. But there is at least one example of the minor rustics contributing humour which does throw light on an aspect of the theme. This is the encounter between Anny and Arabella. Although Arabella is not, as I have already pointed out, a minor rustic character,[30] she is of the same genre as a (minor) rustic character like Anny. She speaks in the same idiom, and her sense of values is the same. She also betrays some of that Caliban like earthiness:[31] except when she tries to climb into lower middle-class financial security and respectability and chapel attendance, she is really rural in her mores. This meeting

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[29]Hardy, Jude, p. 199.

[30]She ceased to be a rustic when she no longer had a rural occupation (she became a bar-maid) and when she rose into the lower middle-class in marrying Cartlett.

[31]I agree with Hazlitt that vulgarity is associated with acquired snobbery hence Arabella is vulgar when she makes a pretence of middle-class respectability after her marriage to, and later the death of, Cartlett. Otherwise Arabella is earthy, not coarse.

between the two old friends occurs after Arabella has been left a widow.[32] Their talk, as of old, is strongly flavoured by uninhibited discussion of their sexual desires. Arabella has not changed since she confided in Anny the unashamedly sexual nature of her desire for the nineteen-year-old Jude:

> 'But I want him to more than care for me: I want him to have me - to marry me!. I must have him. I can't do without him. He's the sort of man I long for. I shall go made if I can't give myself to him altogether! I felt I should when I first saw him!'[33]

and six weeks after her second husband has left her a widow, she confides to Anny: "'After all that's said about the comforts of this religion, I wish I had Jude back again!'"[34] And "'Pooh! I know as well as you what I should do; only I don't do it!'"[35] Also "'Be damned if I do! Feelings are Feelings! I won't be a creeping hypocrite any longer - so there!'"[36] And finally, she states: "'I must be as I was born!'"[37] I have not quoted the whole of the long passage, which would be necessary to reveal the humour. The statements I have quoted are Arabella's and serve to show how Hardy uses humour contributed by a minor rustic, Anny, and Arabella (not strictly speaking a minor rustic), to point out his theme in favour of greater sexual freedom and a release from the crippling inhibitions of conventional middle-class Victorian standards of sexual ethics.

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[32] Hardy, Jude, pp. 325-326.

[33] Ibid., p. 55.

[34] Ibid., p. 326.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

What shows Hardy's bias is the spontaneity and genuineness of Arabella's feelings, which are strong enough to break through her feeble attempt to behave with middle-class propriety and sobriety, the falsity of which is humorously exposed.[38] Similarly, I think, as I have already said Hardy shows up Sue's false ideas and false divisions of natural sexual desires into the genuine, and therefre coarse, low and vulgar,[39] and the false but proper and ladylike, in that encounter between Arabella and Sue at the former's hotel,[40] significantly after Sue has 'given in' to Jude for the most ungenerous and morally repulsive of reasons.

The only other example of a minor rustic character contributing humour that is relevant to the theme of marriage is Widow Edlin's refreshingly old-fashioned and rural attitude to marriage. This also serves as comic relief. The presents she brings Jude and Sue on their wedding, which never took place, help to show her commonsensical attitude towards marriage. She says that in her day, people were not afraid of marriage, and that she and her husband celebrated their wedding for a week and had to borrow sixpence with which to begin housekeeping.[41]

The role of the minor rustic characters in contributing towards comic relief so that it helps to throw some light on the theme of marriage can be dealt with briefly, since most of the examples of comic relief are

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[38] Hardy, Jude, p. 323.

[39] Ibid., p. 275.

[40] Ibid., pp. 278-279.

[41] Ibid., pp. 291; 297; 380.

irrelevant to the theme and so may be dismissed. In Far From the Madding Crowd, Liddy's advice to Bathsheba after the crisis in the plot and Troy's disappearance is comparable in its humour to Anny's advice to Arabella after Cartlett's death. In poking fun at rural methods of coping with emotional crisis, it would appear that Hardy also recognises a rural fatalism. Hence comic relief is used to reveal rural values. Liddy's advice to hem handkerchiefs or finish the sampler, only the carnations and peacocks of which want filling in,[42] is based on the presupposition that there is nothing that Bathsheba can do but wait - which in fact is true - and secondly, it implies a fatalistic attitude towards marriage so that it would be taken for granted that there is nothing one can do about the hazards of marriage but take them in one's stride and wait for the storm to blow over.

There is no relevant example of rustic comic relief in The Mayor, nor in Jude, unless the whole episode of Arabella's ten easy steps to matrimony[43] can be called such. In Tess, Hardy merely makes an ironic comment on marriage in the comic relief provided by the turnpike keeper informing Tess, (without knowing who she is) on her return home after her separation from Clare, of how her father celebrated his daughter's marriage to a gentleman.[44]

The part which the minor rustics play in acting as a chorus, both in commenting on events as well as by providing a setting, is probably

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[42]Hardy, Far From the Madding Crowd, p. 34.

[43]Hardy, Jude, pp. 326-395.

[44]Hardy, Tess, p. 289

rather more relevant in revealing rustic values, which I shall discuss in the next chapter, than in contributing to the theme. In Far From the Madding Crowd, Jacob Smallbury's comment on marriage when the rustics go to greet Oak and Bathsheba gives Hardy an opportunity to make an ironic comment on marriage.[45] The conventional point of view on courting is shown in the comments which the rustics make on the courting of Boldwood,[46] which they view favourably, and to which they help to provide the idyllic rural setting[47] as do the minor rustics in Tess at Talbothay's Farm.[48] They view Troy's courtship with Bathsheba with suspicion,[49] and significantly, there is an absence of rustic background, and like the second seduction of Tess by Alec, it takes place at a spa, which is very unrural in its setting and connotations. Thirdly, they favour the courtship of Oak and Bathsheba,[50] and their comments do, in fact, help to bring about a successful conclusion to this story.

In The Mayor, the rustics do not contribute to a development of the theme in their role of commentators, hence any further mention of their role in this respect is irrelevant. In Tess, besides helping to form the rural setting, Marian, Izz and Betty help to comment on the mutual love of

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[45] Hardy, Far From the Madding Crowd, p. 445.

[46] Ibid., p. 169.

[47] Ibid., p. 144; 167.

[48] Hardy, Tess, Chapter XXIV.

[49] Hardy, Far From the Madding Crowd, p. 220.

[50] Ibid., p. 437.

Clare and Tess,[51] and later, at Flintcomb-Ash, they are a part of the harsher setting[52] and they also comment on the unfairness of Tess's fate.[53] In Jude, I have already remarked on the significance of the absence of a rural setting. The comments of the rustic characters throw no appreciable light on the theme and may therefore be dismissed.

Finally, in this chapter, one may mention that the minor rustics are characters in their own right; but their value in relation to the theme is mostly in conveying a rustic sense of values which may be contrasted with conventional Victorian middle-class values. A juxtaposition of these two standards of values does help to develop the theme. Secondly, by the very fact of their existence as people and as characters in their own right, and nor merely as types, for example, the popular 'Hodge'[54] of the fiction of Hardy's day, Hardy makes the important point of arousing the social and moral awareness of the middle-class reader to the fact that the other half of Disraeli's "Two Nations" are human beings, who are not necessarily, coarse, low and vulgar in their feelings. Hence he undermines the social structure based on class distinction, and those sexual practices of the middle and upper-classes which were based on class distinction: namely, the double standard, the view of women of the middle and upper classes as "sexless angels", the importance of pre-marital virginity for the woman and hence the lack of sexual freedom for the woman, the use of

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[51] Hardy, Tess p. 228.

[52] Ibid., p. 327.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Hardy, Tess, p. 139.

marriage as a means of financial and social betterment, and lastly, the concept of sexual relations (pre-marital and extra-marital, especially) and of the institution of marriage itself, in terms of money and property. The relevance of the juxtaposition of the two standards of values, and the awakening of the social consciousness to the false notions arising from class distinction, I shall deal with in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

DEVELOPING THE THEME THROUGH RURAL VALUES

Perhaps the most significant contribution of the minor rustics to the novels is their rural sense of values. This acts as a frame of reference by which to judge conventional Victorian morality with its bias on a middle-class interpretation of Christian ethics on the one hand, and the more radical views based on intellectual scepticism and a humanitarian inclination on the other. The reason it may be suggested that it is the rural and rustic code of behaviour which acts as a standard by which the reader may judge the validity, in practice, of the other two ethical points of view is that the rustics lend the stability of generations of experience to that code of behaviour to which they adhere. In addition, to the extent that Hardy would seem to suggest, in his novels, that the rural standard of values has sprung from the soil, in the sense that it is pagan, based on instinct (ironically enough, in the Lawrencian sense)[1] and practice that has not been influenced by organised religion, for example, Christianity,[2] to that small extent the rustic values would approximate closest to a natural law. Hence its validity as a frame of reference. In all fairness, it should be added that this would be an approximation to natural law, in that the code of

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[1]Hardy hadn't read D. H. Lawrence, and had a confused idea that he himself, not merely his father, was a miner. V. H. Collins, Talks with Thomas Hardy at Max Gate, London: Duckworth, 1928.

[2]Thomas Hardy, Tess of the d'Urbervilles, New York: Macmillan, 1966.

behaviour would have been to some extent at least corrupted by the exigencies of practice. This point can be made clearer by referring to the fatalism of both Mrs. Durbeyfield, and, to a lesser extent, Tess, who are sometimes inclined to shelve responsibility for their own actions by adopting a fatalistic attitude.[3] The rough-and-ready code of justice, subject to human malice and the human tendency to laugh at the expense of another's discomfiture, is also shown in the planners of the skimmington-ride.

The importance of a frame of reference lies not, in this case, necessarily in its superiority to the other two standards of behaviour that are revealed in the novels; but merely in the fact of its existence, so that it can act as a comparison. It is in this light that rustic values are of importance. They help to compel the reader to evaluate the three different codes of behaviour. I do not wish to suggest that the rural values are to be taken as a prescriptive guide. In this way, Hardy is able to avoid a dogmatic approach, and instead to present the reader with the same alternatives with which the intellectual sceptic is confronted. Hence, Hardy is able to examine each case in the light of different ethical standards, and in presenting the reader with these alternatives, he compels him to exercise his moral consciousness, to evaluate each case anew, instead of dismissing it by filing it away in the neat manner to which the reader may be accustomed by the dictates of

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[3]Hardy, Tess, Mrs. Durbeyfield, p. 101; Tess, in agreeing to live with Alec as his mistress, p. 420.

his religious training and up-bringing. Therefore, by providing a third alternative set of values, the minor rustics play a part in Hardy's moral purpose. Whether this purpose was conscious or not is irrelevant; in his novels I think it is inescapable, and that this aspect of his novels is particularly relevant in a society which is still groping in that process of intellectual crisis which began a century ago, and in which Hardy, then a young man, found himself.

The main aspects of rural values which are of immediate interest here are those concerned with the theme, that is, the rustic attitude towards pre-marital (technical) virginity, and their attitude towards the institution of marriage. Hardy would seem to suggest that there was an element of pre-marital sexual freedom in the lives of the rustics, and his tone and attitude in the following passage, in which Clare ruminates on Tess, would seem to reveal his approval of this sexual freedom before marriage:

> That she had already permitted him to make love to her he read as an additional assurance, not fully knowing that in the fields and pastures to 'sigh gratis' is by no means deemed waste; love-making being here more often accepted inconsiderately for its own sweet sake than in the carking anxious homes of the ambitious, where a girl's craving for an establishment paralyses her healthy thought of a passion as an end.[4]

To some extent at least, Hardy betrays a romanticised attitude which is understandable as a reaction to Victorian convention, but which is none

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[4]Hardy, Tess, p. 200.

the less rather rosier than life, in that in the context of Hardy's novels, there is hardly any love "for its own sweet sake". In his novels, we do not really see love-making without its consequences, which are true to nature and to life. Inasmuch as nature made it pleasurable for man and woman to love for the ultimate purpose of procreation, I think this should be taken into account in assessing the validity of "love for its own sweet sake". Both the rustic as well as the middle-class attitudes which the passage reveals are extreme positions which take into consideration only one aspect of love-making, either its pleasures or the need to make provision for likely offspring. Hardy is not unaware of the very real misery of poverty amongst these rustics who have a big family, like the Durbeyfields,[5] nor is he unconscious of the misery of an unmarried mother like Tess, who has to work hard in order to maintain herself and her child, should it manage to survive.[6] Hardy's attitude towards premarital sexual freedom is shown to be even more confused in that he tries to make it acceptable for the wrong reason; in trying to mitigate Tess's actual guilt (having also shown her actual responsibility as I argued in the second chapter), he says:

> She had been made to break an accepted social law, but no law known to the environment in which she fancied herself such an anomaly.[7]

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[5]Hardy, Tess, pp. 32; 406.

[6]Ibid., pp. 108-109.

[7]Ibid., p. 104.

It is romantic to look upon an unmarried mother as merely one who has fulfilled nature's design of motherhood, in an "environment" which is not society in a state of nature, because as soon as a group of articulate human beings live in a community, they cease to live in a state of nature. Love-making amongst the hay-stacks, with a mate for the season, has all the appeal of fantasy, with none of the responsibilities of actuality. It is unlikely, though very possible, that either one or the other party will not become emotionally involved; on the other hand, if the emotions of neither party are kindled into a feeling of affection, it is probably legitimate to ask when the desire to gratify a natural urge ends and promiscuity begins. It is probably true to say that because human babies need care and attention for such a long time before they become self-sufficient for their primary needs, they require both a father and a mother, and that love between the parents would be nature's way of keeping them together. But it is unsafe to speculate on nature's designs.

Perhaps it is the "modern" view of a "teasing epicene" like Sue that is more acceptable, except that a sexual freedom consisting merely of cenobitical celibacy or abstinence would be the voluntary choice of the few and the dedicated, not of the vast majority. The alternative is a marriage in everything but name, with children, since Hardy does not introduce the subject of contraception. It would seem that the people who attach a regard, out of all proportion to its importance, to the legality of marriage, are those who choose to do without the legal contract of marriage, like Sue and Jude. In every other respect but the legal or sacramental one, theirs was a marriage, "or its equivalent" to use a current expression. As for escaping the obligations which a

legal marriage would have imposed on them, Sue and Jude find out that society manages to impose on them certain obligations because they are not married, so that in the long run it would have been easier to have got married in the conventional manner.[8]

The rural tolerance of premarital sex is an acceptance of what happens;[9] it does involve the responsibility, on the part of the man, to marry the girl who conceives by him. For example, Jude realised that

> Arabella was not worth a great deal as a specimen of womankind. Yet, such being the custom of the rual districts among honourable young men who had drifted so far into intimacy with a woman as he unfortunately had done, he was ready to abide by what he had said, and take the consequences.[10]

Since it would appear that no reasonably safe method of contraception is used, if at all, pre-marital sexual freedom has to be viewed in the harsh reality of an unwanted marriage for the man,[11] or an illegitimate child for the woman. That the acceptance is grudging is indicated by Mrs. Durbeyfield's shrewd reticence on the subject before her marriage to her husband.[12] But ultimate acceptance of the fait accompli by the rural

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[8]But there will always be indivi uals like Sue and Jude, whose conscientious objections to the legal or sacramental bond of marriage should be respected as Hardy seems to suggest.

[9]Hardy, Tess, p. 101.

[10]Hardy, Jude, p. 63.

[11]Hardy, The Mayor, p. 12. One wonders whether Henchard is so bitter because his early marriage at eighteen was the result of similar compulsion.

[12]Hardy, Tess, p. 219.

community did avoid increased misery. Tess was accepted by her family as well as by her friends and colleagues at work after she left Trantridge;[13] it would appear that had she married a working-class man he would not have deserted her the way Clare did on her wedding night. Clare puts it succinctly when he says: "Different societies; different manners."[14] This brief statement in reply to Tess's comment that her mother "knows several cases where they were worse than I, and the husband has not minded it much"[15], belies the fact that the working and the middle-classes had radically different views. As for extra-marital freedom amongst the rustics, it is not so much as mentioned. That which takes place in the novels is between the middle-classes[16] or between a middle-class man and a working-class woman who is unmarried.[17] Jude and Sue are no longer rural in their outlook when they live together. Amongst the working class, the double standard does not exist because of the equality of sexual opportunity between the working-class unmarried man and woman, and as I have already pointed out, the degree of responsibility involved for both is similar. It is further made impossible by the frank and uninhibited acceptance of the sexuality of the working class woman, like Arabella.[18] I think that in the context it does not matter that Arabella is

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[13] Ibid., pp. 101; 109.

[14] Ibid., p. 264.

[15] Ibid., p. 263.

[16] Mrs. Chasmond and Fitzpiers in The Woodlanders.

[17] Troy and Fanny, Clare and Tess.

[18] Hardy, Jude, pp. 55; 326.

not a minor rustic character. Her attitude towards sex is no doubt shared by her friend, Anny.

As for marriage, the rustics look upon it with the cynicism of experience; but there is a conspicuous absence of any idea that the conditions of marriage may be improved. The minor rustics look upon Henchard's proposition to auction his wife as a joke, and vanish rather guiltily after the transaction.[19] That it had no real significance for them is registered by the attitude of the furmity-woman who found difficulty remembering the incident. She would have remembered something really exciting like a fight.[20] Hardy implicitly questions this fatalistic attitude. Generally speaking, it would seem that if the minor rustics do not look upon marriage as an economic investment, it is because the economic condition of both parties in the marriages of the Durbefield and the early Henchard type would hardly warrant it. Yet, Mrs Durbeyfield is as eager as any middle-class mother to make a good match for her daughter and Henchard feels that his re-marriage to the penniless Susan is humiliating,[21] and even Coney thinks it is a poor bargain,[22] and finally, Arabella gave up Jude on both occasions because he was a bad economic investment. This was so even when he was young, and very soon after she has expressed for him such ardent desire[23] . If there is any indication

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[19]Hardy, The Mayor, p. 19.

[20]Ibid., p. 27.

[21]Ibid., p. 86.

[22]Hardy, The Mayor, p. 87.

[23]Hardy, Jude, pp. 28; 398.

of unworldliness, and I think there is not, it is only when the standard of living is so low and the future so precarious that the future is not worth investing in; otherwise even Mrs Durbeyfield can accept or condone the selling of her daughter into prostitution for the economic welfare of herself and her family,[24] and Arabella can advise Sue to marry on the grounds that should the marriage break up the wife may have the few sticks of furniture.[25]

Arabella and Henchard both give up their spouses rather casually. They would seem to reflect rural attitudes, although generally speaking, the rustics seem to view marriage with a fatalistic attitude. But there is as great injustice done to the innocent party by this casual attitude when a marriage breaks up, as in a more formal divorce proceeding, unless children are provided for. The working-class woman had to work for a living; the Victorian middle-class woman did not. Hence the middle-class view towards marriage had to take into consideration a means of livelihood for the woman if she were the innocent party. The inequality of opportunity for earning a living, as well as the false de-sexualising of the middle-class woman, put her into the humiliating position of having to marry in order to gain financial security, as Jane Austen so poignantly reveals. I feel that Hardy does not take this sufficiently into consideration, although he does mention that the ideal marriage is based on getting to know the other person through doing the same work,[26] as Bathsheba and Oak do;

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[24]Hardy, Tess, p. 420.

[25]Hardy, Jude, p. 279.

[26]Hardy, Far from the Madding Crowd, p. 439.

and he does show both Bathsheba[27] and Sue doing a job of work alongside a man.[28]

It seems to me that a confrontation with the reality of the English class system is difficult to avoid in a consideration of rustic values as against either conventional Victorian middle-class mores or more modern standards based on intellectual scepticism of an accepted interpretation of Christian dogma, and which is founded instead on humanitarian ideals. I have tried to show so far in this chapter that close examination of rural values would seem to indicate that it is misleading to assume that they are based on the laws of Nature, merely because rustic standards of behaviour are not as influenced by a middle-class interpretation of Christian ethics. That the interpretation of Christianity is non-working-class is made obvious by the fact that clerics like the Clare family tend to be non-working class in background; and those seats of learning and theology, as represented by Christminster in Jude, are the strong-hold of the non-working classes.

It becomes difficult to ignore the class basis of the English structure of society because one of the more important functions of the minor rustic characters is to convey Hardy's respect for the individual[29] merely because he shares a common humanity. By the very fact that they are characters in their own right, not merely types, the minor

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[27] Ibid., pp. 278-279.

[28] Hardy, Jude, pp. 184-185.

[29] F. E. Hardy, The Life of Thomas Hardy, London: Macmillan, 1962. pp. 355 and 382.

rustics undermine the popular concept of Hodge in Hardy's time.[30] The relevance of this to the theme has been suggested before. As I have already pointed out, the double standard was made possible by the existence of class distinction. And the middle and upper class emphasis on pre-marital chastity was based on the concept of marriage as a legal contract in which the financial aspect of the transaction was important. Women of the middle and upper classes did not own property in their own name until the Married Women's Property Act of 1875, and it was not considered respectable for middle and upper class women to engage in most occupations by which they could earn a living. Therefore, middle and upper class parents had to safeguard the virtue of their daughters, and the easiest way of doing this was to narrow down the meaning of chastity to technical virginity. In this way, they made it necessary for a man of their own class to burden himself financially with a wife, whom he had to maintian at the standard of living to which she was accustomed, in order to ensure legitimate off-spring who could inherit his name and his property.[31] As an inducement to this seemingly unattractive financial proposition, the parents of the girl would part with some money or property in the form of a dowry or a settlement.[32]

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[30]Clare's "Different societies; different manners: (Hardy, Tess, p. 264) reinforces the idea underlying Disraeli's Two Nations.

[31]As well as a hereditary title, if any.

[32]The majority of marriages in India are still conducted in this business-like fashion, with no nonsense about the principal parties concerned being in love, since it is assumed that they have the rest of their lives in which to fall in love-with each other. Divorce is rare.

It is not surprising that Hardy, who knew J. S. Mill's essay On Liberty "practically by heart"[33] should wish to evoke from his Victorian readers (predominantly non-working class since education was only beginning to be compulsory, and later, free, by the Education Act of 1870) a consciousness of the basic humanity of the workfolk. Hardy must have felt that conventional Victorian ideas on marriage, chastity and the double standard would continue unless the dignity of the working class woman were asserted, and unless it were shown that the de-sexualization of the middle and upper-class woman was as false as it was untrue to think that the sexuality of the working-class woman was, by its very existence, and not merely by the attitude of people towards a biological fact, "low", 'coarse" and "vulgar". In this respect, Hardy was definitely ahead of his time, in that his attitude towards sex undermined conventional Victorian middle and upper class ideas. But amongst the rural population, as revealed by the minor rustics of Hardy's novels, the values were based, to some extent, on an acceptance of what happened in practice rather than on Victorian social convention. Although this convention lent coherence to a social system based on a class structure, it was beginning to distort human nature and to create a false dichotomy between the working-class and the middle and upper classes, and the even less valid and purely artificial difference between the nature of the working-class and the middle and upper class woman.

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[33] F. E. Hardy, The Life of Thomas Hardy, p. 330.

Perhaps nowhere else in his novels does Hardy confront the non-working class reader with an awareness of the "different societies; different manners" to the extent that he does in Tess. Hardy maintains an impartiality, and enquiring attitude, in that he can see the strength and the weaknesses of both standards of value. It is a clever confrontation, in that the non-working class reader sees the workfolk at Talbothays Farm from two points of view: from the middle-class and conventional Victorian point of view of Clare, who, "by Mrs. Crick's orders", sat slightly aloof from the others at his own table "in the yawning chimney corner during the meal" and watched the workfolk from the vantage point of the spectator; or, the reader gets the point of view of Hardy, as he unfolds the story of the milkmaid at Talbothays. The unique feature is that in the process of reading Tess, the non-working class reader could be shedding prejudices and acquiring insight and habits in the same way that Clare does. This confrontation between the two standards of value, with the more humanitarian values based on intellectual scepticism of accepted Christian ethics being represented by Clare's encounter with his fellow traveller in far-away Brazil, involves an educational process for Clare which it is difficult for the reader not to share. The encounter between Tess and Clare represents a conflict between the two, and then with the third eithical code, so that the resolution must suggest Hardy's own attitude.

Clare's education begins with a heightened awareness of minor rustics as individuals, as the following passage states very clearly:

> Much to his surprise he took, indeed, a real delight in their companionship. The conventional farm-folk of his imagination -- personified in the newspaper press by the pitiable dummy known as Hodge -- were obliterated after a few days' residence. At first, it is true, when Clare's intelligence was fresh from a contrasting society, these friends with whom he hobnobbed seemed a little strange. Sitting down as a level member of the dairyman's household seemed at the outset an undignified proceeding. The ideas, the modes, the surroundings, appeared retrogressive and unmeaning. But with living on there, day after day, the acute sojourner became conscious of a new aspect in the spectacle.[34]

And, he goes on to say:

> The typical and unvarying Hodge ceased to exist. He had been disintegrated into a number of varied fellow-creatures[35]-beings of many minds, beings infinite in difference; some happy, many serene, a few depressed, one here and there bright even to genius, some stupid, others wanton, others austere; some mutely Miltonic, some potentially Cromwellian; into men who had private views of each other, as he had of his friends; who could applaud or condemn each other, amuse or sadden each other by the contemplation of each other's foibles or vices; men every one of whom walked in his own individual way the road to dusty death.[36]

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[34]Hardy, Tess, p. 139.

[35]Italics added.

[36]Hardy, Tess, p. 140. (If literature in English presented the "black and yellow races" to white readers in a similar manner, the educational process would not be a one way traffic as it appears to have been for the past three hundred odd years).

It is significant that along with his consciousness of the fundamental humanity shared alike by all men, and which must help him to identify himself in relation to the rest of mankind, Clare's perception of his physical environment, in the form of nature, is also quickened with a Wordsworthian heightening of his sensory responses. Hence in the rustic setting of Wessex, which owes its tangibility to a great extent to the genuiness of the minor rustic characters who make it living, Clare learns to identify his position in his physical environment:

> He grew away from old associations, and saw something new in life and humanity. Secondarily, he made close acquaintance with phenomenon which he had before known but darkly -- the seasons in their moods, morning and evening, night and noon, winds in their different tempers, trees, waters and mists, shades and silences, and the voices of inanimate things.[37]

I feel that this close identification of man with his immediate physical environment in the form of nature (and which is so beautifully depicted in Far from the Madding Crowd,) is enhanced by music.[38] This is often provided by the rustics, and humorously accentuated by the incident in which the dairy hands sing in order to coax one of the cows to give more milk,[39] followed by the story of William Dewy and the bull who went down on his bended knees when he heard the Divinity Hymn.[40]

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[37] Hardy, Tess, p. 140.

[38] Ibid., pp. 141, 144, 146.

[39] Ibid., p. 130.

[40] Ibid., pp. 131-132.

It is this identification of man with his environment, this harmony between man and nature, that gives the novels other than Jude a sense of balance. The most useful artistic function of the minor rustics is to create this sense of harmony. Jude conspicuously lacks it. I think this distinction belies a difference in an artist's attitude to life, and its relation to art. Either life is seen as having a basic pattern, because it has ultimate meaning, even though it is not perfect, or life is seen as having no meaning, and hence there can be no form discerned in it. If art imitates life, then art will reveal that basic form which underlies a concept of life as having an ultimate purpose. But I think art is not meant to be realistic in the sense of merely evoking emotion like that which is experience at first hand in life. I think the function of art is to help people reconcile themselves to life as it is, with all its bewildering pain and suffering, as well as with that joy and happiness which as Keats realised so poignantly, seems only to mock man's mortality. For this reason, I feel that the modern novel, like Jude, fails as a work of art precisely because it is so realistic. I do not mean to say that art should not present that aspect of life which is uncomfortable, and the answers to which we still seek; but art must, finally, leave us reconciled to life. If all it presents us is life in the raw, in all its bewilderment, then we do not need art; we may as well stick to life and live it day by day. Art must present all the basic perplexities of life; but ultimately the artist must impose on life some form, some sense of harmony, in such a way that even the agony

and the mortality that man must live with, become bearable.[41] I would like to suggest that the minor rustic characters in the novels of Hardy, with the conspicuous exception of Jude, do exactly this. They help the artist, Hardy, to present life without any distortion of truth,[42] without glossing over the fundamental questions of life, death, and love; but the presentation, at the same time, gives us strength to face life. The basic genuineness of the rustics, their humour, their respect for human beings, help us to reconcile ourselves to life, because the artist imposes a pattern on life so that it is bearable. This is to a great extent helpted by those very values which, right or wrong, help to give Wessex that ultimate sense of equilibrium. In the modern novel, like Jude, the writer has the added difficulty of trying to discern meaning where it would appear there is none. That is why art, in its various forms, is finding it difficult to seem relevant, in other words, useful, to-day. But it is exactly in times of intellectual and moral crisis that the work of the artist becomes both more challenging as well as most necessary for the well-being and ultimate sanity of society. I think it is no coincidence that the middle ages produced some of Western Europe's most integrated art in the form of painting, and especially, architecture.[43]

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[41] On the other hand, it is probably the maturity of the reader, not Jude, that is being judged. I have a feeling that ten or twenty years hence, I may find that I can read Jude with greater detachment.

[42] The more sordid aspects of life amongst the working-classes were not stressed because Hardy wished to redress the distorted views held by the Victorian reader.

[43] The relationship between an art form and an ideal of life as depicted in the gothic arch and the gothic spire, must be as close to perfection as is humanly possible.

This was because the artist was also religious, by which I mean that the artist had already a point of view that was reasonably realistic[44] as well as one which saw a meaning in life.[45] Hence his interpretation of life was relatively easy. But the point I wish to make is that Art is an interpretation, and not merely a representation, of life. It is only when the artist interprets that he can go one step further than merely showing us life, supposedly, as it is, but which of its own, is of no especial use; as, since life is presumably for the living, not for the dead, each one of us knows what life involves. Our problem is to be reconciled to it, to see, as Hardy shows us, that even suffering can be beautiful, that man is at his most dignified, when, like Henchard, and like Tess, he has a capacity for suffering, so that humanity lends beauty to suffering. Or, that even dishonesty, like Henchard's lie to Newson, can have its redeeming feature; that a murderess, like Tess, can be lovable, and that the fallen woman can be pure and chaste. Or that love for one's stepdaughter, one's husband, or one's family, can lead to deceit, to murder and to prostitution. Hardy is an artist, because in all the three novels but Jude, he does interpret life, and he makes us reconciled to life as it is, because, when we have read his novels, even if the perennial problems remain unanswered, life is seen to have a little more beauty.

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[44] That is, it is related to life. There is a discernable relevance to life.

[45] Ultimately life cannot be seen as purposeful unless we recognise human inadequacy and imperfection, and unless we crave for a knowledge of the ultimate good and the all powerful.

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