SUPPORTING CHARACTERS AND RURAL COMMUNITIES IN THE NOVELS
OF GEORGE ELIOT AND THOMAS HARDY

DISSERTATION

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

This study examines supporting characters in three novels by George Eliot and three by Thomas Hardy, in order to show how these characters, as representatives of their rural communities, influence our views of the main characters and their relationships within those communities. The novels are Adam Bede (1859), The Mill on the Floss (1860), Silas Marner (1861), Under the Greenwood Tree (1872), The Mayor of Casterbridge (1886), and The Woodlanders (1887). Each of these novels is set in a single provincial village or town, based on places known by Eliot and Hardy since their childhoods. Portraying the dialects, customs, folklore, religion, local history, daily work, and conversations of the rural natives, the novelists use a variety of supporting characters to create a rich and concrete view of the social environment of the protagonists struggling to establish or maintain their places in the community.

The characters in these novels are divided into three categories in the discussions that follow. While there is a broad range of character types and functions among those who are subordinate to the main characters, and it is sometimes difficult to place them all in particular categories,
especially if their roles change in the course of the novel, it is helpful to distinguish background figures from the more important supporting characters when discussing their roles in relation to the protagonists and their communities. The definitions below are based on Mary Doyle Springer's analysis of primary or main characters and secondary or minor characters in her study of literary character and Henry James, and on W. J. Harvey's discussion of protagonists, intermediate characters, and background characters in Character and the Novel.¹

Main characters are usually presented with more psychological and moral complexity than supporting characters. Their personal traits, thought, or fate changes in the course of the plot, stimulating more complex responses from the reader. Most of the main characters in these rural novels are natives of the community, whose lifelong ties to their homes are threatened by outside interests and influences, or by conflicts within their communities and within themselves. Others are outsiders who become integrated into the community of the novel, or who disrupt its stability by violating its values in their relationships with others in the community. In several of Hardy's novels natives who return after education and experience in the outside world face the problem of determining what kinds of relationships are possible for them within the traditional, limited environments of their childhood homes.
Supporting characters have secondary functions but they are necessary or highly desirable to the total effect of the work. They change minimally or remain static, and serve primarily as complements to the main characters. They can be functional and be sources of interest in themselves at the same time. They are often typical of their time, place, and class, providing background and significant comments on the exceptional, and more complex, virtues and vices of the main characters. Most of the supporting characters in these novels represent the values of their communities, or of their class within the rural society (for example, the squires in Eliot's village novels). Their connections with the main characters and discussions of them are thus crucial in evaluating the main characters' relationships to the community.

Background characters have roles that are primarily functional, filling in the social background of the novel. We are thus less interested in their own characters or fates. They may be anonymous voices or individuals with moments of intensity and depth. They may function as mechanisms with minor but necessary roles in the plot, or serve as voices of traditional community values. These novels all contain groups of background characters who function as choruses, commenting on the main characters and events of the novel.

Supporting characters and background figures perform a variety of functions in the complex Victorian novel, giving
depth and detail to the novel's view of the social milieu of the protagonists. I am especially interested in the community values these characters represent, and the choral commentary they provide on the main characters and plot, but it is impossible to separate their roles as chorus or community spokesperson from their other functions, since these writers skillfully blend character types and narrative techniques to achieve complexity in their main characters and themes.\textsuperscript{2} Harvey emphasizes that the novel, more than any other art form, can establish the reality of characters by placing them in "the human context" and providing a variety of perspectives. Harvey says of the background characters' contribution to the social context of the protagonists:

Clearly this social setting is one of the most important of all human contexts, and while the novelist can do a great deal by way of direct description and analysis, society must also be seen as a complex web of individual relationships. This is most economically achieved by establishing a range of background characters whose individuality need be no more than is adequate to typify social trends or pressures; without them society will tend to become hopelessly abstract and external.\textsuperscript{3}

Sometimes background figures appear in novels to relate facts about the action or characters, to fill in necessary background detail, or to provide comic relief. In these novels, in which the community surrounding the protagonists is so important, these functional background actions almost always are accompanied by some significant comment or detail.
An anonymous voice, such as the turnip-hoer who tells Henchard there is no employment or shelter nearby, is not just a convenient passer-by; this man is a "pessimist" who contributes to the dismal view of rural poverty at the beginning of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Casual conversations not only convey the atmosphere of the everyday life of the community, but they often have some subtle relevance to the main plot as well. The amount of attention given to everyday activities and congenial conversations among the community representatives is an important factor in comparing the views of the communities in different novels. Also, main characters are often introduced through the conversations of ordinary members of the community or through their own initial interactions with the community. Since these introductions in the context of community life are important in shaping our views of the main characters, they receive special attention in this study, as do the roles of community representatives in relation to the exit, death, or final action of the main characters in the novel. Sometimes the author focuses on the reactions of a group of background characters, rather than on the important event itself, as Hardy does when Susan Henchard remarryes Michael in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and when she dies.

One specific function of background characters listed by Harvey and others is their occasional participation in the main plot development. In Hardy's novels, for example,
simple-minded background characters become innocent agents in the increasingly ironic twists of fate that plague his protagonists. Although this function is not examined in detail here as a narrative technique, the actions of the background characters, as well as those of the supporting characters, are discussed when they affect the protagonists' fate within the community. For example, in *The Woodlanders*, Grammer Oliver not only describes Fitzpiers to Grace, but she also begs Grace to see him on her behalf, bringing about the first meeting between Grace and her future husband, who is a disruptive outsider in the village. When community representatives help the protagonists become integrated into the community; when they cause conflicts through interference, ignorance, or coincidental encounters; or when they appear helpless and passive in the face of problems that disrupt their communities, their actions or inaction helps reveal the strengths and weaknesses of the traditional community.\(^5\)

A major function of supporting characters, and sometimes of background characters as well, is forming parallels and contrasts with the main characters. Supporting characters may also contrast with each other to reflect different aspects of the protagonists' complex characters or to represent different points of view or alternate approaches to life available to the protagonists. Although no attempt is made to cover these connections exhaustively, and there are many
psychological and literary parallels not discussed here, they are often significant in relating the main characters to the community. In *Adam Bede*, for example, the Poyzers as exemplary farmers provide parallels with the virtues of Adam and contrasts with Hetty's complete lack of human fellowship or moral responsibility, while a background character, Bessy Cranage, embodies a simpler version of the animal qualities that lead Hetty to violate the values of her family and community. These connections may be obvious or they may be subtle and ironic. As Harvey points out, the static or "flat" supporting characters provide familiar reference points, examples of ordinary behavior and attitudes, as a context for the exceptional virtues and vices of the main characters. Idealized pastoral heroes and heroines, such as Giles Winterborne, are more skillful, more virtuous, and more sensitive than the ordinary workers around them. On the other hand, the limitations of the ordinary provincial mentality can produce fatal flaws in the protagonists. When they adhere too tenaciously to the old provincial conventions, codes of respectability, and prejudices, they may find it impossible to adjust to social changes or cope with unusual problems.

The participation of supporting characters in a chorus also involves parallels and contrasts in the points of view of different individuals. In a complex novel like *The Mill on the Floss*, many characters comment on each other, as well
as fulfilling other functions, so that it is impossible to isolate certain characters as choral figures. Nevertheless, there are groups of community representatives in each of these novels who appear together throughout the work to discuss the main characters and events. The cast of the chorus may vary as circumstances change and characters may participate in a chorus who have more prominent roles at other times. For example, Hardy points out that Robert Creedle is the only workman in the first choral scene of *The Woodlanders* worth describing in detail; he later has a separate role as Giles's faithful servant.

The individual characterizations of members of the chorus may be minimized or ignored, making them representative voices of rural life. A number of critics have described Hardy's "rustics" as a recurring group of rural laborers with certain traits and attitudes in common. On the other hand, the thumb-nail sketches of background figures and vivid details distinguishing an individual's appearance and eccentricities have been praised as some of the best touches of realism and humor in Eliot's novels as well as in Hardy's, creating an impression of vitality and variety in the communities they describe. Albert J. Guerard analyzes Hardy's rustics as "admirable examples of the creation of living personality as opposed to the creation of living character." Guerard stresses that, while some rustic characters are more realistic, the "true Hardy rustic," "the
backbone of the community," is an artificial, literary convention, a stable figure who does not suffer, make moral decisions, or change, like the protagonists, or the real suffering workfolk of Hardy's poems. This typical rustic "has a past history, which he loves to relate, but no present history and conflict."^8

Depending on how much we know about the characters functioning as chorus, their personalities and social positions may influence the views they express. Choral commentary may involve direct praise or blame of the main characters. Adam Bede is admired by one fellow-worker for his wisdom, and criticized by another for his severity. Sometimes the novel's harshest view of a character is given by a background figure—one who has reason to resent that character or one who is simply detached and is free to criticize openly, such as the bark-ripper at the end of The Woodlanders, who "could afford to indulge in strong opinions" about Grace because he only occasionally depends on Melbury for work.\(^9\) The unself-conscious frankness and unsophisticated intellects of the humble rural natives make them effective voices of blunt and humorous comments on the main characters, which may support or qualify the narrator's analysis. As Sarah Burriß observes, this frankness creates an amusing contrast with the artificial and restrained manners of more modern, refined characters. She points out that the rural laborers are in close contact with those
just above them on the social scale. The rustics discuss their superiors freely and deflate their pretensions. Within the small, self-contained communities of these novels, gossip is a custom at all levels of society that can affect the fate of the protagonist, as well as providing various kinds of commentary. When gossip is exaggerated or inaccurate it may reflect ignorance or insensitivity in the community, increasing our sympathy for the protagonist. When it criticizes the vices and errors of the protagonist, however, it exposes the immorality and secrecy that can harm individuals and the community.

Choral discussions may contain subtle and ironic observations on the main characters as well as explicit comment. Although the rural natives can be shrewd and perceptive observers of those around them, with natural sympathy for the suffering of others, their limited insight, inherited deference toward their social superiors, and ignorance of the actions of others often result in ironic reflections. At Arthur's birthday feast in Adam Bede, the speeches praising his virtue and the light-hearted remarks directed at Hetty are full of irony, since their friends do not yet know of their irresponsible violations of community values. Background characters are often used to provide ironic commentary and foreshadowings of future events, with the speakers unconscious, or perhaps only partially aware, of the relevance of their remarks. There are repeated forebodings of
Maggie Tulliver's doom throughout her novel, voiced by characters who are ignorant of her real problems, or who are pessimistic about her future because of their own prejudices and misconceptions. Members of the chorus may also contradict each other, providing a variety of points of view and revealing the ambivalence and complexity in the problems of the protagonists.

The significance of choral discussions goes beyond their immediate relevance to the main characters and plot. Trevor Johnson objects to the use of "Wessex chorus" as a general label for Hardy's rustics (especially in Under the Greenwood Tree) because these figures provide more than choral commentary; they represent "the continuing, stable, ordinary life" of their communities and some of them are interesting for their own sake. The traditions and values of the community are revealed when the rural natives gather at country inns, at work, at home, and at holiday celebrations. Barbara Hardy's discussion of the chorus in Eliot's novels stresses the contrasts between the isolated protagonists, with their tense and tragic plot developments, and the warm, humorous atmosphere of communal gatherings. Hardy points out that the chorus reveals the strengths and weaknesses of the community that can heal or destroy, providing a "formal correlative for the theme of isolation and connection." Occasionally background characters comment directly on the quality of their community. For example, a
tradesman calls Casterbridge "a old, hoary place o' wickedness."\textsuperscript{13}

The quaint discussions of supporting characters and choral groups also reveal their views on life in general, and touch on the most profound themes of the novel. Educated, perceptive men like Rev. Irwine and Dr. Kenn are used by Eliot as voices of her own ideals of communal fellowship and human responsibility. Yet uneducated, unsophisticated villagers like Dolly Winthrop and Hardy's rustics, with their ancient folk wisdom and rough experiences in life, also express the author's views. Sarah Burriss says the rustics present a simplified version of Hardy's philosophy,\textsuperscript{14} but their directness and simplicity also can be used to reflect the complexity of life's problems. Mrs. Penny, for example, realizes life contains "humps and holsters for the best of us."\textsuperscript{15} J. I. M. Stewart refers to the "immemorial choric wisdom" of these characters.\textsuperscript{16} Although the protagonists are the ones struggling with complex moral dilemmas, and the background characters may not be aware of the profound or ironic significance of their discussion, their contradictions, confusion at life's absurdities, and resignation to what fate brings add to the richness of the novel's examination of the problems in which the protagonists are immersed.\textsuperscript{17} While this study does not attempt to analyze fully the philosophic significance of the views of the rural natives, their comical or melancholy tales and
observations help reveal the authors' changing views of traditional rural life in these novels.

Eliot and Hardy chose the small rural communities as the setting for so many of their novels, and portrayed them with such affectionate detail, because of their strong attachments to the provincial homes of their childhoods. Eliot, separated from her Midlands home and family because of her intellectual life in London and her unorthodox relationship with George Henry Lewes, began by describing a Staffordshire village and farms when she first thought of writing fiction. In 1856 she began her first tale based on her own observations of the provincial clergy.¹⁸ The three stories called Scenes of Clerical Life depict ordinary clergymen struggling with their own sorrows and with the criticism of the small, old-fashioned parishes they serve. "Amos Barton," for example, portrays a wide range of villagers, from the workhouse indigent to the rather poor aristocrat, with the many scenes of gossip about Amos and his family problems as forerunners of the choral scenes in her later novels.

Hardy spent most of his life in his native Dorset, and none of his novels is set completely away from the southwestern counties he renamed Wessex. His first attempt at novel-writing, The Poor Man and the Lady, was never published and the manuscript was destroyed. Desperate Remedies
(1871), which he later called one of his "Novels of Ingenuity," was an unsuccessful attempt to combine a sensational plot with realistic human characters. Much of the story is set on a rural estate, where Farmer Springrove, the rector, the parish clerk, and other villagers have minor roles in the twists of the plot and discuss the mysterious events surrounding the lady of the manor and her friends. As in several of Hardy's later novels, the marriage of the young hero and heroine at the end is presented through the commentary of a group of village workers. Since the few rustic scenes in this novel were praised by reviewers, Hardy was encouraged to focus on the village life he remembered from his childhood in his subsequent novels.  

Adam Bede is Eliot's first full-length novel, while Under the Greenwood Tree is Hardy's first successful novel. Both portray idyllic communities with virtuous, industrious heroes—a carpenter, Adam Bede, and a tranter or hauler, Dick Dewey. Under the Greenwood Tree is Hardy's most light-hearted treatment of village life, in which the forces that threaten the community in his later novels appear in relatively mild forms, without destroying village unity or separating the protagonists. The regrettable loss of the village choir is accepted by the Mellstock natives, while the heroine who has been educated outside the village is integrated into her native community through her marriage to Dick. Adam Bede contains a tragic plot that leads to the
exile of Hetty Sorrel and Arthur Donnithorne from their homes, and threatens Adam's ties to the community for a time. At the end of both novels, however, the fortunes of the heroes are on the rise and their happy marriages provide celebrations of community harmony and continuity.

Although Under the Greenwood Tree is Hardy's shortest novel, these two novels depict the everyday life and communal gatherings of the village more fully and more positively than any of the other novels in this study. In Under the Greenwood Tree the whole church choir is the center of attention in the first half of the novel, until the focus shifts to Dick's courtship of Fancy Day. The happy, hard-working Dewey family is at the center of both plots, while the families of the main characters in Adam Bede also provide the primary representatives of community life. The Poyzers' wholesome farm life is portrayed in detail, and a whole book at the center of the novel is devoted to a gathering of the entire community, from squire to laborer. In both novels most of the supporting characters, as well as the heroes, demonstrate the diligence, human sympathy, and fellowship that are celebrated as the enduring virtues of traditional village life.

The Mill on the Floss and The Mayor of Casterbridge convey much gloomier views of provincial life in towns that are larger and more complex than the villages of the other four novels studied here, but these towns are still
old-fashioned and are tied closely to their rural surroundings. Edward Tulliver and Michael Henchard both decline from prosperity as middle class tradesmen to bankruptcy, and then die, as a result of their own rash, irresponsible, and vindictive behavior. The competitive economics of the market town and the concern with middle class respectability are important issues in both novels, yet the portrayals of the two communities are quite different.

The townspeople in Casterbridge play a small role in the background of Henchard's tragedy; among the rustics who comment on the main action are some of the most disreputable and pathetic characters in any of the rural novels of Eliot or Hardy, including some corrupt slum-dwellers and isolated, alienated victims of rural hardship, who provide a variety of reflections on Henchard's moral decay. The communal scenes show Henchard's decline in relation to Farfrae's rise in popularity and prosperity. There are some remnants of human sympathy, communal responsibility, and genial comradeship shown in Casterbridge, and Farfrae and Elizabeth-Jane adjust to social changes successfully, but the emphasis is on the hardships and deterioration of rural life. Family life is no longer a reliable source of unity and harmony in the communities of this novel and *The Mill on the Floss*. Henchard sells his wife when he is a homeless hay-trusser, and alienates his daughter when his family returns to him. The Tullivers, unlike the Henchards, are surrounded by a
wide variety of family members and community representatives, but their financial disgrace and Maggie's later scandal destroy them in their materialistic and class conscious society. Tulliver's conflicts with lawyers and in-laws lead to his downfall, while his son, Tom, inherits a single-minded devotion to revenge and reparation that divides him from family and all community life except work. The daughter, Maggie, feels bound to her home by loving memories, but after her relationship with Stephen Guest is revealed, although some of her friends give her the sympathy and loyalty she needs, the strict code of her Dodson relatives and other influential members of her community, based on unalterable standards of respectability, make a continuation of life in St. Ogg's impossible for her.

Eliot and Hardy both followed these novels of provincial town life with one more novel set within a single rural village. *Silas Marner* contains a more positive vision of village life than that of Hardy's later rural novels, although the legendary quality of the tale, with the outcast from the city joining the community only when his hoard of gold is replaced miraculously by the child he adopts, emphasizes that this is an idealized view of the rural life of the past, and, as Eliot said, of "the remedial influences of pure, natural human relations."20 Moreover, the community representatives convey, with a blend of humor and realism, the weaknesses as well as the strengths of the rural mentality.
There are coarseness, ignorance, and superstition in the villagers, as well as in the rural gentry. The subplot reveals negligence and moral corruption in the squire's family. Godfrey Cass is reformed by a virtuous wife, but they have a limited, childless life; his real daughter, Eppie, remains loyal to the humble villagers who raised her, including Dolly Winthrop, a benevolent, articulate spokeswoman for traditional rural values and folk wisdom.

In The Woodlanders there is also an important female supporting character, Marty South, but she is the passive victim of harsh rural labor and hopeless love. Rather than helping the hero find happiness in the community, she can only close the novel with a poignant eulogy to the virtuous woodlander, Giles, who dies a pathetic death in a chivalrous but foolhardy sacrifice to protect the reputation of Marty's rival for his love, Grace Melbury. The other inhabitants of their isolated village are primarily observers who comment on the disruptions caused by the sophisticated outsiders, Charmond and Fitzpiers. Grace's education in urban society and her father's misguided social ambitions for her create the central conflicts between the desire for status and refinement, and loyalty to Giles, her childhood sweetheart in her native village. This novel ends with a gloomy and ironic view of the debility and decay of traditional rural life, as Grace returns to her faithless husband, with a chorus of workmen and her disillusioned father providing
ironic comments on her slim chances for happiness. Although Grace develops a nostalgic longing for the simple, happy village life of her childhood, she could never find contentment by rejoining that life, and there is no evidence in any of the younger generation that the old-fashioned life of this village buried in the woods will be perpetuated.

These six novels are discussed in chronological order in the following chapters. Eliot's three were written close together in the first phase of her writing career, while the three by Hardy span a wider portion of his more prolific novel-writing years. Although _Under the Greenwood Tree_ was selected for this study because of its focus on the village choir as a group, and because it contains Hardy's earliest and happiest view of village life, the two "Novels of Character and Environment" that come after it, _Far from the Madding Crowd_ (1874) and _The Return of the Native_ (1878), are just as important in the development of Hardy's view of the rural community. Therefore, a brief introduction to these novels will provide background for the references to their characters and communities made for purposes of comparison in the chapters on Hardy.

After selecting a community of stable families, loving couples, and loyal old comrades as the focus of a whole short novel, _Under the Greenwood Tree_, to show how village unity could be preserved in spite of internal limitations and external pressures, Hardy began to explore characters
and problems that could not be accommodated by the simple values of the traditional rural community. *Far from the Madding Crowd* focuses on farm life in the neighborhood of Weatherbury. Michael Steig calls it "Hardy's last work . . . to affirm confidently a faith in the agricultural community as a source of value, as a touchstone for the human condition."21 Gabriel Oak, an exceptionally talented shepherd and farm manager, wins Bathsheba Everdene after they both experience a series of misfortunes and frustrations. Bathsheba's first husband and her other suitor who becomes obsessed with her both die before the peace of the farm community can be restored. Both men have violated the values of the community in their mismanagement of the farms, as well as in their personal relationships. Although some of the communal scenes are disrupted by their misguided and antagonistic actions, the many scenes of everyday life on the farm dramatize the shared work and comradeship that bring Gabriel and Bathsheba closer together in the end.

*The Return of the Native* represents a midpoint in Hardy's view of the ability of the rural community to endure. It is set on Egdon Heath, with more emphasis on natural decay and the isolation and fragmentation of the inhabitants. Clym Yeobright ends up alone, torn apart with guilt over the deaths of his mother and wife, living out a rather feeble realization of his idealistic goal of bringing moral improvement to the heathfolk. In this novel it is only the
supporting characters, Thomasin and Diggory Venn, who provide the traditional happy ending through their marriage, after the deaths of Clym's wife, Eustacia, and Thomasin's irresponsible husband, Wildeve. Moreover, Hardy added in a footnote to the book that if it were not for the demands of serial publication, he would have written a more consistent ending, in which Venn remains a weird reddie man on the heath, leaving Thomasin a lonely widow. These two novels contain some of Hardy's most colorful rustic background characters, whose comic antics and quaint discussions, as well as their involvement in some of the ironic coincidences that mar the lives of the protagonists, reveal a growing emphasis on the inherent weaknesses of the old rural community.

Previous critical discussions of the rural characters in the novels of Eliot and Hardy have often focused on their historical and sociological origins, and their significance in the development of realism in the novel. Eliot's own critical essays, especially "The Natural History of German Life," have been used to document her doctrine of realism in literary portrayals of ordinary people. In this essay she argues that stereotypes of merry, carefree rustics in picturesque garb are unacceptable in the social novel. Her insistence on the author's moral obligation to extend the reader's sympathy by portraying the struggles and motives of the masses as they really are is the basis of her own
efforts at presenting realistically the ordinary strengths and weaknesses of her characters.\textsuperscript{23} Hardy's later essay, "The Dorsetshire Labourer," refutes the opposite stereotype of agricultural workers as uniformly ignorant and squalid. He discusses the advantages and disadvantages in the farm laborer's way of life, and in the migrations and other changes brought about by recent economic developments.\textsuperscript{24} This mixed view of rural life appears in his novels; he conveys regret for the loss of old traditions like the village choir, but he also acknowledges the inevitability of change and the improvements it could bring for those who labor under harsh and degrading conditions.

William J. Hyde's articles on realism in each of these authors point out that they both avoided naturalistic portrayals of the harshest conditions and lowest classes of agricultural life, preferring to select character traits and situations that reflect the human dignity and inner strength of rural England.\textsuperscript{25} Their theories about viewing ordinary people realistically were tempered by their artistic decisions to idealize the elements of rural life they found most valuable. As Hyde explains, and as the selection of supporting characters in these novels shows, Hardy used more agricultural workers in his novels than Eliot did, but they both focused on independent artisans and tradesmen, rather than on the lowest peasants.
Although this study does not attempt to analyze the supporting characters and communities in relation to the real communities and inhabitants of the Midlands and Southwest of England in the nineteenth century, a number of studies discussing their historical origins have provided helpful background information. The places and people used by Eliot and Hardy in their novels have been explored at length by many literary historians, especially in the case of Hardy's Wessex, because he recorded the landscape, architecture, folklore, and customs of the area in great detail in many novels. Merryn Williams' *Thomas Hardy and Rural England* relates Hardy's novels to their historical background and to other rural writings of the period, including Eliot's works. Michael Millgate's *Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist* carefully documents the evolution of Hardy's conception of Wessex, with historical and biographical material related to each novel. Two fairly recent full-length studies analyze the artistic uses of the rural settings in each of these authors: Henry Auster's *Local Habitations: Regionalism in the Early Novels of George Eliot* and Andrew Enstice's *Thomas Hardy: Landscapes of the Mind*.

Another related area of investigation involves the use of the pastoral tradition in these rural novels. As Michael Squires is careful to point out, the label "pastoral novel" can be used only with the recognition that this type of novel "fuses pastoral attitudes with realistic subject
manner." When characters that are literal rather than allegorical are presented with a sense of nostalgia which tends to idealize some aspects of country life and soften its harshest elements, the total effect is "sympathetic realism." 28 Squires and others have developed varying interpretations of the use of the pastoral in these novels. Charles May, for example, has labeled Far from the Madding Crowd and The Woodlanders "grotesque pastorals." 29 While this study does not relate the supporting characters and their communities to literary traditions such as the pastoral, these critics provide insights into the authors' attitudes toward traditional rural life.

The general significance of the community in Victorian novels has also been studied by many critics. As J. Hillis Miller's chapter on "Self and Community" points out, protagonists in Victorian novels are not completely isolated and not fulfilled within their communities, but are struggling to complete themselves in relation to other people. Through the characters' experiences "the novelist can discover . . . not only the nature of selfhood, but also the nature of the community." Miller argues that, having lost their belief in "an extra-human foundation" for the self and community, Victorian writers attempt to depict society "as created by people in their living together." 30 The small, familiar rural community was for Eliot and Hardy an appropriate starting point for their individual revaluations of Victorian
society and human life, as Raymond Williams stresses in his study of the literary significance of English rural and urban communities and settings, *The Country and the City*. His chapters on Eliot and Hardy trace the development from Eliot's "knowable" communities of the past and the unstable, struggling rural society of Hardy's Wessex, to the focus in both authors' later works on more modern problems of individuals who find themselves divided from others and from their society. There are many studies of social analysis in the novels of Eliot and Hardy that consider the significance of the rural community in a broader context. Two of the most recent books on these authors include Philip Fisher's *Making Up Society: The Novels of George Eliot*, which charts the successive novels' gradual loss of faith in the moral value of the traditional community, and relates Eliot's exploration of new ways for expressing the self and society to problems with form in the social novel. The relationship between the individual and the rural community is also an important issue in *Unity in Hardy's Novels*, in which Peter J. Casagrande analyzes Hardy's "deterioristic mode of regard" by comparing the "novels of return" and "novels of restoration."

Thus the significance of the rural characters and their communities in these novels reaches far beyond historical or biographical interest in Eliot and the Midlands or Hardy and
Wessex. Although Hardy pointed out in his "General Preface" to the Wessex novels that one of his goals was "to preserve for my own satisfaction a fairly true record of a vanishing life," he also asserted that the people portrayed "were meant to be typically and essentially those of any and every place." He defended the narrow geographical scope of his novels by acknowledging that "there was quite enough human nature in Wessex for one man's literary purpose."\(^{34}\) While Eliot used some quite different English and foreign settings in her novels after *Silas Marner*, her focus on the provincial community in many of her novels is as significant in her development as a novelist as Hardy's uses of Wessex are in his novel-writing career. In their protagonists they explored complex human passions and motivations, but the supporting characters who surround the protagonists represent the background of conventional values and ordinary intellects that can help or inhibit the individual striving for integration into a human community. The selection of supporting characters to represent particular communities, their varied roles in different novels, the attitudes they express, and their relations with the main characters provide insight into the authors' developing views of human nature and society.
NOTES--CHAPTER I


2 Harvey points out in his comparison of the "card" and the "ficelle" that great novelists can combine types, "can so blend freedom and discipline that the categories no longer apply," Character and the Novel, p. 63.

3 Character and the Novel, p. 56.


5 Sankey mentions "special jobs" Hardy's minor figures perform, such as producing or carrying out an event like the skimmity-ride in The Mayor of Casterbridge (p. 87).

6 Harvey stresses Eliot's frequent use of secondary characters, such as Mrs. Poyser, as "an ironic frame which qualifies our response to the protagonists," in The Art of George Eliot (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961), p. 159. Barbara Hardy points out that some characters have obvious moral significance, while others who seem to be playing "character" roles or comedy roles may have a "disguised relevance" to the main issues, in The Novels of George Eliot: A Study in Form (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959; rpt. 1967), pp. 78-79.

7 Art of George Eliot, p. 159. Sankey notes that minor characters may "embody forces which oppose the protagonist." He also stresses Hardy's "knack of embodying ordinary traits distinctly" and his "habit of fairness to run-of-the-mill human motive." Protagonists like Michael Henchard are shown in "a world made up of people governed by ordinary motives," pp. 86-87.


12 The Novels of George Eliot, pp. 21-22.

13 The Mayor of Casterbridge, p. 83.

14 Burriss, p. 30.


17 Sankey says Hardy views the "English folkways as a workable but essentially illogical way of coming to terms with an illogical world," p. 87.


33 Unity in Hardy's Novels (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1982).

CHAPTER II. ADAM BEDE

Adam Bede is George Eliot's most ambitious attempt to portray with carefully accumulated detail the scope and texture of the traditional rural community. Although Eliot originally conceived it as one of the short Scenes of Clerical Life, this story outgrew the title "Clerical Life" when she decided to combine the incident based on her Methodist aunt's visit to a condemned girl in prison with some elements from her father's life as a carpenter, overseer, and surveyor of lands. As she told her publisher, "I am inclined to take a large canvas for it, and write a novel." "It will be a country story--full of the breath of cows and the scent of hay."¹ We are told in the first paragraph that the author's sorcery is transporting us to Burge's workshop in Hayslope on the afternoon of June 18, 1799, and the main story ends "on a rimey morning in departing November," 1801.² The Epilogue, set in late June, 1807, refers to the opening scene on a June evening nine years before, when Adam Bede was seen at the same workshop and house where he now lives with his own family (p. 447). The precise attention to details of time, place, weather, and the seasonal cycles has been noted by many critics as contributing to the realistic portrayal of the traditional
rural village and the sense of rhythm, order, and continuity so crucial to its inhabitants. 3

The importance of the community in Eliot's first novel is recognized in Dorothy Van Ghent's comment that "it is the community that is the protagonist of this novel, the community as the repository of certain shared and knowledgeable values that have been developed out of ages of work and care and common kindness." 4 Although Adam himself is unquestionably the novel's center of interest, he embodies, in more heroic dimensions that Hardy's idealized rustic protagonists such as Dick Dewey or Gabriel Oak, the beneficent, unifying, and enduring influences of the most valuable elements of traditional community life. He and the other main characters represent several classes of rural society. Adam is a village artisan, Hetty Sorrel is a tenant farmer's niece, and Arthur Donnithorne is heir to the local squire. Dinah Morris is initially an outsider who analyzes the comfortable and complacent Hayslope lifestyle and refuses to join it. But she is also niece to the Poyzers, who insist that her home should be with her kin. Eventually she is integrated into their community through her marriage to Adam, leaving her occupation of urban mill worker and the public duties of her vocation of Methodist minister to the poor, when she becomes a Hayslope wife and mother.

The broad range of supporting characters and background figures who surround these four are all identified by their
roles in the community. The supporting characters consist primarily of the main characters' families: Squire Donnithorne, the stingy landlord; the Poysers, exemplary tenant farmers; and the Bedes, an artisan family distinguished by the father's reputation for drunkenness and the mother's ceaseless complaining, problems that burden the exceptional son, Adam, who outshines his less talented but faithful Methodist brother, Seth. Bartle Massey, the local school-master, brings education to the Hayslope workmen and moral support to his former pupil, Adam, although his antagonism toward women and unknown past in the south separate him from the network of families that form the foundation of village life through each generation. The rector, Mr. Irwine, is a more influential voice in the parish of Hayslope, especially during Adam's and Arthur's crisis.

A wide variety of background characters fills in the survey of rural life, from the insipid spinster daughters of the gentry to the village and farm laborers and servants at the Hall and Hall Farm. Several of these characters stand out because of the attention paid to their individual characterization and their significant choral comments. Mrs. Irwine and Mr. Casson maintain aloof and snobbish perspectives, Mr. Craig and Chad's Bess have functional roles in relation to Hetty, and Joshua Rann is the amusing village shoemaker and parish clerk who speaks out against the Methodists.
Those who represent the workers from the lower levels of rural society reveal the ignorance and coarseness of the common provincial mentality. When describing the "true rustic\[s\]" in a group, the narrator refers to them as "those heavy clowns taking holiday in a dingy pot-house, those rounded backs and stupid weather-beaten faces," or the "slouching labourer" who has "a slow bovine gaze" and is "almost as incapable of an undertone as a cow or stag" (pp. 17, 153). Eliot's commitment to realism in the novel prompted her to point out that "the bucolic character at Hayslope . . . was not of that entirely genial, merry, broad-grinning sort, apparently observed in most districts visited by artists" (p. 433). However, the harsher realities of rural life are kept in the background and viewed only from a distance. Eliot does not include details showing the hardships of the poor and homeless, nor does she give humble and ignorant laborers significant roles in the plot or in choral discussions, as Hardy does in many novels. Eliot says, "The jocose talk of haymakers is best at a distance" (p. 177).\(^5\) The brief character sketches of simple laborers at Massey's night-school and the Poysers' Harvest Supper reveal their rough and vulgar attributes, but there is also admiration for their diligence, decency, and humor. At the school, Adam identifies with "three rough animals . . . making humble efforts to learn how they might become human" (p. 200).
Both the strengths and weaknesses of the ordinary provincial mentality surface in the most complex rural protagonists and contribute to the novel's central crisis, by helping or inhibiting their ability to struggle with the problems that threaten their relations within their families and community. Hetty's animal qualities and the parallels with Chad's Bess are the most explicit examples of this connection, emphasizing the excessive vanity and lack of feeling that lead to Hetty's irresponsible actions and exile from Eayslope. More important to the novel's positive vision of the enduring values of traditional village life, however, is the combination of proud independence, integrity, and loyalty revealed in the communal background, which provides a foundation for the exceptional virtues of Adam and the Poyzers, enabling them to continue their peaceful and productive lives in the community after tragic suffering.

Most of the background characters appear primarily in the group scenes scattered throughout the novel. Besides the everyday scenes which emphasize the importance of work for the villagers (and the lack of work for the gentry), there is a series of rituals and celebrations dramatizing the strengths and limitations of traditional values. Dinah's Methodist preaching to common workers on the village green in Book I reveals moral weaknesses and spiritual needs that are not accommodated sufficiently by the familiar ritual of
Mr. Irwine's traditional church service in Book II. Arthur's coming-of-age feast and the Ploysers' Harvest Supper are two secular celebrations that focus on class relations at different levels of rural society, before and after the young squire's violation of communal responsibility--his seduction of Hetty--tests the stability and endurance of the community. Finally, the wedding at the end of the novel celebrates the unity and continuity of Hayslope after the recovery from a tragic crisis. Although none of these events is overshadowed by conflict or corruption to the extent that many of the communal scenes in later novels are, they all show the realities of rural life and the human failings of the protagonists in relation to the ideals of mutual trust and respect, neighborly sympathy, and communal harmony.

The first half of the novel provides a leisurely survey of Hayslope life. The third book is devoted to the birthday feast, while the earlier chapter titles indicate the emphasis on detailed scenes showing the daily life of the village in progress, at the workshop, the Dede cottage, the Hall Farm, the church, and the night-school. As Barbara Hardy observes, "it is the static domestic scene which is free from crisis that George Eliot used to solidify and stabilize her novels" and to give "an impression of the flow of real and ordinary life." Although these scenes are never completely separate from the character analysis and
actions that culminate in a tragic crisis, the first seven chapters in particular are devoted primarily to establish-
ing the physical and social context for the characters, showing them interacting with family and community, while the following chapters begin to examine the protagonists more closely in isolation and in relation to each other.\textsuperscript{8} Mr. Poyser, Bartle Massey, and the squire are the only supporting characters who do not appear until Book II, but we become acquainted with some of their traits and values earlier. Moreover, our first impressions of most of the characters are determined by comments or attitudes attributed to others before they appear or during their intial interactions, reflecting the importance of social roles and public reputations in the communities of Eliot's novels. The ways in which characters are introduced in relation to others often provide subtle and ironic anticipations of major plot developments.

\textbf{Introductory Views of Adam's Community and Family}

In chapter 2 the innkeeper, Mr. Casson, helps introduce us to some of the characters through the rather awkward de-
vice of a conversation with an anonymous traveler, who sur-
veys the village scene before he rides off (to reappear in chapter 45 as the magistrate who lets Dinah into the prison). This discussion before Casson joins the villagers provides a bridge from the detached, conventional outsider's view
into closer observation and participation in village life. Moreover, Casson is a good example of a choral commentator whose character and social position slant the impressions he gives us of other characters. First the narrator draws attention to his ridiculous appearance and attitudes, with a satiric character sketch providing a comic pause before Dinah's sermon turns the village skeptics and jokers into rapt and repentant listeners. The detailed description of Casson's absurd, rotund figure undercuts his pompous "sense of personal dignity." His non-native background provides him with a perspective that is more detached than that of the other villagers, but it is not entirely an objective view, since he feels his upbringing among the gentry, his fifteen years as a butler to the Donnithornes, and his "present high position" make him superior to the common folk with whom he must now mingle (p. 13). He thus assumes "an air of contemptuous indifference," although he is as curious about the gathering on the green as the rest of the village (p. 14).

Because of this assumed superiority and bias in favor of the gentry (whose language he mistakenly thinks he imitates), Casson points out to the traveler only the "fine hoaks" on the picturesque property of Squire Donnithorne and the "fine doins" that will occur when Arthur comes of age (p. 15). The other references to the squire which occur in the early chapters before he makes his brief appearances
reveal that all on the estate is not "fine" under his stingy management of his property and grandson. Casson's answer to the stranger's question about the parson's attitude to the Methodist preacher also dwells on the issue of social status. Parson Irwine lives away from Hayslope because its parsonage is "not fit for gentry to live in" and as innkeeper Casson knows "he sets great store by" his horse (p. 14). This time Casson's comments match our other early impressions of Irwine. He does enjoy a relaxed and luxurious home life, and Adam has already mentioned in chapter 1 that Irwine is not too concerned about the Methodist influence in Hayslope, although Adam knows this attitude is based on a sensible tolerance for the religion of others; we see later that Irwine is more involved in the ordinary life of Hayslope than are the rest of the gentry.

Casson's allusions to the Poysers and Dinah coincide with the other early references to the Poysers' respected position in the community and the incongruity of their niece's sex and appearance with her strange vocation. It is true, as Casson points out to the stranger, that the Poysers do not care for Dinah's lifestyle as a preacher, although they are not concerned just with social appearances as Casson might think. Even though he himself suggests that Dinah is "making a fool of herself" and may go "stark starin' mad" like the other "Methodisses" (p. 15), he later reprimands the village workers for joking about the pretty
preacher and Seth Bede, as they had done in the first chapter as well. Casson's rigid class consciousness leads him astray when he tells the villagers Dinah's "kin wouldn't like her to demean herself to a common carpenter" (p. 19). Ben argues that Dinah is a poor mill worker (just as Hetty is a penniless niece) and that the Poysers treat Seth's brother Adam like a nephew. Ironically, Adam becomes engaged to both nieces and marries Dinah; the narrator points out later that "those were times when there was no rigid demarcation of rank between the farmer and the respectable artisan," although Poyser might not want his own daughter to marry a carpenter (pp. 84-85).

Ben's comment on the Poysers' friendship with Adam leads to further arguments on the relative merits of Adam and Seth. The first chapter has shown that Ben feels antagonistic toward Adam on that particular day, and some of Casson's comments on Adam are also biased. He tells the stranger Adam is "a little lifted up an' peppery-like" (p. 16). Later at the birthday feast we see even more clearly that Casson is jealous of the attention Adam receives from the gentry, but his remark nevertheless pinpoints Adam's primary character flaw. It is an example of the kind of ironic commentary so common in The Mill on the Floss and Middlemarch, when limited characters make revealing remarks in the context of their own ignorance or misguided motivations. Barbara Hardy calls Casson's comment
"the crudest outside view" of Adam's "unimaginative rigidity." Yet when the stranger admires Adam's appearance and demeanor, Casson also admits that "he's an uncommon clever stiddy fellow, an' wonderful strong," a villager known by all and admired by Arthur and Irwine (pp. 15-16). Throughout the first half of the novel the narrator's praise of Adam's virtue is supported by comments from Irwine, the Poysers, and others, culminating in the honors he receives at the birthday feast when he is appointed estate overseer.

Before Casson's superficial survey of the village, chapter 1 introduces Adam dramatically, hard at work in the carpentry shop. The narrator's initial analysis of his "tall stalwartness" and "good-humoured honest intelligence" and the contrast with his pious but plainer and less accomplished brother, Seth, create a heroic portrait which is qualified by subsequent comments and actions. The narrator's observation that "idle tramps always felt sure they could get a copper from Seth" but "scarcely ever spoke to Adam" (p. 6) introduces his rigidity and lack of sympathy for weaker mortals, traits which are demonstrated in his initial interactions with his co-workers and mother. He reprimands his fellow workers for their lax habits and irreverent jokes and even uses physical violence when Wiry Ben teases his brother, but Seth makes peace and says, "You know Adam will have his way" (p. 7). While Wiry Ben and Mum Taft
dislike Adam's moralizing and glorification of work, Sandy Jim applauds Adam's outburst as "the best sarmunt I've heared this long while" (p. 10).

Adam's rigid moral principles and impatience with others' failings are further dramatized in his first scene at home. His mother Lisbeth appears in the static role she maintains throughout the novel--the adoring, possessive mother and the incessantly complaining housewife. She is blind to the frustration and aversion built up in her favorite son by her constant crying and nagging. His impatience with "her 'nattering' habit" (p. 41) and his father's drinking and irresponsibility are justifiable, but Adam's reactions in this first scene, when he insists on staying up alone to finish his father's work, illustrate his hot-headed and stubborn tendencies. Barbara Hardy describes his rejection of his favorite dish of "taters" Lisbeth has saved for him as a breach of private ritual, a symbolic rejection of his family.12

After the wayward father is found drowned in the morning, however, Adam regrets his pride and intolerance. The significance of this episode is revealed more fully during the later crisis that separates Adam from those he loves outside the family, Arthur and Hetty. When Arthur asks him, at the end of Book V, if he has never regretted deeds of his own, Adam remembers his hardness to his father, a lesson which helps him recover his old fellow-feeling for Arthur.
His father's death frees Adam from a family burden, while grieving Lisbeth sees it as the end of her useful existence. Her superstitions and narrow pessimistic views, her preoccupation with material household details and the proper rituals for burial, and her maternal favoritism for her first-born and jealousy at the thought of his future wife, dramatize the restrictive and negative aspects of the aging village housewife's role. Her joys are all in the past, when her husband and sons depended on her for all their love and nurturing. During the significant events in her life within the novel, her husband's funeral and Adam's honors at the birthday feast, she is torn between feelings of self-importance and pride, and her self-centered grief and jealousy; at the feast she worries that Adam's new position would place him "out of her reach." Thus "she wished she had all the old troubles back again, for then it mattered more to Adam what his mother said and did" (p. 237). Only the saintly Dinah can appease this fretful old woman, so that when Adam marries Dinah, Lisbeth for once does not mar her son's happiness, for she is "too busy with her pride in her son, and her delight in possessing the one daughter she had desired, to devise a single pretext for complaint" (p. 446).

The annoying traits of the mother are balanced by the patience and pieties of Adam's less colorful but virtuous brother, Seth, who tries to keep Lisbeth from nagging Adam.
While Seth lacks Adam's hot temper and inflexibility, he also lacks Adam's practical talents, strong will, and common sense, as the workshop scene shows. Dinah's rejection of his marriage proposal early in the novel, to which Seth submits meekly, is a mild scene of disappointed love, unlike Adam's later ordeal. It also shows Dinah's reluctance to accept the personal love and comforts of family life in a prosperous village. Seth's sad thoughts of Dinah at Arthur's birthday dance emphasize her detachment from the worldly joys of community life. Although Adam says Seth, the devout and dreamy Methodist, has "the same way o' thinking as Dinah" (p. 120), Adam's own deep affections and down-to-earth attitudes prove to be the right match for Dinah's quiet spiritual nature in the end. Seth's happy acceptance of his role as Dinah's brother rather than her husband makes him a saint rather than a realistic human character, but he embodies the ideal of unconditional family loyalty and pure sympathy. He is the first to comfort Adam after Hetty disappears, even though the brothers are not in the habit of discussing their feelings and Seth lacks Dinah's experience and insight into human nature. His help during Adam's romantic crises is thus limited, yet he is part of the stable family life that binds Adam to the community throughout his ordeal. Seth appreciates the long and deep suffering that draws Adam, his family, Dinah, and the Poysers all closer together in the end.
This pathetic family group in which Adam is placed at the beginning of the novel, with the whining mother, the father whom we see only in his disgraceful death, and the kind but ineffectual brother, does not provide much inspiration for Adam, but instead their shortcomings emphasize both the exceptional virtues which place him above the ordinary village workers and his excessive intolerance. Yet the parents have not always been a negative influence. Bartle Massey sums up Lisbeth's character by saying, "The mother's a whimpering thing . . . however, she's a straight-backed, clean woman, none of your slatterns" (pp. 351-52). Although Adam treats his mother with less patience than does the self-sacrificing and envious Seth, he is usually kind and gentle with her even when he is asserting his independence. His hot-headed threats to leave home are never carried out, for duty to one's family is a deeply ingrained precept of the village code. Adam, as well as his mother, remembers the happier days when his father cared for them and taught the sons their trade. The Bedes had raised their sons "with an inheritance of affections nurtured by a simple family life of common need and common industry, and an inheritance of faculties trained in skilful courageous labour," making them valuable members of the community (p. 181).
Hetty and the Ploysers

Hetty Sorrel has had the same kind of upbringing among a more productive and lovable family, the Ploysers, but in her case the contrast in family character emphasizes her faults. Like Adam, the Ploysers are more diligent and responsible than ordinary members of their class, and they are intolerant of poor work and negligence. The bustling life of their farm, with its atmosphere of love and family loyalty, reveal Hetty's vanity and frivolity. Her shallowness is also introduced by allusions to her character before the narrator rhapsodizes in the dairy scene on the beauty which blinds Adam and others to her faults. In the third chapter Dinah worries about the "poor wandering lamb," and Seth knows she will never make Adam happy (although he realizes love is a "deep mystery," p. 30). Lisbeth calls Hetty a "bit of a wench" more useless than a gillyflower, another example of a comment that is more relevant than the reader might think at first, given the context of Lisbeth's mood of fretful jealousy (p. 40).

Later in the novel Totty's reluctance to go to Hetty and Mrs. Poyser's constant scolding at her "feather-headed" ways provide recurrent dramatization of and choral commentary on Hetty's lack of feeling. Even Mrs. Poyser cannot help being fascinated by the girl's beauty, but her keen observations that Hetty's "heart's as hard as a pebble" and that
the "tender-hearted" servant Molly cares more about the family than Hetty does support the narrator's analogy of Hetty as a plant that blossoms but has no roots (pp. 132-33). Mrs. Poyser does her duty to her husband's niece by teaching her all the household tasks of which she herself is such an exacting manager. But Hetty lives in a foolish world of her own, looking at her reflection in the oak table she must polish so carefully, dreaming of a life of luxury, and hiding her frivolous earrings and trinkets from the critical eye of her aunt. Her conscience consists solely of a fear of shame and a vain concern for what others think of her, whether it is her family, the villagers, or Arthur Donnithorne.

Hetty's indulgent uncle, always less critical than his wife, is blinded like Adam and thus encourages his courtship of Hetty, believing she'll "be all right when she's got a good husband and children of her own" (p. 133). Hetty's rootlessness: her lack of affection for the old house, the children and older folks, and all associations with the past; and her lack of sympathy for the feelings of others (demonstrated by her indifference when Adam's father dies) are severe violations of rural family loyalty and Eliot's moral code in all her novels. Hetty's grandfather is provoked into an unusually long outburst when Hetty wants to leave the family to become a lady's maid. He attributes her waywardness to her inheritance from her mother, since
he is still resentful that the latter ran off with a nobody with "on'y two head o' stock" on his farm. His son agrees that Hetty's taking a wage would be a disgrace, for "my family's ate their own bread and cheese as fur back as anybody knows" (p. 284).

Thus the Poyzers dramatize the sturdy virtues of the ideal farm family, with their proud dedication to work, independence, cleanliness, hospitality, honesty, and all the deeply rooted principles of traditional rural morality and religion. They provide choral commentary on most of the major characters and events in the novel, especially in the two largest communal scenes, the church service and the birthday feast, when the narrator follows the Poyzers from home to the event to give a detailed depiction of their way of life and attitudes. Gentle, jolly Mr. Poyser is slow and sparing with his speech and lax in his attitudes toward most weaknesses except bad farming. But he does speak up when provoked by examples of negligence or impropriety, or when a ceremony such as Arthur's birthday requires a speech; he is also "secretly proud of his wife's superior power of putting two and two together" when her sharp tongue and mind full of folk wisdom and witty proverbs cause her to "supply a running commentary" on everything that affects their farm (p. 161). Many critics have commented on the Poyzers as the moral center of the novel; although a few believe their idyllic farm life and colorful
characters command too much of our attention, the detailed
descriptions of daily routine in the farmyard, house, and
garden are blended with the plot developments which unite
the lives of all four main characters. It is a sympa-
thetic setting for the loves and sorrows of Adam, and an
ironic setting for the beginnings of the tragic union be-
tween Hetty, who fails to absorb the family's values, and
Arthur, who betrays the trust placed in him as the future
squire.

The Poyzers and Adam are almost uprooted from their
native soil, and the stability of the traditional community
is nearly destroyed when this union brings into conflict
two of their most deeply ingrained values—their awe of and
respect for the privileges of the gentry and their pride in
their family honor and reputation. The narrator points out
that "nearly sixty years ago ... a gentleman with a white
hand was dazzling as an Olympian god" to an "uneducated ... 
simple farmer's girl" like Hetty, whose "little silly imagi-
nation" dreams of marrying the handsome gentleman who
flirts with her (p. 87). Arthur, on the other hand, is
fully aware that "no gentleman, out of a ballad, could marry
a farmer's niece" (p. 119). His first speeches in the
novel, on his admiration for the work of the Poyzers and
Adam, and his desire to improve the estate for their benefit,
provide background for the tragic consequences when he
violates their trust and must leave the estate. After he
first kisses Hetty, his attraction to her immediately conflicts with his fear of offending his honorable tenants:

But this little thing would be spoken ill of directly, if she happened to be seen walking with him; and then those excellent people, the Poysers, to whom a good name was as precious as if they had the best blood in the land in their veins—he should hate himself if he made a scandal of that sort, on the estate that was to be his own some day, and among tenants by whom he liked, above all, to be respected. . . . He couldn't imagine himself in that position; it was too odious, too unlike him. (p. 119)

Unfortunately, both Arthur's and Hetty's fears of shame are based on an egoistic concern for what others think of them, rather than on a deep sense of family honor or personal morality, and neither is capable of resisting temptation.

When Hetty disappears, lenient and optimistic Mr. Poysers, believing she has simply fled from her fiancé in confusion, refuses to turn his back on her at the first wrong she has done. When news of her arrest for child murder reaches the village, however, the limits of his family loyalty and the consequences of his fierce family pride are revealed. He says he will pay for Hetty's defense but never see her again. Mr. Poysers and the grandfather are grief-stricken at their immediate decision that they must leave their home and be buried in strange graves, rather than live on land owned by the man who "has brought shame on respectable folks":
Before ten o'clock on Thursday morning the home at the Hall Farm was a house of mourning for a misfortune felt to be worse than death. The sense of family dishonour was too keen even in the kind-hearted Martin Poyser the younger, to leave room for any compassion towards Hetty. He and his father were simple-minded farmers, proud of their untarnished character, proud that they came of a family which had held up its head and paid its way as far back as its name was in the parish register; and Hetty had brought disgrace on them all—disgrace that could never be wiped out. That was the all-conquering feeling in the mind both of father and son—the scorching sense of disgrace, which neutralised all other sensibility; and Mr. Irwine was struck with surprise to observe that Mrs. Poyser was less severe than her husband. We are often startled by the severity of mild people on exceptional occasions; the reason is, that mild people are most liable to be under the yoke of traditional impressions.

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After the trial Poyser and Adam agree together to "go out o' hearing o' that man's name," although Poyser is convinced he and his children will never escape the ignominy of having a convicted and transported relation (p. 387). His mournful sense of disgrace at Hetty's crime complements Adam's hot-headed desire for revenge against Arthur, but Arthur's repentance and self-exile influence Adam to stay and improve the estate, and the Poyser are persuaded to do the same. Thus the continuity of the community is restored when its most vital members turn from their sorrows to renewed devotion to their work, and the corrupt gentry are removed, with the old squire dead and Arthur leaving his plans for improving the estate in the care of Irwine.
While the rigid traditional principles of the male Poyser family give them a vision of inescapable homelessness and disgrace, Mrs. Poyser shows more imagination and resilience in a crisis. Early in the novel she demonstrates the same family pride and concern for propriety and public image, bustling and scolding because she does not want the gentry to see her kitchen or dairy unless they are in a state of spotless perfection. When she jumps to the conclusion that Dinah has brought disgrace on the family and they will be turned out of their home, even though "folks must put up wi' their own kin, as they put up wi' their own noses," her outburst provides an amusing and ironic foreshadowing of the disgrace Hetty will bring (p. 69). But when the real crisis comes, for the first time she is less pessimistic than Mr. Poyser and is "almost overawed by her husband's unusual hardness and decision" (p. 347). She has enough foresight and common sense to see that, as long as parents and children are together, the children could thrive in a new parish and their innocence need not be tainted forever by their cousin's crimes. As Eliot's later novels demonstrate, the unity and love within the small family group are more important moral and social forces than public reputation or the connections with a particular piece of land or community.

Moreover, Mrs. Poyser is more active than her husband in speaking out and resisting injustice and detrimental
restriction or changes imposed by the gentry. She curtsies and trembles at Arthur's first arrival in the novel, for "in those days the keenest of bucolic minds felt a whispering awe at the sight of the gentry" as if they were gods, but she does not let this habit of reverence sway her as Hetty dies (p. 69). When practical matters concerning the farm arise, she complains to Arthur of the hardships of running the farm under his grandfather's stingy management; although she doesn't "wish to speak disrespectful o' them as have got the power i' their hands," her speech "always sailed along without any check from her preliminary awe of the gentry. The confidence she felt in her own powers of exposition was a motive force that overcame all resistance" (p. 71).

The climax of Mrs. Poyser's role as the comic but forthright spokeswoman for the rights of her class comes in the chapter, "Mrs. Poyser 'Has Her Say Out,'" when the squire proposes a change in land management which she views as added hardship rather than as a benefit. This economic crisis threatens to uproot them if they do not submit to the old landowner's wishes, before the violations of the next squire, Arthur, bring the more serious moral crisis. John Goode notes the structural irony of the squire's threat being "dissolved in gentle comedy" soon before Hetty's disappearance. Mrs. Poyser, prepared for the first threat with speeches she has been storing up for the squire's next
rare appearance, is not taken in by his compliments and "smooth-tongued palaver" (p. 290). Although she acknowledges that her sex and station do not entitle her to speak so plainly according to traditional standards of propriety, she defends her rights as the one who contributes to the farm's profits and overrides her husband's milder tendency to compromise. Her tirade increases in intensity until she tells the squire that throughout the parish his "name's no better than a brimstone match in everybody's nose" because of his abuses (p. 293). Mr. Poyser's alarm at this offense against the squire and the possibility of eviction is combined with his "triumphant amusement at his wife's outbreak," which is soon more famous in the parish than Napoleon's victories, and which even Mr. Irwine laughs at in private. He admires Mrs. Poyser's "original . . . untaught wits" and realizes that, even though he could never risk offending the squire himself, old parishioners like the Poyzers are more important to the community than the squire, with his self-serving plans (p. 195).

Arthur and the Gentry

The confrontation with Mrs. Poyser is the culmination of a negative view of the squire that begins early in the novel. It is his only appearance in the novel in which he is seen carrying out business, although he has "the meanness" to collect his rents and make his own bargains regularly
(p. 166). Next to "the small, wiry, cool, old gentleman," the robust Mr. Poyser "looked like a prize apple by the side of a withered crab," while the squire's short-sighted way of peering at Mrs. Poyser makes her feel like an insect he wants to crush (pp. 288-89). His other appearances are on ceremonial occasions, at church and the birthday feast, when he is also described as a wrinkled, pretentious old man.

This unfavorable view of the squire is also anticipated early in the novel by Arthur's comment that for some mysterious reason his grandfather dislikes Adam and does not want to appoint him estate overseer. Later Adam tells Bartle Massey how he offended the squire, by refusing to take less money than he had charged for making a needlework screen. Like Mrs. Poyser, Adam, with "the blood of the peasant in his veins," has "obsolete" characteristics such as "instinctive reverence" for the gentry (p. 140). But, while his manner of protest is quieter than hers, he does stand up proudly to the squire when his integrity in his work is questioned and to Arthur when Hetty's virtue is threatened. This refusal by the most productive members of the community to submit their own values to the designs of the gentry is one factor which assures the survival of the community. In Hardy's later novels the rural community is damaged irreparably or divided because some of its most valuable members are seduced in various ways by upperclass
values, or because they are passive victims of the abuses of corrupt landowners and aristocrats.

Although the squire's appearances are few, his detrimental influence on Arthur and the community is felt throughout the novel until his death in Book V, which affects only his spinster daughter in a negative way. In *Silas Marner* Eliot portrays the elder squire and his sons at home, where there is a more direct example and encouragement given for lives of indolence and vice. In *Adam Bede* the effects of the gentry's idleness and neglect work themselves into the main plot more subtly, through the comments of others and through the contrast with the more industrious common folk. While there is no villain as wicked as Dunsey Cass to play on the young heir's weaknesses and guilt, the squire is one of the few characters never analyzed sympathetically by Eliot. John Paterson points out that "the cunning and tyrannical" squire is the novel's only "unredeemable" character, with no idealizing qualification, but he "lurks after all only at the outer edges of the novel."16 He does contribute to the sympathetic analysis of Arthur, for his lack of affection for his grandson and reluctance to involve him in estate business are factors leading to the young man's restlessness and subsequent offenses, when he is "shut up with his grandfather, who had the same sort of affection for him as for his parchment deeds!" (p. 109).
In the story about making the screen for Miss Lydia, Adam reveals that the squire's daughter shares his stinginess; "she's not a bad woman at bottom, but she's been brought up under his thumb" (p. 207). Arthur's aunt and the other background figures associated with the gentry— from Mrs. Irwine and her daughters to the Hall servants— serve to emphasize the contrast between the vital and productive lives of villagers and farmers, and the combination of idleness, indifference, pretensions, and mismanagement in the society surrounding Arthur. He gets even less guidance and inspiration from among his own class than does Godfrey Cass in *Silas Marner*, for both his parents are dead and there is no virtuous Nancy Lammeter in this story to provide a beneficent female influence. He is kind to his aunt and indulges all of her sex, but Miss Lydia, like her father, appears to us only on ceremonial occasions, an unattractive but fashionable and polite figure, and when the squire dies her life is empty.

Mrs. Irwine, with her aristocratic tastes, "queenly" demeanor, and formal speeches, is another gentlewoman who observes the forms of polite society and enjoys her life of luxury yet never participates in the real life of the village. She is fond of her godson Arthur but she judges everything by appearances; her main concern is that he find a beautiful wife. Her daughters, whose nervous and sickly habits try even their mother's patience, are the epitome of
the uselessness of the gentry. Although we scarcely see them, the narrator tells us the local opinions of them. Mrs. Irwine is at least a clever and magnificent figurehead worth looking at, but the daughters seem "stupid, uninteresting women." Philip Fisher points out that the idle characters in this novel are grotesque. 18 Except for some charity to the poor, these women are "superfluous existences; inartistic figures crowding the canvas of life without adequate effect" (p. 58). Yet their existence has affected Irwine's life, since supporting them has kept him from marrying. The narrator's comments on the contributions of such "insignificant people" to "the tragedy of life" reveal Eliot's conviction that the lives of all are inevitably blended, and thus even the slightest background characters are selected and described to fulfill a social or moral purpose in relation to the more important characters.

Even our glimpses of the squire's servants contribute to the atmosphere of indifference and moral decay in which Arthur was reared. They imitate the social formalities upheld by the gentry, believing it is their duty to appear at Adam's wedding to represent "the family," an ironic attitude since the family has been broken up by death, childlessness, and Arthur's self-exile by the end of the novel. Just as Mr. Casson's pretentious attitudes are based on his upbringing and former career among the gentry, Mr. Craig, the gardener, who functions as one of Hetty's suitors (unaware that
his young master is his rival), is a blend of provincial ignorance and boastful pride in the young Captain and his own position at the Hall. The squire has chosen his other servants to accommodate his own mean habits. Adam says Satchell, the old bailiff, has been "a selfish, tale-bearing, mischievous fellow" who has lost more money than he has saved "by ill-management o' the woods" because the squire made "a stupid fellow like that a sort o' man-of-all-work," instead of paying for "a proper steward" (p. 205). One of the frustrations at home which adds to Arthur's restlessness is the stingy management of the stables. He views Old John, the head groom, as "an old dolt" and a "blockhead," while John considers Arthur and all young people his natural enemies (p. 108). He and the sarcastic coachman Dalton create a background of indolence and antagonism as Arthur rides off in chapter 12, struggling with these petty irritations and his desire to see Hetty.

Bartle Massey and Mr. Irvine

Mr. Irvine, Arthur's friend and former tutor, is a more positive moral influence than are the other members of his class, and Bartle Massey, Adam's former schoolmaster, has given Adam a kind of guidance his family and friends in his own class could not provide. As educated men with more sophisticated attitudes than those of the working classes, these two provide significant observations on the
villagers and their values. In several ways they are more detached than other characters, living on the fringes of the Hayslope community. Neither is a native of the village, although each has served it professionally for a decade or more; Irwine lives in Broxton rather than Hayslope, while Massey's isolated night-school outside the village is the last important work-place to be introduced in the novel. As bachelors, they are not involved in the kind of family life so important to the village, and they are less personally involved in the love triangle of the main plot. However, they are father figures for the fatherless Arthur and Adam, and they have a strong involvement with the village and sympathy for the common workers.

Their affection for Adam in particular (and Irwine's for Arthur) draws them into the main plot when Hetty's crime becomes known. During the trial at Stoniton, when Adam is isolated physically and emotionally from his home and work by his grief, anger, and desire to be near Hetty, these two friends play crucial supporting roles. Most of the proceedings are described through their sympathetic viewpoints and their influence keeps Adam from isolating himself permanently and doing even more damage to the community through a rash act of vengeance. Reva Stump points out that Adam's only positive action in his grief is accepting these two friends; since their vision is not blurred by such intense anger, they can help him develop clearer vision.19
Although trouble brings these two men together in feelings and actions with respect to Adam, they are very different personalities. Bartle is a less complex character than Irwine, but, as Van Ghent points out, his kind and deep feelings, his habits of self-sacrifice and self-discipline, and his eccentricity "are of the richest texture of the community life." A chapter is devoted to his night-school, and Adam has mentioned earlier in the novel that he is grateful for the knowledge he has obtained there, although Massey has "a tongue like a sharp blade" (p. 143). Adam's visit to the school, where the stern master is admonishing the simple-minded workmen to apply their brains to their lessons and their lessons to their daily lives, dramatizes several important forces in village life: the value of diligence and self-improvement for ordinary workers, the "fellow-feeling" Adam has for the men who struggle for knowledge as he has done, and the beneficent influence of a place and a friend familiar since Adam's youth (p. 197).

Like the other scenes of everyday life, this one is blended with the main plot development. Preoccupied with his personal problems, Adam uses his visit to discuss with a sympathetic and perceptive adviser his future and the squire's attitudes toward him. Bartle's eccentric opinions and prejudices are expressed with comic exaggeration, but his comments have a wisdom and significance that go beyond the immediate issue of Adam's career. He warns Adam against
being "over-hasty and proud" in his dealings with people, since only a settled old bachelor like himself can be "fiery and stiff-backed" without harm (p. 208). His tirade against women is harsh and absurd, yet his warnings have an ironic relevance to Adam's future troubles with Hetty. Book II ends with Bartle's amusing complaint about the "woman" dog who has taken over his life with her puppies. His final remark that a woman with babies has "no conscience; it's all run to milk" is a grotesque foreshadowing of Hetty's inhuman crime when she abandons her baby (p. 209).

The hints that this condemnation of women stems from some painful experience in his mysterious youth suggest that Bartle embodies the permanent bitterness and isolation that can result from personal conflicts, intolerant attitudes, and severance from one's past. But Bartle's prejudices are treated humorously, and he has a kind heart, beneath his brusque exterior, for those who need him. In Adam's case this permanent alienation is prevented, partly through the support of friends like Bartle. When the crisis comes Bartle closes his school and rushes to Adam's side at Stoniton. At Irvine's his condemnation of Hetty as a "rotten nut" who has spoiled a good man and "vermin" which deserves to die is the harshest choral view of her, contrasting with Adam's immediate forgiveness and blind belief in her innocence (pp. 350-51). But Bartle assures Irvine that his similar temperament and past experience give him
sufficient sympathy for Adam's suffering, as his kind words and actions in the lonely room at Stoniton demonstrate. He describes the trial gently to Adam; putting aside "his usual peremptoriness and impatience of contradiction," he appeals to Adam's courage and good sense to help convince him he will come out of this crisis a better man if he avoids any hasty act of revenge (pp. 383-84). When Dinah helps soothe Adam on a more spiritual level, Bartle's admission that some women can be comforters despite their inevitable foolishness (Methodism in her case) is a significant softening of his woman-hating attitude, and is therefore a convincing testimony of her beneficial influence over everyone she meets. When he is persuaded to attend the wedding at the end of the novel, although he still protests at a sensible man's getting married, he is teased for kissing the bride. Thus even this gruff bachelor is drawn into the final idyllic celebration of the renewal of family and village life.

Irvine is placed initially in the category of the idle gentry by Casson's introduction to his fine house and attachment to his horse; by his portly, distinguished appearance; and by our early views of him at home, playing chess with his aristocratic mother and eating a luxurious bachelor breakfast. He is aware of his own weaknesses and limitations, however, admitting on several occasions that he is lazy: he enjoys his comfortable life, even though he
cannot afford to marry or to live at the aristocratic level his family once knew, and he finds it easier to overlook insults from an upstart like the Methodist Will Maskery than to impose any severe restrictions on his parishioners. The pagan imagery used to describe Irvine and his mother and the descriptions of his attitudes and preaching reveal that traditional village religion at that date was concerned more with following conventional forms and rituals than with doctrines held by more learned, energetic, and zealous church leaders or dissenters.

To Eliot, however, this neglect of rigid doctrine is not necessarily a detrimental approach for a country parson. Eliot devotes more space to analyzing and defending Irvine's character and religion than she does with any of the other supporting characters, especially in the famous chapter, "In Which the Story Pauses a Little," where Irvine is the center of her defense of realism in portraying the complexity in the characters of ordinary people and developing sympathy for their faults. Although the authorial intrusions in passages like this one sometimes seem awkward and excessive,21 the attention paid to Irvine's own character is preparation for his role at the center of the novel's moral crisis, and his contact with each of the main characters reveals both strengths and weaknesses in traditional village morality.
In his defense the narrator points out that Irwine lacks the vindictiveness and intolerance of more zealous theologians. Although his theology is lax, he realizes that earnest doctrines mean little to villagers such as "old 'Feyther Taft'"; with his insight into their characters he sees that the strong emotional effect of the familiar church rituals and liturgies is more beneficial than lofty or severe sermonizing (p. 60). Adam in old age is quoted as saying with respect to Irwine, "It isn't notions sets people doing the right thing—it's feelings" (p. 154).

The wisdom of this attitude is demonstrated in the chapter called "Church," one of the communal scenes in which the whole village gathers and the Sunday service is seen as part of the ordinary life of the community. The neighborly gossip and discussions of business before and after the service, the wearing of best clothes and offers of Sunday hospitality, and the displays of reverence for the gentry are as much a part of the weekly ritual as the sacred service itself. The villagers, from the conceited but talented parish clerk Joshua Rann, to the fretful Lisbeth, bring their common prejudices and faults into church with them, but even those who cannot read know "a few 'good words' by heart" and follow the service "without any very clear comprehension indeed, but with a simple faith in its efficacy to ward off harm and bring blessing" (p. 168). The familiar liturgy and psalms are "a channel" for Adam's deep feelings
about Hetty and his father's death, uniting his present strong emotions with his consciousness of the past (p. 170). Irwine's simple sermon of "very old truths" is effective inspiration for Adam's examination of his conscience, and the handsome rector's sincere and generous demeanor spreads a beneficent influence over the whole congregation (p. 172).

Thus Irwine "harmonised extremely well with that peaceful landscape" (p. 61). He is a spokesman for community values on occasions such as the birthday feast, when his speech celebrates "neighbourly kindness," "humble everyday work" and goodwill among landowners, clergy, tenants, and workers (pp. 226-27). The affection shown for the rector on this occasion is supported by comments from Adam, Mrs. Poyser, and Bartle Massey elsewhere in the novel. They praise his common sense, charity, gentlemanly respect for all classes of people, and especially his ability to love, sympathize with, and influence his parishioners without the annoying pretensions and chatter of other preachers,

for his was one of those large-hearted, sweet-blooded natures that never know a narrow or a grudging thought; epicurean, if you will, with no enthusiasm, no self-s scourging sense of duty; but yet, as you have seen, of a sufficiently subtle moral fibre to have an unwearying tenderness for obscure and monotonous suffering. (p. 59)

Irwine's moral guidance during the crises of the novel is therefore based on individual human sympathy and a sense of communal responsibility, rather than on direct appeals to
sacred doctrines or divine powers.

Irwine's conversations with and about Dinah early in the novel, combined with the contrast between their preaching scenes, reveal the differences in the two preachers and prepare for the complementary roles they play during Hetty's trial. As she preaches Dinah can "fix the attention of her rougher hearers," even though the villagers gather out of curiosity and do not want to be associated with the Methodists (p. 25). In this scene there is less attention paid to the gossip of the villagers and more space devoted to the moving words of Dinah's sermon and prayers. Joshua Rann's indignant and superstitious recitation of an irrelevant psalm passage to protest "this scandalous irruption of Methodism" reveals the comparative emptiness of some of the forms of traditional religion (p. 18). The familiar psalms bring a vague sort of comfort to simple village minds, but Dinah's personal aura of pure love and direct appeals touch their hearts in a deeper, more intimate way, moving some of her listeners to tears.

Later Rann's excited tirade on the dangerous influx of Methodism is subdued by Irwine's quiet assurance that it would be a worse threat to village peace and church dignity to show alarm when the Methodists have done no serious harm to their neighbors. His tolerance for a new influence which can touch and improve the rough villagers as he cannot is further demonstrated during Irwine's visit to Dinah, when
she tells him the story of her life and vocation, and these contrasting preachers develop a mutual respect. Irvine agrees with Dinah that the people of Hayslope take life slowly and are "not easily roused" by the deep thoughts and fervent eloquence of spiritual preaching like hers (p. 80). When Dinah later admits that Irvine is not the "worldly Sadducee" she had imagined, but a pleasant, friendly man, Mrs. Poyser's outburst on their beloved rector's way of making the world seem "comfortable like" confirms his ability to fulfill the needs of Hayslope as long as life is peaceful and uncomplicated (pp. 81-82). But it takes Dinah's deeper, unworldly insight to reach the most fretful, self-centered, and troubled minds in times of crisis. She is the only one able to calm Lisbeth when her husband dies, despite the comfort given to the family through the familiar ritual and fellowship of Irvine's church service after the burial. During the preaching on the green Bess Cranage is singled out as a typical "naughty" and lazy village girl with a vain love of finery and "slackness in the minor morals" (p. 26). She has been known to misbehave in church, but Dinah's fervent, direct appeal to her to cast off her folly and save her soul sends Bess into a violent "fit" of repentance. Her continuing struggle to give up her earrings and live virtuously is mentioned several times in the novel, providing a parallel and contrast on a lower social level with Hetty's temptations and deeper moral flaws.22
Dinah's pure sympathy and divine love also penetrate Hetty's selfish heart in a way that church and family life have never affected her. In the church scene Hetty is deaf to the liturgy that comforts her neighbors, preoccupied with her disappointment and anger that Arthur is absent and her vain desire to keep her agitation hidden from others. In court Irwine stands by Hetty and her uncle with neighborly pity for their suffering, but he can do no more for Hetty than observe that "some fatal influence seems to have shut up her heart against her fellow-creatures" (p. 353). His acknowledgement that Dinah's gentle womanly ways "might move Hetty to open her heart," as he and the "harsh" jail chaplain had been unable to do (p. 356), is verified when Dinah brings about Hetty's confession, repentance, and reconciliation with Adam.

The dangers of Irwine's indulgent "live and let live" attitude toward the parishioners under his care are also demonstrated in his relationship with Arthur. Irwine encourages Arthur's dreams of becoming a beloved squire and offers only the gentlest criticism when he sees Arthur motivated by pride in his own role as patron rather by pure benevolence. He warns Arthur to avoid looking at Hetty because feeding her vanity would "spoil her for a poor man's wife" (p. 88). When Arthur continues to struggle with this temptation he plans to avoid further excess by confessing his weakness openly to Irwine, but his proud concern with
keeping his friend's admiration prevents him from admitting to a foolish flirtation. Although Irwine offers some strong moral observations about the "un pitying" consequences of our deeds, which inevitably spread to others besides ourselves, the indulgent atmosphere of his breakfast table enables Arthur to keep the discussion on a "philosophical, general" level (pp. 147-48). This scene marks an early stage in Arthur's separation from the community, ending the healthy openness and trust between the two men. Later Irwine feels bitter regret that he was too fastidious to intrude on Arthur's secret when his influence might have helped prevent this terrible crime against the community.

Despite his fatherly regret at having to make Arthur's shame public, Irwine's role as a just magistrate and clergyman and his pity for those who have been wronged force him to tell the whole story to everyone concerned. Although Hetty is permanently beyond the reach of Irwine and the village code, and it is too late to prevent Arthur's long exile, Irwine can help Adam through this crisis. Moved by the signs of Adam's deep suffering, Irwine is perceptive enough to agree that Adam is better off away from home for a while, but the parson must use his strongest powers of persuasion to keep Adam from destroying his own ties to the community. Early in the novel Irwine had commented on Adam's "independence of spirit" and "excess of pride" (p. 88), and now he warns Adam not to confuse his passion
for revenge with his desire for justice, since an act of hatred against Arthur would bring more evil to the whole community. Irwine's appeals to the needs of Hetty and the Poyzers are his most effective arguments for keeping Adam from going after Arthur. Murray Krieger describes this moral crisis as Adam's tragic tendency to insist on ethical judgment, which is subdued by Irwine's arguments in favor of the classic acceptance and human sympathy necessary for the community to heal itself. Irwine's speech on the eve of the trial contains one of Eliot's most explicit statements of the inevitable interdependence of lives in the human community:

There is no sort of wrong deed of which a man can bear the punishment alone; you can't isolate yourself, and say that the evil which is in you shall not spread. Men's lives are as thoroughly blended with each other as the air they breathe: evil spreads as necessarily as disease. I know, I feel the terrible extent of suffering this sin of Arthur's has caused to others; but so does every sin cause suffering to others besides those who commit it. (p. 355)

The Birthday Feast

This blending of lives, with both good and evil effects, is illustrated in the birthday feast at the center of the novel, where all the members of the community gather, from the aged people older than Grandfather Poyser to babies younger than Totty. Adding a celebration which occurs once
in each generation to the many scenes of workday life and weekly or yearly rituals, Book III is the climax of Eliot's portrayal of ordinary village life in the first half of the novel, and her most detailed dramatization of a single local event in any of her novels. With three of the main characters and all the supporting characters brought into close contact on this special day, Eliot reinforces our view of their individual attributes and the significance of their personal and social relationships, before the tragedy that changes most of their lives. Maurice Hussey points out that during this pause in which the tragedy is delayed, we see that happiness for these characters is transitory and is based on false relations.26

The selection of details and dialogue shows which elements of rural life Eliot finds most interesting and valuable, and which have produced empty formality or dangerous decay. This feast day is for the tenants and laborers, while the few members of the gentry present remain in the background, aloof. The stingy squire has not allowed Arthur to be as generous in the provisions as he would have liked, and the farmers see that beneath the squire's "polite speeches" his "polish was one of the signs of hardness" (p. 239). The conversations among the gentry show them viewing the common folk in their games and dances as if they were watching a pretty spectacle from a great distance. Mrs. Irwine used to "go about" and know the
villagers, although they are strangers to her now, and the other ladies are familiar with some of them through charity work or household business, while the near-sighted squire, with his double glass, sees individuals only as a blur. Mr. Irvine's more active sympathy with the villagers prompts him to contradict the snobbish and patronizing comments of Mrs. Irvine and Miss Lydia, as he points out that the common people are not stupid, but have "sense and feeling" like their more refined and articulate superior (p. 232). The detailed explanations of the hierarchical arrangements for sitting at table and choosing dancing partners reinforces this dramatization of the rigid class distinctions in this society. Philip Fisher points out that "the bitter falsity or comic emptiness of the social forms" is revealed by details such as Mrs. Irvine's role as Queen with her throne on a stage, the ugly prizes she chose to prevent poor girls from desiring unsuitable finery, and the comic argument over who will head the tenants' table, with Massey's practical solution that the broadest man preside undercutting distinctions of age, wealth, or rank.  

The Poyser's arrival and departure are used to frame this book as they are in the "Church" chapter, and they share the center of attention with Adam. Easy-going Mr. Poyser, enjoying his role as both the broadest man and the most respected tenant, is proud of the attentions shown to his wife and niece. However, Mrs. Poyser's usual sharp and
critical comments reveal that her mind is never far away from the business of the farm; she is skeptical of the squire's flattery, suspecting "he's brewin' some nasty turn against us" (p. 239). Perceptive enough to see that the gentry are mocking Ben's rustic dance, she has little use for their ceremonies. She sets out worrying about keeping the farm locked and guarded and departs early, scolding about the work that is lost on these useless "pleasurin' days." She tells the squire bluntly that only "gentlefolks" can stay up late without cows and cheese and early morning work on their minds (p. 244).

Adam, in his quiet and humble way, is also less concerned with merrymaking than with his responsibility of controlling the drinks and helping out. But the hard-working carpenter appears as a hero on this day in a way that contrasts with the dashing young captain's position in the limelight. Arthur's speeches about his plans for the future show that he is motivated by his need for admiration and self-satisfaction. When Adam is honored with an invitation to the tenants' table and dance, and a new position as overseer, he is at first uneasy at being placed above his family and then is deeply moved by the tributes to his industry and integrity from Arthur and Mr. Irwine, in the presence of "all his little world" (p. 227). Some of his neighbors find his acceptance speech rather proud, but these speeches are the novel's most explicit and elaborate formal statements
of the importance of hard work, "plain duty," and self-respect for all members of the community, "gentle or simple" (p. 228).

There is irony in Arthur's tribute to Adam, and especially in the speeches praising Arthur's virtue by Poyser, Irvine, and Adam, for Arthur's birthday celebration is undercut by the problem which keeps pricking at his conscience. The tragedy may be delayed during this communal feast, but the tragic love interests of the main plot are not neglected. Two of the novel's communal scenes, the burial of his father and the wedding at the end, mark Adam's first sorrow and final happiness, and this book celebrates his public triumph, but it also shows that he is unaware of the personal tragedy developing beneath the surface. The book opens with Hetty's vain fantasies about being with Arthur; at the end Adam leaves abruptly after discovering her hidden locket. When the rigidly ordered formalities of the day give Hetty a miserable realization of her distance from Arthur, her rival, Mary Burge, hopes Adam will see her pouting; however, her charming "pettishness" is turned into flirtation, and Adam's love is strong enough for him to explain away the locket in his own mind and go to bed happy.

The choral comments by everyone ignorant of Hetty's and Arthur's secret love are full of irony. Mrs. Irvine's remark that Hetty's "perfect beauty" is "thrown away among
the farmers" and her desire for Arthur to find a beautiful bride serve to increase his attraction to Hetty, although he tries to convince himself he has done no harm with her (p. 232). Mrs. Poyser's innocent reminder that Hetty must save a dance for Arthur gives him another prick of conscience, while Hetty's dances with both men intensify the unfortunate tangle of attractions and misconceptions among them. This book ends with a comment to Hetty as ironic and foreboding as Bartle's remark at the end of Book II. Here Mr. Poyser, "in his merriest mood," tells Hetty she will still be talking in her old age about the honor of dancing "wi' th' young Squire the day he come o' age" (pp. 244-45).

**Crisis and Recovery in Hayslope**

After this communal feast with its optimistic celebration of harmony and unity on the surface, and its ironic undercurrent of discord and danger, Book IV plunges into the first stage of "The Crisis." It opens with details about the harvest, repairs on the estate, Adam's fond memories of his boyhood friendship with Arthur, and his hopes for the future with Hetty. These positive signs of continuity and progress are dropped when Adam discovers Arthur kissing Hetty in the woods. A number of critics have discussed the contrast between the domesticated settings in the village, farm, and estate, and the dangerous "alternative community" for the self in untamed natural settings such as Donnithorne
Chase, where secret meetings separate Hetty and Arthur from their obligations to family and community. Adam's isolation begins when the idyllic Grove where the lovers meet becomes the scene of his confrontation and combat with Arthur, and ends with their reconciliation in the same symbolic spot at the end of Book V.

As the tragedy develops, most of Books IV and V takes place away from Hayslope, but Hetty's descent into isolation and crime puts the community values to their severest test. Scenes of everyday life at Hall Farm go on as usual for a time, yet the interlude which seems idyllic to Adam contains actions and conversations that appear increasingly ironic. Hetty's fantasies in the solitude of her bedroom have separated her from her family throughout the novel. Now, believing all previous threats to Hetty's reputation and the farm family's stability have been removed, the Poysers and Adam rejoice when Hetty agrees to marry him. They are completely ignorant of her indifference and her dread at the crisis looming over her.

Hetty's journey in hope and despair, Adam's search for her, and the scenes surrounding the trial take the narrative away from Hayslope and Broxton for the first time, and bring Dinah into the main plot. The pathos of Hetty's condition during her journey and confession is increased by the ironic fact that some of the inherited provincial attitudes she shares with her family contribute to her separation
from home and society. Her ignorance of prices and strange places, her horror at the disgrace of seeming poor or of accepting charity, her proud concern for what others think of her, and her constant visions of her aunt's disapprobation prevent her from attempting to return home or to make any human contact that might help her.

During the journey strangers provide choral comments on Hetty's deteriorating condition. A landlady's remark that "It 'ud have been a good deal better for her if she'd been uglier and had more conduct" (p. 316) echoes comments made earlier in the novel by Mrs. Poyser, Mrs. Irvine, and the Hall housekeeper, Mrs. Best, on the dangers of beauty for a simple girl of Hetty's station. Hetty does learn, when it is too late, to appreciate her comfortable home of the past and her peaceful family, and that vision of life keeps her from suicide; ironically, she later tells Dinah her longing to return home ultimately pushed her to violate her family's most sacred principle and abandon her own baby, since she could never return with the shame of an illegitimate child. In her confusion and isolation she searches desperately for some shelter that reminds her of the farm, until she appears like a "wild woman" in a novel to a "bovine" shepherd (p. 325).

In all the remaining scenes Hetty's point of view is abandoned, except in the dark isolation of the prison. Her confession is a child-like submission to unworldly Dinah,
"the only visible sign of love and pity" available to her (p. 386); she is so alienated she is lost to the community, and her fate interests us in the end only as it affects those she left behind. As U. C. Knoopflmacher argues, since her extreme lack of fellow-feeling and morality are repulsive and irredeemable throughout the novel, her crime does not teach her the lessons that widen the understanding of the other characters and enable them to restore the harmony of the community. The only communal scene in Books IV and V is the trial, which takes place in the harsher environment of Stoniton, in keeping with the physical and moral contrast between Stonyshire and Loamshire throughout the novel. Although other Hayslope natives besides those deeply affected attend the trial and tell of Adam's suffering by their firesides years later, socially destructive crimes such as Hetty's must be removed from the peaceful village in order to maintain a vision of Hayslope as an ordered, stable environment. The extraordinary events of the murder, trial, verdict, and pardon are not narrated in the intimate, absorbing manner of the scenes of rural life, but are told through the point of view of Massey, the trial witnesses, and a "multitude" of strangers who react to the courtroom proceedings and to the melodramatic arrival of the last-minute pardon on the execution day (p. 386).

Book VI records the recovery of Adam and the community eighteen months later, with the focus again on the homes of
the Bedes and Poyzers. Mrs. Poyser's loving contemplation of the milking of the cows on the first page dramatizes the restoration of peace on the farm. This atmosphere of prosperity and contentment is reinforced by the nostalgic passage in praise of "Old Leisure" as the Poyzers walk home from Sunday afternoon church.

The Poyzers' lively Harvest Supper, a seasonal celebration of the continuity of rural life, contrasts with the other secular Hayslope feast in the novel—the unique occasion of Arthur's coming of age, which celebrated hopes for the future squire that were destroyed by tragedy soon afterwards. Here there is more attention paid to the lower social levels of the rural hierarchy and there is no question that Mr. Poyser belongs at the head of this table. While Mrs. Poyser enforces her customary rules of punctuality and order in the serving of the meal, and there are traditional rituals to be followed in the drinking and singing, the elaborate and empty formalities of the squire's feast are missing, and the atmosphere is more relaxed and jovial. Mr. Craig's mention of Miss Lydia and her servants sitting at the Hall reading the papers reminds us that this idle remnant is all that remains of the Donnithorpes in the neighborhood. Unlike the stingy old squire, proud and benevolent Mr. Poyser takes great pleasure in watching his workers enjoy their rare meal of the best roast beef he can offer; the Poyzers also laugh at the antics of the simple-minded fellows with
"good-natured amusement" rather than with the mocking laughter Mrs. Poyser had heard from the gentry at their dance (p. 431). The narrator's description of the simplest, clumsiest, and least articulate laborers in the novel is somewhat condescending, but affectionate: although the debate on politics and the sexes reveals the provincial ignorance and prejudices of the Poyzers, Mr. Craig, and Bartle Massey, the scene is full of vitality and good humor. As W. J. Harvey observes, the "comic ritual" of the battle between the sexes shows the natural community's return to health.  

Although the patriarchal order is observed at the dinner, Mrs. Poyser is still the dominant voice of rural life in this last scene at the farm. Massey is amazed at his friend Martin's cushion-like ability to enjoy the pricks of her needles, but Adam's response to Massey's complaint is a tribute to the enduring value of a woman like Mrs. Poyser:

But she's a downright good-natur'd woman, for all that . . . and as true as the daylight. . . . If her tongue's keen her heart's tender: I've seen that in times o' trouble. She's one o' those women as are better than their word. (p. 440)

To apply John Goode's phrases to Mrs. Poyser, her static but colorful character demonstrates "the intensity of tradition and the resilience of the core even in years of acute crisis" and complements the drama of Adam's more complex
"demonstration of the true, evolutionary process of development" and individuation on the "'pastoral' stage." 35

Although the Harvest Supper is free of the ironic reminders of tragic love blended into the birthday feast, it is connected to Adam's new love story and he leaves early, disappointed at Dinah's absence, as he had left the birthday dance abruptly, worrying about Hetty. Dinah has been drawn closer to the Hayslope community since the Poyzers sent for her when Hetty was arrested, but now that the worst suffering is over, she insists on returning to the poor people of Stoniton who need her more. Her departure before the Harvest Supper shows her reluctance to join in the bountiful celebration of Loamshire's prosperity.

Throughout the novel both Mrs. Poyser and Lisbeth have begged Dinah to stay near them, unable to understand why she prefers to sacrifice herself to live amid poverty and trouble. Mrs. Poyser in particular provides the most effusive and strident criticism of Dinah's Methodism and her unnatural refusal to stay with her own kin and settle down with a husband. Yet she also praises Dinah's ability to help and comfort whenever she is needed, awed at Dinah's "way o' knowing the rights o' things more nor other folk have" (p. 163). Lisbeth's only perceptive and beneficial act in the novel, although still based on her own selfish desire for Dinah as a daughter, is to notice Dinah's feelings for Adam and to make him aware of his own overwhelming
rebirth of love. He is more sympathetic than the women to Dinah's conflict between her new love and her lifelong devotion to God's work, but his observations that she has become as particular as her aunt in housekeeping and that she would make a good mother anticipate her readiness for a private domestic life.

When Mr. Poyser suddenly notices this pleasing development in Adam his wife insists that she is never surprised by what is just under her nose. Her unusual silence has been caused by her frustrated belief that Dinah will "never marry anybody, if he isn't a Methodist and a cripple" (p. 427). However, her shrewd powers of observation cannot penetrate the subtle complexities of Dinah's soul, while Lisbeth's intense wishful thinking causes her to anticipate the marriage of the two people she adores.

Although critics have argued at length about the weaknesses in Eliot's use of this sudden development to reward her idealized hero with a saintly wife and provide the traditional happy ending, the marriage is a significant dramatization of the new life and harmony achieved in the rural community with Dinah's help. This novel, like Silas Marner, contains no radical criticism of village life and portrays no drastic changes in the rural society. Methodism as a movement has not invaded the local traditions as Joshua Rann feared when Dinah first arrived, and the individual sources of internal corruption have been removed.
Nevertheless, the tragedy of Hetty and Arthur has shown that in a crisis, inherited provincial morals and rituals are too weak to restrain egoists like these two, and too rigid and restrictive for righteous individuals who stick to the established code. Adam's and Mr. Poyser's excessive adherence to inflexible values almost uprooted them, but Dinah's individual spiritual influence, combined with the practical and down-to-earth moral guidance of Irwine and Massey, has brought about the renewed integration into the community that is impossible for the protagonists of The Mill on the Floss and Hardy's later novels.

Dinah has her own moral crisis to resolve before this process is complete. She must learn that rejecting the worldly comforts and joys found in the community of her lover and family can be destructive of the self, weakening her ties to God and the poor people she serves. After a final period of isolation she returns to contribute to the community in her new role as wife and mother, and to continue to minister to the needy souls of this village such as Bessy Cranage, whose dependence on Dinah is mentioned at the wedding. As John Paterson explains, the marriage of Dinah and Adam "formally harmonizes what they stand for, the claims of subject and object, of inner light and outer world, of spirit and matter." The last chapter gives a final brief survey of the combination of serious and comic elements in the village, with the memory of Hetty as the
only note of sadness, when all the remaining residents take a holiday to celebrate this wedding.

The Epilogue then reinforces the novel's affirmation of community continuity and harmony by focusing on the small, thriving family group which unites old and new. Adam and Dinah have two active children, with the daughter Lisbeth perpetuating the memory of the dead mother. As head of the workshop, Adam now occupies the Burge's "pleasant house," which was seen in the first chapter (p. 447). The sorrows of the past are not forgotten in this new prosperity. Arthur and Hetty have been redeemed by suffering, in the views of their friends, but "the death of the poor wanderer" before she could return home emphasizes for Arthur the sense of "a sort of wrong that can never be made up for" (pp. 448, 450). Arthur has returned, however, Adam reports that "he's altered and yet not altered," and he looks forward to his reunion with others in the community which he has always loved. The most valuable supporting characters are also mentioned in this last vision of harmony and reconciliation. Mr. Irwine, who has been Arthur's link with the village, is "joyful at having him home again" (p. 449). The loyal brother, Seth, is a contented uncle in the Bede family, and the Poysers approach as the novel ends, adding a final suggestion of family unity and fellowship to the tranquil portrait of village life.
NOTES--CHAPTER II


7 The Novels of George Eliot: A Study in Form (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959; rpt. 1967), pp. 185-86. John Paterson's comments on the "set or ceremonial chapters" which introduce the life of the novel in this leisurely and deliberate way emphasize their relation to the formal structure and style of this novel, p. xxxi.
8 See Van Ghent's remarks on the "massively slow movement" of the novel as it builds up gradually "a dense body of physical and moral detail" to reflect the slow pace of rural life, p. 173.

9 Auster notes the significance of the opinions of others for giving depth to the characters and their setting, and for showing realistically how attitudes shift and develop. The "inadequacy of the personal reputation" is shown, for example, by "the old Squire's ability, in spite of his widespread unpopularity, to retain his stature and dignity pp. 131-32.

10 The Novels of George Eliot, p. 38.

11 Paterson notes that dramatic comments by Wiry Ben, Casson, Irvine, and Massey criticize Adam more than the indulgent narrator does (p. xix). It is true that minor characters sometimes are used to undercut a general impression created in the main narrative, or to give blunter or cruder expression to negative points, and, as Paterson notes, their perspectives add complexity to the novel's point of view. But this complexity is created by a multiplicity of characters and the variety of comments sometimes made by the same character, rather than by a significant distinction between the narrator's view and the characters'. The supporting characters, except for the selfish and prejudiced old squire, all praise Adam far more than they criticize him, just as the narrator does.

12 Ritual and Feeling, p. 12.

13 John Goode contrasts the Poyzers in Book II on their way to church as a "unified group which is a microcosm of the integrity of the community" with their journey at the opening of Book III, "precluded by Hetty's secret, so that we have a sense of the group riding to its destruction," "Adam Bede," in Critical Essays on George Eliot, ed. Barbara Hardy (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1970), p. 24.

14 Van Ghent (pp. 174-76), Squires (p. 72) and Harvey (The Art of George Eliot, p. 171) discuss the Poyzers' contribution to the portrayal of the rhythms of country life, with their normal behavior and everyday work and harmony with the environment. Foakes points out that the Poyzers and their farm are idealized, but they show vitality and order in a valuable way of life (pp. 173-76). Auster describes Mrs. Poyser as the complacent, self-assured voice of Hayslope values, with a viewpoint and common sense which are never satirized, despite their limitations (p. 106). Barbara Hardy adds that, besides revealing her personal and moral attributes, Mrs. Poyser's comic patter also contributes to
the theme of the novel by satirizing, directly or indirectly, the other characters (The Novels of George Eliot, p. 79). Hussey also comments on her ability to "discuss the deficiencies of Hayslope in such a manner as to command serious attention," while her husband's harshness toward Hetty is a criticism of the lack of perfect unity in the rural community (pp. 125, 122). Jerome Thale argues that Mrs. Poyser is praiseworthy, but she and the villagers command too much attention as characters, detracting from the less appealing main characters, in The Novels of George Eliot (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), pp. 16-17. Philip Fisher asserts that "the Poyzers are at the center of the social reality of the novel" but "they are peripheral characters" described through a nostalgic and idyllic haze, and their kind of family life is irrelevant to the main characters whose moral lives are tested. It is true, as he says, that "they do not develop or decline" in complex ways (as most supporting characters do not), and we do not see them decide to stay in Hayslope as we see Adam's process of reconciliation and regeneration. But it is inaccurate to say that they are untested by crisis or that their reactions to Hetty's crime are not shown. "The force of the family" does not vanish in this novel, and Dinah and Adam's marriage does renew the valuable kind of family life represented by the Poyzers and essential to the continuity of society. See Making Up Society: The Novels of George Eliot (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1981), pp. 63-65.

15 Goode, p. 25.

16 Introduction, p. xxiv.

17 Critics have noted that the squire is near-sighted and Mrs. Irvine is far-sighted, symbolizing their moral limitations and lack of contact with ordinary life. See Paterson, p. xviii and Reva Stump, Movement and Vision in George Eliot's Novels (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1959), pp. 218-19.

18 Fisher, p. 42.

19 Stump, p. 44. She analyzes in detail the images of vision and religious communion which relate to Massey's role. His frequent shifting of his spectacles symbolizes his desire for insight into the lives of others, pp. 45-50.

20 Van Ghent, p. 177.

21 Joan Bennett, for example, says Irvine is explained too much and excessive authorial intervention keeps us from identifying with such characters, in George Eliot: Her Mind

22 See W. J. Harvey's discussion of Bess as an example of a character selected out of the communal background to serve as a comic analogy to Hetty, in The Art of George Eliot, pp. 172-73.

23 See Barbara Hardy's analysis of the variety of individual responses to the church service in this scene, including Hetty's "rejection and neglect of the ritual /which/ emphasise her isolation and weakness," Ritual and Feeling, pp. 6-8.

24 Jerome Thale argues that Christianity is bankrupt in Hayslope and Arthur, Hetty, and Adam all show its limitations, while only Dinah has a Christianity that works (pp. 20-22, 28-29). It is true, as he says, that Hayslope Christianity is primarily a way of life and a moral code for simple village living, and that its weaknesses are revealed by the exceptional crises experienced by the main characters. Dinah does have a range and depth of feeling for others that the other characters lack, particularly her feelings for anguish and alienation shown in the prison scene. However, Methodism never becomes a "vital factor in the reality of the local scene" despite the individual influence of Dinah, as Paterson points out, and "the serene untroubled religion of Parson Irwine and Adam Bede continues" in this novel. Paterson, p. xxviii.


26 Hussey, p. 119.


28 John Goode calls the tributes to Arthur "the central ironies of the book," since "the class-gap is being closed by exploitation" (pp. 23-24). See also Barbara Hardy's perceptive discussion of the birthday feast. She says "the feudal ritual shows within it the seeds of its own destruction," because the people of Hayslope are both "fatally close to each other" and "fatally separate," ignorant of each other's lives, Ritual and Feeling, p. 10.

29 Fisher, p. 45. He analyzes the role of nature in the seduction and the destruction of Hetty as an individual, which begins with her choice of nature and solitude at home, continues with her crime against society when she abandons the child to nature, and ends when she contemplates
the ultimate secrecy of drowning herself in the pool. When her secret becomes public at the trial, society sentences her to death and the revised sentence of exile is another form of death (pp. 44-51). Squires also discusses the meanings of nature in this novel, seeing the Fir-Tree Grove as the traditional pastoral "locus amoenus," pp. 60-70.


32 Krieger points out that secrecy is the enemy of the community and that the "stony" morality of Stonyshire, rather than the lenient "loamy" morality of Hayslope, is necessary to isolate the lovers' crimes and restore community ties, pp. 203-206.

33 See Squires's discussion of the proper distance established for depicting various aspects inside and outside the pastoral world, pp. 83-84.


35 Goode, pp. 21-23.

36 Reva Stump says Dinah learns through Adam "the inadequacy of a vision which partially negates feeling." She compares Dinah's unearthly vision with those of Lisbeth, Mrs. Poyser, and Irwine, pp. 58-60.

37 Introduction, p. xviii. See also Foakes's defense of the wedding as an appropriate end to the pattern of action in which the harmony and rhythm of community life are broken and then restored, p. 176. Bruce K. Martin also discusses the marriage of Adam and Dinah in relation to the values of rural life, in "Rescue and Marriage in Adam Bede," Studies in English Literature, 12 (1972), 745-63.

38 Both Auster (p. 126) and Stump (p. 22) point out that Arthur was sincerely attached to the community, in contrast to Hetty, and thus he can be restored at the end. Stump notes the final irony in his return to be taken care of by the community, which he had hoped to take care of as squire, p. 56.
CHAPTER III. THE MILL ON THE FLOSS

George Eliot planned The Mill on the Floss as "a novel as long as Adam Bede, and a sort of companion picture of provincial life." It complements Adam Bede by depicting the life of a thriving provincial market town in the 1830's, rather than the small, older rural village. It is also broader in scope than any of the other novels in this study, with its extensive portrayal of childhood and family relations and most of one book devoted to Tom's education away from home. Yet the central problems in this novel still involve the protagonists' attachment to their home, their strong associations from the past, and obligations to family and community, which are in conflict with the external and internal forces that make the continuation of these bonds difficult or, for all three main characters this time, impossible.

The community is no longer envisioned as a primarily sympathetic, beneficent body that maintains its harmony and cohesion while those who violate its values are removed and punished, as in Adam Bede. This novel conveys, more fully and intensely than any other novel by Eliot or Hardy, an ambivalent attitude toward the value of permanent, unalterable loyalties to one's native community and past ties, since
the limitations of provincial life and human nature can overshadow the natural human affections and virtues instilled by inherited traditions and lifelong attachments. Edward Tulliver is destroyed in his attempt to stay at his family's old mill under its unscrupulous new owner. As a result, his son, Tom, inherits a single-minded desire for revenge and reparation that controls his future career and helps divide him from his sister. Maggie's agonizing renunciation of a new love out of loyalty to Tom and home is rejected by a brother and a community that will not forgive. The offers of reconciliation and sympathy she does receive are qualified, limited by circumstances, or simply too late to restore her to the community she cannot bear to leave.

Thus the community of this novel is less idyllic and more complex than Adam Bede's. Instead of focusing on a small, charming village that contrasts with a harsher and poorer neighboring district, The Mill on the Floss portrays St. Ogg's and its surrounding parishes, encompassing a variety of environments and characters, from the comfortable town house of a prosperous businessman to the "beggarly," muddy farms of Basset, where poor working men drown their troubles at "a centre of dissipation" called Dickison's. Passages analyzing the history of the "venerable" "old, old" town rooted in nature, and comparing it to villages on the Rhone, reveal the "narrow, ugly, grovelling existence" of humanity, and the "sordid life" of the St. Ogg's inhabitants.
(pp. 181, 362). Nostalgic affection, sharp satire, and direct criticism are blended in the portrayal of the combinations of charms and foibles, virtues and vices in the provincial characters. While the significance and permanence of the individual's bonds to the community of the past are unquestioned, Eliot emphasizes the "melancholy" reality that the most influential members of that old-fashioned community were often ignorant, narrow-minded, and materialistic.

The Mill on the Floss is also narrower in scope than Adam Bede in some respects. It focuses on the middle class of business men and professional men, and their families, which was growing in size and power during the middle of the century. Morton Berman calls this novel "the natural history of a social class." The plot deals with the related tragedies of a father and his son and daughter, rather than with the contrasting fates of members of different social classes. Along with the increasing opportunities for advancement for industrious men like Tom Tulliver and Mr. Deane, the class consciousness, social prejudices, and code of respectability within this class have become even more rigid and restrictive than those in the old, inflexible rural hierarchy depicted in Adam Bede and Silas Marner, with its wide gap between the gentry and the farmers and village artisans. The same deep-seated fear of family disgrace that threatens to uproot the Poysers in Adam Bede and mars
the lives of Godfrey and Nancy Cass in *Silas Marner* is a constant preoccupation with the "emmet-like Dodsons and Tullivers" (p. 363), contributing to Tulliver's death and Maggie's alienation. In a changing society where fortunes are uncertain and old ideals of integrity and justice conflict with modern corruption and unconventional moral dilemmas, old-fashioned people like the Dodsons and Tullivers protect their family fortunes and honor by adhering to extreme standards of frugality, clannishness, and propriety. Claude T. Bissell calls this novel Eliot's "most sustained analysis of English philistinism."6

Because these conventions are so inflexible and restrictive, the old customs intended to "strengthen the primitive fellowship of kindred, and make the sunshine of familiar human faces . . . welcome" are often undermined by discord and division among relatives and neighbors (p. 223). Maggie learns early in life, through her own and her father's suffering, and through friendships with other misunderstood characters, Bob Jakin and Philip Wakem, that family connections and public reputation are inaccurate reflections of an individual's worth. Her severe, self-righteous brother does not learn this lesson, while her own unconventional virtues and attempts to atone for her errors are rejected by a society that judges by appearance and unalterable standards of conduct.
Like **Adam Bede**, **The Mill on the Floss** contains a wide variety of supporting characters, creating a dense portrait of the social milieu of the Tullivers. Since reputation and respectability are crucial concerns in this novel, these characters, especially the Dodsons,* provide constant commentary on the attributes and behavior of the protagonists. Mrs. Tulliver and her most outspoken sister, Mrs. Glegg, are the dominant voices of the Dodsonian way of life. Although most of the characters are relatives of the Tullivers, the other aunts and their husbands, along with an assortment of other inhabitants of St. Ogg's and vicinity, represent a broad range of social positions and occupations in the community, from Mr. Pullet, the affluent gentleman farmer, and Mr. Deane, the rising businessman, to Luke, Tulliver's loyal miller, and Bob Jakin, the clever and comical pack-man.

The three supporting characters who play crucial roles in Maggie's crisis in the second half of the novel—her cousin Lucy, Philip Wakem, and Stephen Guest—are less important as representatives of community values than as contrasting personalities embodying the conflicting emotional ties and alternate approaches to life that tear Maggie apart in the end. Lucy, with whom Maggie is always compared

*In this chapter, as in the novel, "the Dodsons" refers to all the Dodson sisters, as well as the aunts' husbands, insofar as they share their wives' views on money and respectability, even though none of the characters carries the name of Dodson.*
unfavorably, is the Dodsonian ideal in appearance and de-
corous behavior, yet she lacks the aunts' annoying habits. 
Although she is a typical provincial society girl—compla-
cent and conventional—in contrast to restless, deep-souled 
Maggie, in the end Lucy also demonstrates the selfless for-
giveness and sympathy that Tom and the rest of society re-
fuse to Maggie. Philip, because of his hump-back, is a 
sensitive recluse in the town he finds dull and oppressive. 
He gives Maggie the intellectual stimulation and uncondi-
tional affection she craves, and falls in love with her. 
Their secret meetings in the Red Deeps provide escape from 
the miseries of home and the pressures of a community that 
would keep them apart. Later Lucy's suitor, Stephen Guest, 
considered "a great coxcomb" with status and wealth in St. 
Ogg's (p. 549), tempts Maggie with offers of intense ro-
mantic love and a life of ease. In her decision to return 
home after nearly eloping with him, Maggie breaks his heart, 
as well as Lucy's and Philip's, and loses the acceptance 
she had gained in the society of her native town.

Like Adam Bede, this novel contains many scenes of 
everyday life at the homes of the characters, but most of 
these episodes are interrupted by some crisis caused by 
Maggie or Mr. Tulliver. The few family and communal cele-
brations are also dominated by the troubles of the protago-
nists. The family Easter dinner is spoiled for Maggie and 
her mother when Maggie cuts her own hair; after dinner
Mrs. Glegg leaves in a rage during a violent argument with Tulliver about money and Tom's education. Although the Christmas chapter opens with nostalgic details about the "fine old" holiday traditions enjoyed by the children, the returning schoolboy, Tom, realizes his home is not as "happy as it had always been before." There is no dancing or congenial conversation at this provincial holiday gathering, as there is in Silas Marner and Under the Greenwood Tree. Only Mr. Tulliver's relations attend because, as Mrs. Tulliver points out, the two sides of the family "don't suit well together" (p. 96). After an abrupt statement that "Christmas was cheery; but not so Mr. Tulliver," his ranting about lawsuits occupies the rest of the chapter (pp. 223-24).

Books III, IV, and V contain no celebrations except the paying of Tulliver's debts, with the creditors treated to dinner at the Golden Lion, where the mill had been sold. At home this news provides one brief "moment so delicious" in the lives of Tom and Maggie (p. 456), in the midst of the many scenes of misery and privation during Tulliver's bankruptcy, illness and death. The most solemn ritual in the novel is Tulliver's private ceremony of placing a curse against Wakem in the family Bible, a malicious deed that shocks his family, as Henchard's use of the town choir's psalm to curse Farfrae horrifies his onlookers in The Mayor of Casterbridge. As Barbara Hardy points out, the pagan ritual of revenge replaces the Christian use of the Bible.
The irrational vow of vengeance against Wakem and his kin, added to the record of Tulliver births and deaths, leads to Tulliver's own death after he attacks Wakem, and contributes to the division between Tom and Maggie, because of Maggie's friendship with Philip Wakem.

In Book VI some stability and prosperity are restored for Tulliver's survivors. Although Tom is too obsessed with making a fortune and getting the mill back to participate in social life, Maggie's new social success in St. Ogg's under Lucy's patronage is demonstrated on several festive occasions. But again the focus is on Maggie's troubles, rather than on depictions of a harmonious community in action. The Charity Bazaar, where "all well-drest St. Ogg's" gathers in "the fine old Hall" (p. 547), dramatizes the tensions among Maggie, Philip, Stephen, and the innocent Lucy, when Stephen and Maggie try so hard to avoid each other. The dance at Stephen's luxurious home, where the Guest sisters condescend to entertain mainly the "commercial and professional gentility," so that Lucy is "queen of the occasion" (p. 558), provides a glimpse of the life of ease that could be Maggie's if she and Stephen were free to marry each other. But because of his ties to Lucy, the secret love scene and quarrel between Stephen and Maggie that dominate this chapter cut short the possibility that Maggie could enjoy some "music and brightness" at the dance, as Lucy had hoped (p. 557).
At the family party celebrating Tom's return to the mill, optimistic Lucy is the only jovial one, since the discussion is monopolized, as usual, by the Dodsons' bickering, this time about the linens they will give to Tom and the disgrace of Maggie's "going into service" to support herself (p. 575). Lucy's generous little schemes to restore comfort and happiness to Maggie are thwarted, not only by Tom's refusal at the end of the party to accept Philip as a future brother-in-law, but also by Maggie's fateful boat trip with Stephen, which follows in the next chapter. After this scandal there is no possibility for cohesive communal gatherings. Stephen and Lucy both go away for a time, while Philip becomes more reclusive than ever. Tom turns Maggie away from his restored home at the mill, and, though she refuses to leave her native town, she is spurned by its society.

**The Provincial Men of Business**

The different types of provincial middle-class men represented by the background characters include a wide range of occupations, personalities, and ethical standards, providing a context for the short-sighted, proud, and rash behavior that costs Tulliver his mill and his life. The lax principles of Riley and Wakem contribute to Tulliver's downfall, while the honorable and prosperous Dodson husbands, constantly held up to Tulliver by his wife as models
of judicious and profitable management, offer more criticism than support to their unlucky relations until Tulliver is bankrupt and Tom proves to be an industrious Dodson. Although the varying points of view of these men relate primarily to the Tulliver financial troubles, they are also voices of the narrow-minded, sexist society that misunderstands and represses Maggie. Riley and the uncles all make patronizing and teasing remarks about little Maggie's reading and her pranks that are unintentionally "lacerating" to the intelligent, sensitive child who yearns for acceptance and admiration.

Mr. Riley's brief appearance in the beginning of the novel helps introduce Tulliver's misguided plans and delusions. When Tulliver asks him for advice about Tom, because Tulliver would like Tom to be an educated and "smartish" man of business like Riley, this auctioneer and appraiser calls simple, traditional men like Tulliver "people of the old school" (p. 63). Tulliver's first speech in the novel reveals his stubborn antipathy toward lawyers and the Dodsons, since Riley's strongest recommendation is that he is not afraid to look Lawyer Wakem in the face, and since Tulliver opposes his wife's desire to consult the Dodsons about Tom. Riley is an amused, condescending audience for Tulliver's first long-winded recital of his many problems—the old feuds over water rights; his wife's ignorance (considered an advantage until her lack of wit or
scholarly ability turned up in the son); his desire for Tom to be a shrewd businessman rather than a farmer or miller who would usurp his father's place prematurely; and his puzzlement over having a clever, studious daughter who could probably beat the lawyers if she were a man.

It is ironic that Tulliver trusts Riley's judgment and wants Tom to emulate him, since Riley's own pretensions and limitations are evident in this scene. U. C. Knoepflmacher discusses "the differing levels of awareness" seen in the Tullivers and this "false counselor" who knows less about books than the little girl does. Later this supposedly infallible businessman dies with debts that complicate Tulliver's financial troubles and leave Riley's daughters penniless, as Tulliver's own daughter will be. The long analysis of Riley's egotistical motives for giving inflated recommendations of Mr. Stelling as a school-master helps establish the realistic approach and moral tone of the novel, by emphasizing that laziness, "trivial falsities," and "small promptings"—not the deliberately malicious and selfish plots depicted by dramatists—can lead ordinary, short-sighted people to spoil their neighbors' lives (pp. 74-75).

Mr. Wakem is reputedly the villain at the source of Tulliver's legal and financial problems. While Wakem makes few actual appearances in the novel, the repeated allusions to him as a satanic "raskill" emphasize the excessive and destructive nature of Tulliver's fanatical grudge against
him. Tulliver's belief "that rats, weevils, and lawyers were created by Old Harry" is similar to the superstitions applied by the villagers to Silas Marner and to Dr. Fitzpiers of The Woodlanders, a prejudice based on the notion that certain clever and successful men must have evil powers. Tulliver's conviction, however, is not one of his "safe, traditional opinions," but is produced by his own ignorance, hot temper, and belligerence in legal disputes (p. 63). The knowledge that Wakem also controls the mortgages on the mill, after beating Tulliver in the lawsuit, causes Tulliver's initial collapse and Tom's assumption that Wakem deliberately set out to ruin them.

When Wakem appears himself, we see that he is indeed an unscrupulous lawyer, although not as wicked or malicious as Tom and his father suspect. Aware that some men, like Tulliver, are honest but misguided, Wakem enjoys exercising his power in society and using tricks against less crafty opponents. Mrs. Tulliver's foolish appeal to Wakem not to buy the mill, the most aggressive action of her life, affects him as her nagging does her husband, leading him to do the opposite of her wishes. Her obtuse blunder of discussing Tulliver's faults with Wakem and repeating what has been said publicly about the lawyer prompts his hot-headed reply that Tulliver is "a pig-headed, foul-mouthed fool," the most antagonistic comment on the miller's failings. (p. 337). Although Wakem had not even thought of buying the
before, now Tulliver's foolhardy vindictiveness and public
denigration of him make Wakem inclined to retaliate and
humiliate this insignificant, but obnoxious, adversary by
becoming his employer. After Tulliver, torn between his
life-long attachment to the mill and his repugnance at this
degrading position, gives in to his wife's pleas to stay in
the old place under Wakem, his growing bitterness leads him
to believe it is fair to horsewhip Wakem during an argument,
and to die refusing to forgive his enemy.

In the early stages of this feud, young Tom's associa-
tion of Philip's hump with the father's "rascality" shows
Tom's inheritance of his father's irrational enmity (p. 233).
Ironically, Tulliver is proud to have his son at school with
Philip Wakem, believing a scoundrel as shrewd as Wakem surely
chooses the best in school-masters and any commodity, but
Tulliver also warns Tom not to learn anything evil from "the
son of a bad man" (p. 232). The contrast between Maggie's
sensitive, sympathetic personality and Tom's habit of ad-
hering "tenaciously to impressions once received" is illus-
trated when Maggie pities and befriends Philip, while Tom
continues to consider him a "natural enemy," despite
Philip's kindness to Tom when he is injured (p. 239). Where-
as Maggie's strongest memories bind her to those who have
shown her the love and respect she craves, Tom's deepest
associations with the past are his lingering sense of dis-
grace and "his duty to his father's memory," which compels
him to live by the curse against Wakem and reject Maggie, rather than accept Philip Wakem as a family friend or brother-in-law (p. 579).

Although almost every appearance of Philip is accompanied by references to the guilt by association that makes his father an obstacle between him and Maggie, Wakem's appearances in Book VI reveal the humane qualities that only Philip sees--his bonds of love with his deformed son and dead wife. His savage rage at the idea of a degrading alliance with the Tullivers softens when he realizes that his son, who has suffered so long, wants the kind of happiness he had with his loving wife. Wakem is suspicious that Maggie looks "dangerous and unmanageable," unlike his mild wife and Philip. His assertion that "whom she belongs to" is more important than her own attitudes reveals the same sexist prejudice that has plagued Maggie all her life (pp. 543, 545). But Wakem cannot sever his ties with Philip, unlike Tom, who cuts himself off from Maggie because of old grudges and scandal. Although he refuses ever to associate with Tom, Wakem is kind to Maggie in public at the bazaar, and is later fiercely bitter when she breaks Philip's heart after Wakem has let his acceptance of her be known in society.

The husbands of the Dodson sisters support the central Dodsonian doctrines of frugality, family pride, and respectability; they also represent a broad range of approaches
in their business dealings and attitudes toward modern middle-class progress. Mr. Pullet epitomizes the ignorance and complacency of "that extinct class of British yeomen"—he is a gentleman farmer who dresses well, lives comfortably, and prospers with no awareness of the world outside his safe, well-fortified gate (p. 127). Like Tulliver, he is puzzled at any unexpected development that does not conform to his own narrow, yet righteous, view of life; since he is more wealthy and cautious than Tulliver, and even less knowledgeable, he remains aloof from the financial struggles that destroy Tulliver and raise Deane to Pullet's own level of affluence. He insists that his wife have the best hat in church, but he uncharacteristically voices emphatic opinions in the discussion about helping the bankrupt Tullivers in the most frugal way. Later, unlike Deane and Glegg, Pullet never assists Tom in his career, but rationalizes his own stinginess by saying it is best not to meddle with progress when Tom is doing well on his own.

The ever-present lozenges in which Pullet finds solace are used to satirize this trivial, foolish man. His greatest talent, to his wife, is his good memory, demonstrated when he recites her complicated daily routine of medications, although he is "lost among the keys" that are so important in Dodson households (p. 578). In the absence of any ties of genuine affection between the Dodson relatives and the Tulliver children, Mr. Pullet's candies, music-box, and
"remarkable" house and farm animals make this small, unremarkable man the children's favorite. Tom realizes Pullet is a silly "nincompoop"; to him gentlemen farmers are thus enviable for their riches, but not for their timid and unheroic way of living (p. 153).

Mr. Glegg functions as another type of old-fashioned businessman, and as a congenial counterpart to his sharp-tongued wife. Although he married the eldest Miss Dodson because of her exemplary domestic thriftiness, and the main scene at their home shows that he can argue as belligerently as she does, when provoked, he is mystified by her female "contrairiness" (p. 187). She believes one of her wifely duties is to curb his pleasures and follies, such as his passion for gardening and his "too light" and "undelicate" jokes about the serious failings of the Tullivers (pp. 575-76). As with all their habits, however, strict limits of moderation on their private family quarrels preserve domestic stability. At family gatherings Mr. Glegg is the most kind-hearted and gentle of the Dodson adults, hating to see his wife fight with others. Like Maggie and Mrs. Moss, he shows genuine sympathy for Mr. Tulliver while he is ill, and he tries to keep the others from bickering. Unfortunately, his greater compassion for Lucy leads him to judge Maggie as harshly as Mr. Deane and others do in the end, making Mrs. Glegg's defense of Maggie seem all the more remarkable.
As a retired wool-stapler who earned his fortune slowly, Glegg is one of a lost "race," who proceed cautiously and find miserliness a necessity. But he is an "amiable" and "lovable skinflint," with a different kind of stinginess from his wife's egoistic hoarding (pp. 187-88). Like Mr. Deane, he is skeptical about the value of Tom's education, proud of his own independent struggles in the past, and appalled at any unnecessary or injudicious outlay of capital. Glegg prudently waits to encourage Tom until the latter has proven himself in Deane's employ; then the Gleggs' investments help Tom pay off the shameful debts.

Mr. Deane, unlike his brothers-in-law, represents a more modern type—the self-made, highly-respected businessman in the town's most prosperous company, who has advanced so far in society that Susan Dodson's questionable match promises to become the best among the Dodson sisters. Deane is described as a typical, active Englishman, with a silver snuff-box more expensive than Tulliver's, used as a distraction when he prudently wishes to remain neutral on questionable subjects. Knoepflmacher discusses in detail the contrast between "impulsive and sentimental" Tulliver and the "noncommittal" and "utilitarian" Deane. Although not as cautious as Glegg, Deane is stern and conservative when Tom applies to this resourceful and ambitious uncle for employment; he lectures at length on the necessity of acquiring a more practical education than Tom was given,
adapting himself to the changing needs of the market, and resigning himself to years of ordinary labor. Deane is the spokesman of the new order of provincial gentlemen, believing that commerce and technological progress are as valuable as farming, and that one must "know what the world's made of" (p. 315).

When Tom adapts to these modern ways humbly and renounces his ambitions of quickly becoming a powerful and dashing gentleman on a fine horse, Deane eventually shows fatherly pride in Tom's accomplishments, praising him at the public dinner for the creditors. Having pointed out earlier that the family's old attachments to the mill do not make it a better investment than his company's newer mill, Deane never considers buying the mill "on sentimental grounds" (p. 330), but his company buys it later, when Lucy's pleas for her cousins' sake coincide with sound financial policy. Despite Deane's professed indifference to the fancies and activities of young people, however, even his "business-loving ears" detect the sadness in Tom when the young man surpasses the diligence and dutifulness of his relations, expressing a single-minded determination to do nothing but work and get the mill back (p. 511).

The Dodson Sisters

The extensive dramatization and analysis of the daily lives and habits of the Dodson sisters create the most
detailed portrayal of a group of supporting characters in any of the novels in this study. Critical debate about the relative virtues and vices of the Dodsons began as soon as the novel was published. One writer's condemnation of the "odious Dodson family, ... stingy, selfish wretches," prompted Eliot to write that she was "aghast" that anyone would think she hated the Dodsons (who were based on her own aunts) or that she denigrated their honesty or the paying of debts. Because their petty bickering and abrasive nagging are so long-winded and persistent throughout the novel, and because their condemnation of long-suffering Maggie and Mr. Tulliver is so harsh from the earliest chapters, it is easy to overlook their redeeming virtues. As many critics have noted, however, and as the narrator's comments emphasize, beneath the "oppressive narrowness" of their lives lie solid, unwaveringly honest values and loyalties that form the foundation of community life (p. 363). The depth, humor and sympathy with which they are portrayed color the piercing examination of their ignorance, insensitivity, and materialism. Although society is indebted to Dodsonian mothers for "some worthy qualities in many of her members," the trivialities, excesses, and "proud, honest egoism which had a hearty dislike to whatever made against its own credit and interests" reveal that familial and social cohesion are not always produced by bonds of charity and sympathy (pp. 364-65).
The Dodson conventions are based on generations of family respectability: "their moral notions, though held with strong tenacity, seem to have no standard beyond hereditary custom" (p. 362). Each of their virtues, which can be seen in more attractive or sympathetic forms in other characters and other communities (Raveloe and Hayslope, for example, in Eliot's village novels), manifests itself in variations that are petty or extreme. Their loyalty to their own kin, their most significant value in relation to the Tullivers, results in self-righteous condemnation or exclusion of outsiders, including, to some extent, in-laws. Because the Dodsons never had mills, lawsuits, bankruptcy, sudden death, loans without security, brown skin, unruly children, or scandal, they cannot accept these circumstances in the Tulliver family. The Dodsons' proud independence conflicts with Tulliver's stubborn determination to remain independent from them, causing deep humiliation on both sides when he is bankrupt. Dodsons are both honest and richer than they appear, but never honest and poor. Their stern ideas of justice and retribution lead them to insist on punishment as well as fair play, and to attach blame to victims of misfortune. Thus Mrs. Tulliver, under the influence of her sisters' criticism, futilely and pathetically wonders what wickedness she has done to deserve troublesome children, a faulty husband, and poverty.
The exclusive and peculiar Dodsonian rules for all details of domestic management are based on thrift, cleanliness, and a wholesome preference for what is homemade, but these habits seem trivial or unsociable when days are spent in monotonous, unchangeable routines, or when they refuse to eat at a home with different rules. Their instincts for saving money, their pride at displaying social superiority in public with the latest fashions, and their morbid interest in family funerals conflict with comical results, when expensive new clothes are kept emtombed safely in their closets, or when they fear this year's hat will never be worn if they go into mourning. Their nostalgic attachment to the past results in silly reminiscences about linens and china, and in reluctance to adapt to present changes by parting with old things or altering their habits. Their preoccupation with possessions, domestic details, and rules of propriety substitutes for intelligent or sympathetic response to human problems. Their interminable discussions of legacies to nieces and nephews reveal that, while they would never "forsake or ignore" their kin, they believe "personal qualities were subordinate to the great fundamental fact of blood" (pp. 365, 197).

Since Dodsons are not all identical and their individual foibles can vary or clash with each other, the portrayal of the four sisters dramatizes the limitations and excesses of the Dodson code in action. Susan Deane has the smallest
Dodson role, as she dies before the romantic drama that begins in her home, as morbid Sophy Pullet predicted she would. Although Susan usually shuts her thin lips and refuses to argue like Mrs. Glegg, her few "small well-considered speeches on peculiar occasions" show that she shares the Dodson blend of materialism and duty to family. She offers to send jelly to Mr. Tulliver, if prescribed, and "loftily" condescends to buy some of the best household goods, but not in order to give them back to Bessy (pp. 287, 291). Bessy, who is bitterly jealous because the "thinnest and sallowest" sister got Lucy, the perfect child with Bessy's own good looks, and because she is compared unfavorably with Susan in other ways, claims that Susan is "jealous and having," and never takes her side (pp. 95, 116).

Although Bessy believes Susan's lack of an independent fortune renders her powerless as an ally against Mrs. Glegg, later the Deanes' growing fortune and acquisition of the latest possessions, which outshine the old Dodson goods, prompts Mrs. Glegg to declare that the "true Dodson spirit" is fading in all but herself. Her scorn of the Deanes' getting "like the rest" and her hopes that the distant nephews are more commendable illustrate the tendency of her kind to criticize people who are nearest to them (p. 286).

Sophy Pullet is the most comical Dodson, a caricature displaying the extreme versions of most of their eccentricities. She enters her first scene crying and continues that
habit at every crisis that occurs, "as a compendious mode, at all times, of expressing what were her views of life in general" (p. 287). Her domestic preoccupations reveal the proud and morbid obsessions of the simple-minded, childless, well-to-do housewife. At her home the solemn ritual of retrieving and unwrapping her new hat, her collection of used medicine bottles, and the horrified screams of mistress and maid when the children track in mud dramatize the sterility of her materialistic existence. Philip Fisher points out that Sophy's and Bessy's hoarding shows "the central absurdity of 'things'" that are "dead to the human needs they were created for," being simply guarded by their owners until their deaths. 13 Sophy's disagreements with Mrs. Glegg about the propriety of discussing other people's complaints and crying for non-relatives further emphasize the trivial extremes of their code of respectability. While Jane opposes going "beyond your own family" in habits such as locking up, Sophy believes Jane "lives too low," and is ashamed to have people know Jane never goes to the doctor (pp. 578, 156).

Sophy and Bessy side with each other, like-minded allies against Mrs. Glegg's frequent scolding, although Sophy, like the others, pities Bessy for her awful children and husband. Sophy tells Jane "it's very bad among sisters" to be so quarrelsome, and may cause a fit or insanity (p. 131). When Bessy persuades Sophy to appeal to Jane to make up with
Tulliver after their argument, in order to avoid family disgrace, this unwelcome interference makes proud Tulliver even more determined to end his debt to Mrs. Glogg and to risk financial ruin, while Sophy is rebuked by Jane for attempting to correct her on a matter of family decorum. Thus Sophy and Jane play a small role in Tulliver's financial downfall, although the Dodsons function primarily as reproachful judges of Tulliver.

Bessy Tulliver has a more active and detrimental part in her husband's tragedy. Although Tulliver is proud of having a beautiful and intellectually inferior wife, her dull wits and vague idea that complaints can change reality keep her from realizing that her increasingly peevish and "monotonous pleading" makes Tulliver do whatever she opposes, especially when she consults her sisters on every family problem, so they will not blame her (p. 228). She is the mildest version of the Dodson mentality, claiming to be a passive wife in all areas except those which her code of family respectability cannot tolerate, including lawsuits. As a self-centered, fastidious, nagging provincial housewife, she is like Adam Bede's mother, except that her more active interference in her husband's affairs contributes to his downfall. Knoepflmacher observes that the "mismatch" between the Tullivers leads to a tragic widening of the gap between them. 14
The bankruptcy reduces Mrs. Tulliver to a confused, frightened, aging drudge. Her limited intellect, which views every issue in terms of its effect on her domestic details, is baffled by this new world of misfortune and disgrace, leaving her in "helpless imbecility" when the household "gods" that gave her life meaning are gone. The idea of having her treasured possessions sold to outsiders, rather than saved for her offspring, and perhaps worn out in strange houses before she dies, is the epitome of disgrace to the Dodson mentality, although her frugal relations cruelly ignore her pleas to buy her best things to keep them in the family. Maggie chides her for caring only about the goods bearing her Dodson name, and for worrying more about her things than about her husband's health. Although her affectionate husband regrets the sorrow he has caused her, she insensitively points out that she was better off before her marriage, when she did not realize "for better or for worse" could mean "for worse as this" (p. 349). As with all the Dodson relationships, her marriage is judged by inherited expectations and material success, with little evidence of human compassion or love.

Ironically, it is the absence of her beloved possessions and denial of "her own small personal desires" that cause a measure of maternal fondness for Maggie to emerge. Nevertheless, she still wishes Maggie "had been quite different," and the mother's "narrow griefs" provide a dismal
companion during the years of poverty and loneliness (pp. 320, 369). Although she works slavishly at home until the debts are paid and appears as a valued housekeeper for Lucy after Tulliver's and Susan's deaths, Bessy fades into the background of the struggles of Tom and Maggie, an ineffectual old woman nodding over her knitting. While her eccentricities are as humorous as Sophy's in the beginning, she becomes a pathetic figure in her response to misfortune.

Mrs. Glegg, on the other hand, sets the example of true Dodson morality and propriety through the end of the novel. Constantly reminding everyone that she is the eldest sister, she dominates every conversation with her shrill and sarcastic demands for attention and respect, excluding no one from her merciless scolding. The children's antipathy toward her and her violent quarrel with Tulliver in her first scene create a negative view of the Dodsons at the beginning of the novel. Tulliver's resentment of her aggressive interference provokes him to call her a "damned ill-tempered woman," after she bemoans the prospect of her "own kin going headlongs to ruin" by investing in Tom's education (pp. 129, 131). She starts visiting Bessy again months after this quarrel, to Maggie's dismay, but she insists Tulliver's mind is "too corrupt" for further contemplation or comment (p. 197). She loves to point out the miracle that her pessimistic words all come true. Ironically, despite her narrow-minded egotism, she is ultimately right about the
grim futures of Tulliver and the children, just as the foolish and annoying people around Dorothea Brooke in Middlemarch are often right for the wrong reasons about her unwise marriage to Casaubon.

Mrs. Glegg's righteous pride is also emphasized when her "excellent house" is described as giving her views "from which she could observe the weaknesses of her fellow-beings and reinforce her thankfulness for her own exceptional strength of mind" (pp. 185-86). Her milder husband, baffled by her unreasonable belligerence, points out that she is like a tipsy man who sees excess in everyone but himself. Her lack of restraint in expressing her views and asserting her own virtues is combined with strict self-discipline in her personal habits. She inflicts privations on herself when nursing an ill temper, eating gruel and reading Puritan devotions while she quarrels with her husband, yet she has a secret desire to be a "widow well left," admired by her family and neighbors when she is dignified with a generous inheritance (p. 194). The quality of her marriage, like that of Mrs. Tulliver, is determined by materialistic considerations, since Mr. Glegg's hints about his will help end their arguing, and she plans fond eulogies on his weaknesses and pleasures that she denigrates while he lives.

This shrewd and energetic woman involves herself in men's business in a way that is baffling and improper to Bessy and Sophy. Having prudently invested and hoarded her
own money since her maidenhood, Jane refuses to let her husband "rob" her to give a loan to the Tullivers when they need it most, but when Tom later proposes an investment that will bring high interest, she insists on making a loan for profit. After long and cautious scrutiny she decides that Tom is worthy of encouragement and reminds him to respect her when she is in her coffin and he has her guineas, since her money is bequeathed to her nephews and nieces equitably, regardless of quarrels with their fathers.

Tom grows into such an extreme variation on the Dodson mentality, without their humorous foibles, that severe Mrs. Glegg discovers the limits of her kinship with him. In the Tullivers' first discussion in the novel, the father's dismay at Tom's inheritance of his mother's slow intellect is countered by her absurd pride in the most trivial of Dodson traits in her boy--his fair complexion and preference for salt. The impossibility of failure and family disgrace is so deeply instilled in Tom that he receives a "violent shock" at the bankruptcy (p. 267). One of the saddest results of this crisis is Tom's loss of his boyish loyalty to his father's point of view, in contrast to Maggie's sentimental affection and fidelity, when Tom joins the Dodsons in blaming Tulliver. While Tom's diligence and persistence in working to pay the debts are admirable and honorable, his prejudices, limited understanding, and bitter experience result in a tenacious devotion to his goals and cold
treatment of Maggie, especially when he condemns her for disgracing the family, without considering her motives, circumstances, or remorse.¹⁵ When Mrs. Glegg cannot convince "immovable" Tom to relent, the aunt realizes she has found a Dodson nature stronger than her own, in which "personal pride" overcame the sense of clanship (pp. 630-31).

In relation to Maggie, who takes after the Tullivers, the Dodsons function as a constant "chorus of reproach and derision" (p. 125). Her mother never defends her as her father does, but introduces her in the novel by complaining about her "comical" irregularities that make her seem like an idiot, because Dodson children are never absentminded or mischievous. Bessy's threat that the aunts will stop loving Maggie when she ruins her curls is an ironic reflection on the conditions and quality of the Dodsons' affections, making Maggie resent them more than ever. The aunts continually criticize Maggie's dirtiness, roughness, and bad manners. Opposed to Tulliver's indulgence of Maggie, Mrs. Glegg says the child should get bread and water and a whipping when she cuts her hair for spite, making her mother almost insensible with "domestic sorrows" (p. 126). Sophy hopes boarding school will cure Maggie's vices, although there is no help for her brown skin, which reminds uncle Pullet of a song about a "Nutmeg Brown Maid" who was crazy. Many of the ignorant and pessimistic remarks of the Dodsons are full of ironic forebodings of Maggie's future, especially the fears of
drowning and of fates worse than drowning.

During the bankruptcy Mrs. Glegg admonishes the children to be humble and grateful for their relatives' stingy support. Maggie's defiant outburst against the Dodsons for blaming her father and ignoring her mother's pleas for more help appall them so much they declare her schooling a waste, and Bessy wonders if "life could go on" after such madness (p. 297). During the following years of Maggie's privation and renunciation of worldly happiness, however, Bessy and the aunts are amazed that Maggie turns out to be so good. She is beautiful, dressed in aunt Pullet's dresses to avoid shabby appearances in public, and dutiful, as she visits her aunts and sews for them, although they oppose her insistence on taking a wage, rather than living with them.

The Dodsons' views of Maggie are even more mixed and qualified when she returns from the boat trip in disgrace, which is worse than death to Tom and the aunts. Sophy merely cries and despair of ever going out to meet acquaintances on the street again. Bessy displays an instinctive response of motherly love when Tom disowns Maggie, leaving her favorite child to comfort her unhappy one. After the initial shock of being rejected has worn off, however, Maggie sends her mother back to Tom, while Bessy starts complaining again of her confusing bad luck with her children, unaware of the insensitivity in her vow to "put up with" them, now that she has no furniture to be fond of (p. 632). Mrs. Glegg surprises
everyone by withholding judgment until the evidence is in, and then deciding, according to strict standards of family honor and fair play, that Maggie is not a total disgrace. Her desire to fight relatives and neighbors in Maggie’s defense shows admirable spirit and courage, but she also insists Maggie must be humbled and punished if she takes in the homeless outcast. The Dodson women, with their limited understanding and affections, actually play small roles in the background of Maggie’s turbulent drama at the end of the novel. The feeble love of the mother and the stern loyalty of the aunt are insufficient responses to the internal struggles of the girl who is rejected by the rest of the community.

The Tullivers’ Poorer Friends

The background characters who are lower in social status than the Dodsons and Tullivers—the Mosses, the servants, and Bob Jakin—display more unconditional loyalty and affection for the Tullivers during their troubles than do the Dodsons and other “respectable” members of the community. Although these poorer characters have little education and some of them have their own humorous varieties of social prejudice and moral weakness, their simple views, staunch devotion, and fortitude provide ironic reflections on the more damaging pretensions and doctrines of the Tullivers and Dodsons. But since there are drastic limitations on the intellectual
understanding or social influence of these characters, their generous support is not sufficient to help the protagonists maintain harmonious lives within the community.

Mr. Tulliver's sister, Gritty Moss, and her husband contrast in almost every way with the Dodson aunts and uncles. As hard-working and poor, but honest and loyal farmers, they are from the beginning of the novel victims of the same kind of prejudice and blame attached unfairly to more important characters later because of their family backgrounds and misfortunes. To the Dodson aunts, who agree the blood of the two families "did not mix well," Mrs. Moss's lack of china and possession of a husband who can barely pay his rent are the marks of her disrepute (p. 116). Ironically, Mr. Tulliver also continues to reproach his affectionate sister for marrying poorly and having so many children, even reminding her from his sick bed how she "aggravated" him, although Tulliver himself is the object of similar insensitive criticism from his in-laws (p. 306).

When he tries to retrieve the money he loaned to Moss, to help his own financial troubles, Tulliver finds that "poor relations are undeniably irritating: their existence is so entirely uncalled for on our part, and they are almost always very faulty people" (p. 142). Although Tulliver builds up his annoyance by illogically blaming "that unlucky agriculturist" for the "awkward" catastrophes that constantly befall him, Moss and his wife are both passive victims of
years of grueling rural labor (p. 137). Considered "the buck of Basset" before his marriage, Moss now has "the depressed unexpectant air of a machine horse." While Tulliver sorrowfully remembers his sister as good-looking, she is now "too fagged by toil and children to have strength left for any pride" (p. 141). On Christmas, with these careworn, uninformed farmers as his audience, Tulliver's ranting about lawsuits and water rights seems excessive and self-indulgent. Overworked Mr. Moss, who knows nothing about mills and can hardly stay awake, could never disagree with a relative to whom he owes money. Mrs. Moss, who is well aware that "the right doesn't allays win" and "the rich mostly get things their own way" (p. 228), is more interested in her brother's problems and anxious for his sake, but Tulliver argues with her excitedly as if she were defending his adversaries.

Unlike the Dodsons, Tulliver allows his warm and impulsive affections to override his desire to collect money owed to him. Simple Mrs. Moss unconsciously manipulates Tulliver's feelings by praising Maggie, as few people do; by discussing her hopes that her sons will always look out for their sisters; and by humbly expressing her gratitude for her brother's assistance. Puzzled by the conflict between his notions of sound finance and brotherly responsibility, and by his illogical belief that his leniency toward Gritty will ensure Tom's future devotion to Maggie, Tulliver
is a man "apt to clothe unimpeachable feelings in erroneous ideas" (p. 144). Memories of his fond mother also cause him to see connections in the past, present, and future that prompt him to defend his unfortunate sister and daughter. Maggie's resemblance to her aunt Moss, which dismays the Dodsons, endears her to her father. Although Mrs. Pullet declares scornfully that Maggie should "think more of her aunt Pullet nor of aunt Mosses," for monetary reasons (pp. 291-92), the Mosses' humble gift of a colored egg and genuine affection for Maggie are more precious than Pullet's contributions of money to send Maggie away to school. At the beginning and end of the novel aunt Gritty's home is a sanctuary for Maggie, where, as a dirty, active child or a wise, beautiful young lady, she is appreciated and adored by her aunt and cousins as intensely as she is criticized by Tom and the Dodsons. Although Gritty cannot help Maggie with her troubles, she thoughtfully provides privacy for Stephen and Maggie and a shoulder to cry on, without the interference or opposition the Dodson aunts would inflict at Stephen's unexpected visit to Maggie.

Mrs. Moss meets the Dodsons face-to-face after Tulliver collapses. The "easy-tempered, untidy," affectionate woman has already been contrasted with Mrs. Tulliver, who imitates Mrs. Glegg as she brags about her sisters' riches and flaunts her superiority over submissive Mrs. Moss (p. 227). After Tulliver loses the lawsuit, the Dodsons all get to voice
their opinion that the Mosses should do their share financially, although the Dodsons are all rich enough to help without inconveniencing themselves. Their tirades of blame and self-righteousness are interrupted by Mrs. Moss's frantic concern over her brother's health and remorse at owing him money he needs. Even though she admits she feels like a robber who has been a burden all her life, torn in two between her obligations to her brother and her own poor children, Mrs. Glegg tactlessly emphasizes her own sister's suffering from the bad luck of the Mosses and Tullivers.

Since these relations with their conflicting interests and values all agree on the subject of family loyalty and honoring pledges, when Tom remembers that Mr. Tulliver had decided never to recall money from Moss, the Dodsons all admit that it would be wrong for the Mosses to pay, despite their disapproval at this "reckless" and "wicked alienation of money" (pp. 300-301). While Mrs. Moss blesses Tom for this generosity, the boy and his uncle are more concerned with the ethical justification of keeping that money from the creditors than with emotional ties. Although self-centered Mrs. Tulliver continues to complain later that Tulliver will not take money from the Mosses for his own needs, the affectionate bankrupt keeps his pledge always to be a good brother to his unlucky sister, but Tom does not extend the same generosity and tolerance to his sister when she needs him.
Kezia, the Tullivers' house-maid, provides a comic echo of Mrs. Tulliver's blend of preoccupation with domestic details and unswerving loyalty to the family. After the bankruptcy sale her good heart and bad temper produce an indignant but poignant reflection on the family's sense of shame and bitterness, as she tries to scrub away the "peculiarly vile" dirt left by "that 'pipe-smoking pig' the bailiff" and the buyers, whom she considers "her personal enemies" (p. 322). When Tulliver comes downstairs to the dreary parlor for the first time, Kezia's defiance and assertiveness make Mrs. Tulliver's peevishness seem even more pathetic. Kezia is "equal to the task" of keeping irritable Mrs. Tulliver away from her sick husband; since the maid insists on staying without wages until Tulliver recovers, her compensation is her unprecedented ability to "scold her betters with unreproved freedom." She revels in ordering Mrs. Tulliver to help with the housework and to stop moping, while the despondent mistress submits to her servant's tyranny as "the last remnant of her household dignities," anticipating the greater disgrace of losing Kezia (p. 344). Her servant, like her sold furniture, is an outward sign of respectability without which she feels lost.

Luke, Tulliver's head miller, is another devoted employee. He watches constantly at Tulliver's bed during his illness, offers to take Tulliver to his own home during the sale, and attends with his wife when the master dies. One
of honest Tulliver's first concerns after his collapse is paying back money Luke invested in the mill, but, while Luke feels the "natural fitness in rank which made his master's downfall a tragedy to him," the master-servant relationship again seems reversed as Luke refuses the money and tries to share the family's sorrow by repeating his assurances that "you'd ha' paid iverybody, if you could" (p. 346). Luke's fidelity seems even more valuable at the end of the novel, when homeless Maggie reminds her mother that Luke was always good to her and would take them into his cottage if he had room.

Luke's homely advice about growing accustomed to Tulliver's new poverty, as his mother has "made friends" with her troubling shortness of breath, shows that the poor are used to accepting hardships patiently, while proud, stubborn Tulliver destroys himself because he cannot adjust to his misfortune (p. 348). Later, however, Luke agrees with Tulliver's confused and pessimistic view of life, adding his own quaint examples of puzzling troubles, from rust on the wheat to last year's runny bacon fat. In this important discussion Tulliver confides in Luke about his lifelong affection for the mill, his memories of his parents, and his despair at the idea of leaving his family home. Luke's sympathetic remarks reflect a dilemma inherent in the novel's view of the characters' strong attachment to people and things associated with the past. While Luke's loyalty
is touching when he indicates that he will accept a worse job under the mill's new owner, rather than end his work with Tulliver after twenty years, his distaste for anything new reveals a narrow view and inflexible temperament. Tulliver's acknowledgment that he is old-fashioned himself and Luke's provincial vocabulary when he says he "can't abide new plazen" nor "new victual nor new fazen" help emphasize the antiquated attitudes of these men (pp. 353-54). Like Michael Henchard in The Mayor of Casterbridge, they are too entrenched in the old methods and habits to flourish in a world of rapidly changing business practices and social upheavals—the world in which Donald Farfrae prospers in Casterbridge and in which Mr. Deane helps Tom Tulliver begin to succeed in St. Ogg's.

Luke's kind but simple-minded remarks are also used earlier in the novel, as are many of the incidents of Maggie's childhood, to provide ironic parallels and foreshadowing of the troubles that plague Maggie all her life. Although Luke's dusty domain in the mill and his "pleasant cottage" occupied by his hospitable wife are friendly places of refuge for the lonely little girl, her attempts to impress Luke with her cleverness are as frustrating as her interaction with every other adult besides her father. Luke's beliefs that Dutchmen, book-learning, and lop-eared rabbits are inherently immoral or unnatural are comic examples of the kinds of provincial ignorance and prejudice
displayed by more intelligent and powerful members of the community. There are grim forebodings of the fates of Tom and Maggie in Luke's pessimistic views that learning more than is necessary to earn a living brings disaster, that "things out o' natur niver thrive," and that the Prodigal Son probably never amounted to much after his repentance and reconciliation with his father (pp. 81-83). When their discussion of the weak-willed Prodigal Son revives Maggie's guilt at letting Tom's rabbits die, it is clear that pity and comfort from simple, good-hearted friends like Luke are not enough to soothe the restless spirit of this sensitive girl who craves knowledge and love.

Bob Jakin provides the best examples of unqualified friendship and selfless devotion as the troubles of the Tullivers develop. In his series of surprising appearances in every book but one, the magnanimous and imaginative assistance of this humble acquaintance provides increasingly ironic contrasts with the stingy and duty-bound support of the Dodsons. During the Tullivers' first sorrow, Bob offers them his little fortune freely, not out of family obligation, but for gratitude and "old 'quinetance sake" (p. 327). Although Tom disappoints him by not accepting money, Bob later remembers Maggie's lament over her lost books and brings her new ones, showing an untutored and comical, but lively, interest in the books, while her relations leave her only the barest necessities and disparage her reading.
The different responses of Tom and Maggie to Bob, like their opposing attitudes to Philip, emphasize the contrasts in their temperaments. Maggie quickly forgets her former jealousy of Tom's childhood pal and her childish notion that Bob must be wicked because of his strange family or his pet snakes. She responds warmly to his generosity, pointing out that the best bond between them would be the dependence of strong friendship. She sees that their former bird chaser, a courageous and clever example of "virtue in rags," has grown into a benevolent, affectionate young man (p. 102). Self-righteous Tom has always remembered a childhood quarrel over Bob's cheating at games, while Bob had forgotten the fight and his pride and resentment immediately, so that he could keep the precious pocket-knife Tom had given him. Later, when Bob shows that he does not carry grudges, but still treasures the knife, he creates one of the few moments when Tom, dropping his patronizing air, is "touched keenly enough to forget his pride and suspicion" (p. 326). Philip Fisher calls Bob's knife "concrete memory," a symbolic possession that is used and loved, unlike the Dodsons' sterile possessions.19

Ironically, this uneducated, independent pack-man is more instrumental in helping Tom pay off the debts quickly than are any of the cautious uncles, even Mr. Deane, with his large modern company. Mr. Glegg is suspicious that anyone would invest money for a friend without keeping a
share himself, so quick-tongued Bob, who enjoys sharing his good luck with Tom, shrewdly declares that he does it to make himself look important. When he also gives Tom lodgings Bob worries that Tom sits alone and never goes into company. As a child Tom renounced the pleasures of Bob's interesting company because of his moral scruples about the cheating. Now he cuts himself off from family and social life, slaving away and brooding about getting the mill back, while energetic Bob has a quaint house, a loving wife, and several thriving business enterprises of his own, providing a light-hearted and sentimental contrast to the restricted lives of Tom and Maggie.²⁰

Although Bob grew up in an environment where chivalry was not valued, he develops a chivalrous adoration of Maggie, when few people admire or befriend her. She becomes to him a Madonna who influences him to deal with his customers honestly, but he protests that he needs some "varmint to come over," and he only trickes stingy women who want to cheat him, by measuring goods with his big thumb (p. 377). The comic climax of the novel is his triumph over Mrs. Glegg. When Mr. Glegg's distrust of Bob's irregular appearance turns to admiration and amusement, they both use reverse psychology to get Mrs. Glegg to invest in Bob's trading and buy some goods from his pack. Bob's flattery, "unembarrassed loquacity" and keen wit are a match for her sharp and snobbish belligerence (p. 411). His pleasure in
getting the best of miserly, egotistical women like Mrs. Glegg complements his tactful kindness to unfortunate friends. His ethical standards are less rigid than the Dodsons', but more adaptable to individual human feelings and needs.

In the end Bob is the one Maggie turns to when Tom rejects her. Bob's home is a calmer refuge in her disgrace than her aunt's home, because Bob respects her privacy, makes no judgments, and offers her the companionship of his faithful dog and the baby named after her. His devotion to the Tullivers, especially this last offer of shelter, is like Abel Whittle's dogged loyalty to alienated Michael Henchard in The Mayor of Casterbridge. Out of remembrance for past kindnesses, one of the simplest, least powerful members of the community helps his friends when they are in need and all others shun them. Bob's responses to Maggie are limited, however, despite his sensitivity to human feelings. Without prying, he is dismayed that she returns home unmarried. He only asks if she has any grudge, eager to serve her cause by physically punishing those who wrong her; then he is puzzled when she says she has done wrong herself. His "easily satisfied ignorance" enables him to be perpetually happy, while she has no one to fulfill her greater emotional needs (p. 381). Bob's fidelity cannot help her rejoin the life of her native community. When the flood comes in their house, it is ironic that she plays the
role of protector, rushing to help with the boats, while Bob is unaware of her danger as he saves his helpless family. Although his act of charity in taking her in is reminiscent of St. Ogg's impulse to row the lost woman because "thy heart needs it," there is no legendary spirit watching over Tom and Maggie in this flood (p. 182). Bob's good luck and faithful friendship cannot save Maggie from the unmerciful forces of society or nature.

Dr. Kenn and St. Ogg's Society

As George Eliot acknowledged herself, the third volume of the novel is sketchier than the earlier parts, with inadequate development of the events leading to Maggie's tragic end. Thus, as Henry Auster notes, the society that rejects Maggie in the end is not portrayed in detail, although it is now more complex, when Maggie moves into the higher society of the town and meets Stephen Guest. Maggie's internal conflicts are shown primarily in relation to Stephen, Lucy, and Philip, with the few community scenes overshadowed by the developing secret troubles of these ill-fated lovers.

With a few very brief exceptions, such as the comments of Young Torry, who dances with Maggie and calls Stephen a coxcomb, the new people who admire Maggie and later spurn her never appear as characters, but their attitudes are described by the narrator. Although her relations consider
it a great opportunity for Maggie to be launched into gentle life, and her friends indulge her with the music, comforts, and affection she has been deprived of for so long, the shallow and frivolous society analyzed by the narrator, as well as the strict Dodsonian homes of her aunts, do not form a responsive community for the passionate, restless soul longing for a sympathetic haven in the place where her ties to the past are so deep. The Guest sisters, who have condescended to accept Lucy, are dismayed at the idea of being connected with the disagreeable Glegg and Pullets, or with unsophisticated Maggie. They blame Maggie for Stephen's disgrace and exile, embracing unfortunate Lucy in their fear that Stephen will ultimately marry Maggie instead. The descriptions of the condemnation of Maggie in St. Ogg's contain bitter mockery of the hypocritical "world's wife," who would have accepted Maggie as a romantic wife of the eminent Mr. Guest, but since she is still degraded Miss Tulliver, everyone pities Lucy and Stephen, hoping Maggie will take her corruption far away. There is also perceptive analysis of the less judgmental, but uncourageous ordinary citizens, who dare not risk association with the appearance of guilt.

The new vicar, Dr. Kenn, offers comfort and support to Maggie, but loses the struggle against this unforgiving community. At the bazaar, where the serious vicar disapproves of using vanity for charitable purposes, he notices Maggie's troubled look, establishing an instant bond of human sympathy
and understanding that prompts Maggie to go to him with her sorrow. Other brief introductions to Kenn show the town's light or indifferent attitude to his teaching. Mrs. Pullet's preoccupation with Mrs. Deane's illness and Lucy's collar frame Mrs. Tulliver's comment that Kenn is known as "a wonderful preacher" (p. 440). Stephen gives a half-satirical, half-sympathetic description of Kenn's severity and his charity toward a homeless sinner, more concerned with how Kenn's Anglican views might affect his future political career.

In Kenn's long discussions with Maggie he, like Mr. Irwine in *Adam Bede*, voices Eliot's views of the ideals of human fellowship and "mutual responsibility" in the community (p. 625). Although he believes the Church will ultimately restore those bonds of natural sympathy, he is realistic about the failings of his parishioners and the obstacles Maggie will encounter. Like Bob Jakin, he is tempted to think Maggie would be better off married, but his deeper knowledge of the situation and insight into her conscience keep him from tampering with her urgent desire to recover her ties with the past by staying home and trying to atone to those she has wronged. Whereas Rev. Irwine's main accomplishment is persuading Adam Bede not to sever his bonds with the community through a rash act of vengeance, Kenn has the more difficult task of trying to convince the egoistic, scandal-loving ladies of St. Ogg's to give acceptance and employment to the repentant girl who cannot bear to begin "a strange life" as "a
lonely wanderer" (p. 626). Just as the Dodsons' "pagan" forms of religion are rooted, not in theology or spiritual belief, but in hereditary customs of observing proper church rituals and moral conduct, the general populace of St. Ogg's value "their favourite abstraction, called society," based on arbitrary notions about social duties and reputation, above Kenn's ideals of Christian charity (pp. 362, 637). 22 Since Maggie is admittedly blameworthy, these self-righteous women cannot imagine the feasibility of offering pity and reconciliation to her as a fellow sinner. As Eliot said in relation to the Dodsons, "the sense of respectability ... was the only religion possible to the mass of the English people." 23

Kenn's courageous and desperate act of employing Maggie himself as a governess starts a new flood of malicious gossip and speculation. Whereas Amos Barton in Scenes of Clerical Life receives communal sympathy and absolution from suspicion of scandal when his beloved wife dies, Kenn falls prey to absurd speculations that he is "an apostle who had fallen," and who was about to make his wife turn in her new grave by marrying the "artful" Miss Tulliver (p. 639). Like all of Eliot's clerical men, Kenn is a fallible human being. 24 Opposition to him is so great he cannot risk his own position in the community, so he advises Maggie to go away. The realization that she has no home and that "even those who pitied, were constrained to hardness," contributes to Maggie's
final despair before the flood that brings a brief reconciliation with Tom and the release of death (p. 646).

After the flood, St. Ogg's and Dorlcote Mill are rebuilt by men of industry, and nature repairs most of her damages. Although those who loved Maggie remember the past with sorrow, and all her friends are still alive five years later, there is no indication that the community that rejected Maggie has changed. There is a brief suggestion that Stephen and Lucy are reunited years later, but there are no scenes of communal harmony and unity at the end of the novel, as there are in Eliot's village novels and Hardy's early novels.

This novel portrays three members of a family who are unalterably attached to the place where "everything is known and loved because it is known" (p. 94), but all three are destroyed because these ties to the past and home are not always beneficent. The importance of memory is stressed from the first chapter, creating an atmosphere of charm around the old mill and influencing Maggie in each crisis of her life. She is tied to the past by illusory memories of love, friendship, and an idyllic childhood at the mill with her brother, even though she has suffered from criticism, family discord, and privation most of her life. Like Grace Melbury in The Woodlanders, she feels nostalgia for an ideal life that does not exist in her community. The narrator says we look on the old town "with loving pardon at all its inconsistencies" (p. 181), but the town does not accept the inconsistencies
of Maggie or others. Her father and brother are divided from her because their strongest memories involve family disgrace and a vow of vengeance and reparation. They do not forgive their adversaries, and neither Tom nor the rest of the town forgives Maggie for her errors, even though she returns to them to re-establish the bonds created by her deepest memories. For most members of her community, especially the Dodsons, loyalties to the past and family are based on a rigid code of conduct and respectability. Social cohesion in this community is based on materialistic standards and public reputation, not on human sympathy, love, and mutual tolerance. Although Maggie receives forgiveness and loyalty from some of her friends, her strongest allies cannot help her find peace or acceptance in the community, and her brother understands her sacrifices and devotion only in the moment of their death.
NOTES--CHAPTER III


2 A. S. Byatt argues that "the peculiarly tense and gloomy character of parts of The Mill on the Floss" is based partly on Eliot's effort "to 'teach' that strong and deep roots make good men, that morality is derived from the development of particular family and local affections into abstract conceptions of duty and piety," while her own experience had necessitated severing those ties. Byatt also discusses ambivalence in the novel's view of the St. Ogg's culture, in Introduction, The Mill on the Floss (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979), pp. 9, 18-20. Michael Steig also discusses the disparity between Eliot's ideal of a positive community and her realistic analysis of the human obstacles to such a community, in "Anality in The Mill on the Floss," Novel, 5 (1971), 43.

3 Philip Fisher says Tom is suspended midway between the old and new orders, since he tries to recreate the past as he advances in the new economy. His goal, unlike Mr. Deane's, is recovering the mill, not material improvement. Making Up Society: The Novels of George Eliot (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1981), pp. 71-72, 83.

4 The Mill on the Floss, ed. A. S. Byatt, p. 137. All further references will appear within the text.


6 "Social Analysis in the Novels of George Eliot," English Literary History, 18 (1951), 231. Bissell observes that increased social mobility and new standards produced more snobbery within the middle class (pp. 236-37).


9 Jerome Thale contrasts cautious Glegg and Pullet, who have more money than they reveal, with Tulliver, who appears to have more than he does and lacks control over his impulses, *The Novels of George Eliot* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 44.


12 Berman, for example, says, "The Dodsons' strong sense of loyalty to kin is not always a virtue, yet it commands our respect as well as our interest," p. 552. A. J. Sambrook says of the Dodsons' hereditary customs and beliefs, "All this is richly comic, sympathetic, and acute observation of certain not unadmirable social habits and attitudes; it is also the shaping element of Maggie's tragedy," in "The Natural Historian of our Social Classes," *English*, 14 (1963), 133. Henry Auster argues that Bissell's analysis of the Dodsons' passion for money is too harsh, pp. 143-44. Byatt calls the Dodsonian morality "limited but nevertheless tough and powerful," p. 9. W. J. Harvey emphasizes "the cramping and thwarting pressures of the community" seen in the Dodson gatherings, where the family represents the collective voice of St. Ogg's, in *The Art of George Eliot* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961), p. 137.

13 Fisher, pp. 73-74. In Michael Steig's Freudian analysis of the Dodson obsessions he discusses the "dehumanization" and "emotional death" involved in their preference for objects over people and their treatment of people like objects, pp. 43-46.

14 Knoepflmacher, p. 192.

16 Haight mentions that Maggie's mother "has dwindled to a cipher" when Maggie needs her in these last parts of the novel, *George Eliot, a Biography*, p. 6.

17 Knoepflmacher points out that the relationship of Tulliver and Luke is still like that of the feudal lord and loyal vassal, p. 197.


20 Knoepflmacher discusses the difference between Bob's adaptability and Tom's monomaniac devotion to work, pp. 210-11.

21 Auster, pp. 139-40. Auster also discusses Dr. Kenn's function of vindicating Maggie in relation to "the lack of development, dramatic illustration, or sustained emphasis" in the social criticism of the end of the novel, pp. 167-68.

22 Fisher compares the different methods of judgment used by various characters after Maggie's return. Kenn is the only one to judge objectively based on the evidence of Maggie's story and the letter from Stephen, pp. 90-91.


24 W. J. Harvey compares Kenn to Irvine and other characters who are moral "touchstones," but also real human beings. He also says Kenn is the best example in Eliot's novels of a background character whose individuality is subordinated to his function as a moral voice, pp. 75, 151.

CHAPTER IV. **SILAS MARNER**

After portraying in *The Mill on the Floss* the tragedy of a complex heroine unable to envision a life for herself away from her family and native community, trapped by her own attachment to the past in an unforgiving society that rejected her, George Eliot presented in her next novel a hero who was able to find fulfillment in a new community after long suffering and isolation. As U. C. Knoepflmacher points out, Silas Marner's story begins where Maggie Tulliver's life ends; he is exiled from his home and is rejected by his closest friends, with no remaining family ties.  

In order to create a simpler vision of a community more unified and harmonious than the materialistic provincial town society of the 1830's, Eliot turned again to the small village of the more distant past for Silas' new home.

Thus in *Silas Marner*, labeled by Eliot "a story of old-fashioned village life," she depicts a rural community with a social structure and traditional body of values much like those of Hayslope in *Adam Bede*. Again Eliot's narrator directs our attention to the distance in time, space, and culture between the villagers of the past and the more sophisticated readers of the later nineteenth century, as the novel opens in "that far off time. . . . the early years of this.
century." To the inhabitants of Raveloe, "the peasants of old times," the world outside their own direct experience was a region of vagueness and mystery.\(^3\) This village is another isolated but prosperous community where the wide social distance between landowners and workers is maintained, even though the "chiefs" in this area are not gentry with great manors (p. 54).

Despite many similarities between the two novels in setting, characters, and themes, \textit{Silas Marner} has an atmosphere different from the leisurely, nostalgic spirit in which the life of Hayslope is depicted. The community of Raveloe is presented in a more condensed form,\(^4\) with fewer static scenes of everyday life, while the less attractive elements in the rural society are given a stronger accent. Both novels are named for the hero who is a village artisan, and both contain another main character who is a young future squire. Godfrey Cass and Arthur Donnithorne are similar in background and personality: the atmosphere of idleness and indulgence in which each is raised leads him into crimes of excess that change the lives of the other main characters, and each is punished before the harmony of the community can be restored and celebrated at the end of the novel. The Casses, however, are involved more actively in decadence, deceit, and actual crime that are the Donnithornes. Although the exceptionally pure and virtuous Nancy Lammeter is a supporting character who counteracts the negative influence of
Godfrey's father and brother, the limitations of her social and moral code are stressed in the confrontation with Silas in Part Two. The background characters who represent others of their class are rather coarse and vulgar, not just idle like the refined Mrs. Irwine and Miss Lydia Donnithorne.

Silas is an outsider who has lived as an alien in Raveloe for fifteen years, until a sequence of extraordinary events, caused by the crimes of both sons of the squire, leads to his integration into community life. Since he is an outcast from another kind of small closed community, this study of alienation has a universal significance more obvious than the tragedies that develop within the communities of Hayslope and St. Ogg's, isolating Adam, a native of his village, for only a short time, and destroying the Tullivers. The supporting characters around Silas are not family members or lifelong friends, and there are no strong moral advisers in this novel like Mr. Irwine and Bartle Massey. Nevertheless, despite the comic foibles, provincial ignorance, and narrow lives of all the villagers, Dolly Winthrop and Mr. Macey are charming, humorous, and articulate supporting characters. When these community representatives speak and interact the more positive and enduring values of the village code are revealed. As the Winthrops and other neighbors help Silas find lasting peace and fellowship in Raveloe, the novel moves from a bleak portrayal of alienation to a happy ending that creates an idyllic picture of simple village life.
This novel is often analyzed in terms of its double plot, with the stories of Silas and Godfrey linked by the strong patterns and symbolic parallels characteristic of a legendary tale. Although Silas and the Casses are never discussed without some reference to the village and their public reputations, they and the community actually form three distinct centers of interest, with separate sections in the first one-third of the novel. The narrator initially emphasizes the separateness of these three elements of this society, rather than providing the extensive introductory scenes found in *Adam Bede*, where the different groups interact and comment on each other. At the end of the Casses' first section, Dunsey steals Silas' gold, creating the initial link between Silas and the Casses. His loss sends Silas to the Rainbow Inn for help, where a male chorus of villagers introduces the traditional customs and attitudes of the community. As W. J. Harvey says, the community is one of the protagonists of the novel. From chapter 7 on, Silas' developing relationship with the village is charted. When he finds Eppie he interrupts the Casses' New Year's dance, just as he had burst in at the Rainbow earlier, and then the novel continues to alternate between his new life in the community with Eppie and Godfrey's story.

The first two chapters provide background on Silas and Raveloe, before the "great change" through which "his history became blent in a singular manner with the life of his
neighbours" (p. 70). The discussion of Silas' previous life in Lantern Yard reveals that he had been a beloved member of another small, intimate community. The initial description of Lantern Yard suggests that close human fellowship, productive work, and opportunities for self-improvement can be cultivated in communities different from the rural village Eliot focused on. However, the rigid religious doctrines of Lantern Yard are too restrictive and inflexible, like the code of respectability in Maggie Tulliver's community. Silas' history there follows a course that is the opposite of his fate in Raveloe. His friend's betrayal, more devious and devastating than the crimes of the Casses, reduces him from an admired community leader, engaged to be married, to a lonely outcast. The drawing of lots to determine his guilt is a practice as superstitious as, and more destructive than, the remnants of primitive belief in Raveloe.

We see later that Raveloe's lack of the religious enthusiasm and austere lifestyle of Lantern Yard is balanced by the human sympathy and common sense which eventually lead the villagers to open their hearts to Silas, after fifteen years of mutual distrust and fear. He was raised in a physical and mental atmosphere so confining that his own inability to accept new ideas and a new environment contributes to his initial isolation in Raveloe; his new home is as strange to him as he is to the suspicious villagers.
Feeling completely cut off from his past is a debilitating experience for Silas, as it is for Maggie Tulliver and other characters in Eliot's novels. It is not until Silas has established a stable domestic life that he is able to discuss his past with his friend, Dolly. Like the differences between Loamshire and Stonyshire in *Adam Bede*, the physical and moral contrast between Lantern Yard and Raveloe emphasizes the idyllic aspects of the rural village. Lantern Yard's narrow ways are socially destructive and after Silas is exiled it is physically demolished by urban development, replaced by a crowded factory. When Silas takes Eppie to the large manufacturing town to look for the little community, which was located near a jail and buried within the winding streets and dark walls that hide the sky, the village maiden is horrified at this environment. "'O father, I'm like as if I was stifled,' said Eppie. 'I couldn't ha' thought as any folks lived i' this way, so close together. How pretty the Stone-pits 'ull look when we get back!'" (pp. 239-40). The streets look strange to Silas, too, after more than thirty years, and the injustice committed in the strict Christian community remains forever dark to the simple, honest minds of Silas and Dolly. The obliteration of Lantern Yard confirms that Silas now has no home but the happier village of Raveloe.
The Villagers at the Rainbow

The qualities that eventually make Raveloe a contented home for Silas are embodied in the background figures representing the village workers. Although the novel begins with a negative view of the villagers, the endearing and valuable elements of village life are revealed as Silas' interaction with the community develops. The narrator's analysis in the first two chapters is especially critical and detached. The important Rainbow Inn and a number of Raveloe citizens are mentioned, but they are kept at a distance. Mr. Macey and Jem Rodney are quoted indirectly to record the villagers' suspicions concerning Silas' trances. Most of this section describes "the rude mind" of the peasants of that time in general terms, with their narrow lives of hard toil and ignorance of the outside world. Since they believe "honest folk, born and bred in a visible manner, were mostly not over-wise or clever" and since "strange lingering echoes of the old demon-worship" remain in the village, they are suspicious of the weaver who is skilled in his craft and knowledgeable about curing with herbs (pp. 51-53).

Silas' one earlier opportunity to develop fellowship with the community came when he cured Sally Oates, feeling a revival of pity and charity toward a neighbor. However, the villagers' superstitious assumption that he knew charms, and perhaps had satanic powers, forced him to stop attempting cures. Ironically, his honesty about the limitations of his
knowledge was misinterpreted by the villagers, creating more repulsion and isolation for Silas. He sank deeper into his hardened, narrow insect life of weaving constantly, neglecting thought, nature, and human fellowship. His hoard of useless gold and few household possessions became his only companions. As Philip Fisher points out, for Silas "things" determine the self when the community and duty are lacking, before the child appears to replace the lost gold and lead him to the community. For Silas this pathetic attachment to money is a temporary condition during his isolation, unlike the pervasive materialism that dominates the middle-class culture of St. Ogg's in *The Mill on the Floss.*

These earlier negative incidents and impressions related by the narrator are qualified when we see the community in action, although the unattractive elements never disappear from sight. After Silas' gold is stolen he immediately goes to the Rainbow Inn as the community center "where he could most speedily make his loss public" (p. 94). Before he enters the narrative backs up to record the conversation among the men inside. This community is introduced dramatically, not through detailed scenes showing them hard at work, as in *Adam Bede,* but through a single scene in which they are drinking and arguing. The narrator suggests that "hectoring and condescension" are the favorite pastimes for the class-conscious society found at the inn (p. 95). The scene opens with a dull argument about a cow's carcass,
which becomes more bitter, sarcastic, and comic, as the mild butcher insists he'll "quarrel wi' no man," while continuing to press his point (p. 97). This petty arguing is one way in which, as Henry Auster points out, the rustic charm of Raveloe is undercut by the "grossness, laxness, and dullness of mind and spirit" displayed by the villagers. When the men tease Tookey, the deputy-clerk, and argue over a local ghost legend, they reveal several of the limitations of the village mentality: the belief in superstitions; the ignorance of everything outside their own narrow experience; the antagonism between the old and the young; and the intolerance of the older generation, in particular, for any change or innovation in established practices.

Nevertheless, the traditional attitudes expressed by these men are not all undesirable ones. This one conversation conveys with economy, humor, and charm a wide variety of rural customs and values. Dowlas, the farrier, is the only one who is unreasonably fierce and stubborn while arguing—"a man intensely opposed to compromise" (p. 105)—and even he joins the others in praising Silas during the harmonious scene at the end of the novel. Several of the other men are described as jocose or jolly, and the landlord, Mr. Snell, always preserves peace and unity by insisting that there must be some truth in both sides of an argument. When Ben Winthrop's jokes about paying Tookey to leave the choir become cruel, Snell feels that "paying people for
their absence was a principle dangerous to society." He says, "a joke's a joke. We're all good friends here, I hope. We must give and take. You're both right and you're both wrong, as I say" (p. 99).

Although we do not see the villagers at work as we do in Adam Bede and Hardy's Wessex novels, the importance of work in this community is emphasized when the men are frequently identified by their positions, and when they make comments such as Mr. Macey's assertion of pride at being a tailor. Their discussions of the church rituals and choir; their respect for decent and thrifty families like the Lammeters; and their admiration for talented or knowledgeable people, such as the musician, Solomon Macey, and the parson, are reflections of the traditional values and daily concerns of the village. Mr. Macey is the most articulate male representative of the community, here and later in the novel. His storytelling brings into this scene a slice of one of the richest traditions of village life, with the ritualistic prefatory encouragements and the audience listening to the old familiar tales like "a favorite tune." Although Macey is superstitious, argumentative, and narrowly provincial like the others, his use of shrewdness and folk wisdom to examine complex moral problems is admirable. He points out himself that he is a "'cute man" who is "allays uncommon for turning things over and seeing all round 'em." His worry over the mixed-up vows at the Lammeter wedding at
first seems to be a trivial and comical concern with the form of the traditional ritual, but the parson's assurance that only the register counts is even more superficial. It is ironic that Macey defers to the judgment of the "parsons and doctors who know everything by heart," because the villagers show more curiosity and imagination in a crisis than the gentry, with their rigid social standards (pp. 101-102).

When Silas bursts in with the news of the robbery, the villagers' responses to this crisis reveal more of their collective attitudes. The robbery becomes an inspiration for village gossip and an excuse for more drinking at the Rainbow. Again the villagers' comically ignorant and argumentative behavior does not overshadow their solid underlying values of sympathy, common sense, and fair play. Although they let their imaginations and suspicions run wild, they act with good intentions. They are still suspicious of Silas and consider him crazy, but they also pity him when they see how genuine his suffering is. The men convince him at once to stop accusing the innocent Jem Rodney, even though the villagers later decide, without evidence, that a traveling pedlar must have been the robber. In a small, closed community, the limitations of each man's character are public knowledge; everyone knows Jem steals an occasional hare, but they also know he was with his friends during the robbery, and no ordinary villager could ever use
the stolen money, anyway, without his neighbors seeing it.

The absence of suspects within the village encourages some superstitious minds to consider supernatural intervention in the robbery. However, when Tookey suggests that an inquiry into such a mysterious event would be futile, Macey becomes the voice of common sense and justice, reprimanding him for "overshooting the mark" and undermining the functions of "justices and constables." While the desire for justice is an admirable trait, it is again ironic that Macey places his trust in the figures of authority who gather at the Rainbow to investigate the robbery. These "substantial parishioners," including the squire and the rector, only encourage the villagers' fertile imagination and suspicions of anything foreign, by asking irrelevant questions about the pedlar and his ear-rings (p. 113).

Despite this atmosphere of continued superstition and suspicion, the villagers act responsibly when the need for neighborly help and justice is first revealed. Although the men argue over who will act as deputy constable on the night of the robbery, Mr. Snell and Dowlas do not hesitate to walk to the constable's in the rain, to show that they are "sensible" and "respectable" men who know the proper steps to take (p. 110). Their instinctive and immediate action contrasts with the gentry's annoyance at being called out in the snow later to help Silas with the dead woman.
This habit of well-intentioned action is also revealed in the village's growing sympathy for Silas after he loses his gold. While the advocates of the pedlar theory and the "impenetrable mystery" theory still argue about the robbery and insult each other, some villagers try to console Silas with gifts and visits (p. 128). Several critics have pointed out that Silas is silent until he shouts "Robbed!" at the Rainbow, and that others talk about him rather than to him in the first half of the novel. Their first kind attempts to talk to him are "beery and bungling," but at least they are not "complimentary and hypocritical," a phrase that could describe the conversation in more sophisticated society (p. 131). Mr. Macey’s speech telling Silas that he is better off without the gold, and that he should go to church and "be a bit neighbourly" contains too much blunt criticism and too much pride in his own role as parish clerk. Silas has "a sense that the old man meant to be good-natured and neighbourly," yet he cannot respond to this kind of tactless appeal. Macey then reports at the Rainbow that Silas is, after all, only a heathen with his head "all of a muddle" (pp. 132-33).

Dolly Winthrop

At this point Mr. Macey’s role as the most articulate and sensible villager is taken over by Dolly Winthrop. Her conversations with Silas carry as much weight in the novel
as the combined discussions of the male chorus, and are more effective in bringing Silas into the life of the village. Like Mrs. Poyser, she is the dominant spokesperson for community values—an exceptionally diligent housewife and doting mother, with a fund of proverbial phrases for every occasion, and an amused tolerance for the "troublesome" ways of those clumsy animals called men (p. 134). But she lacks Mrs. Poyser's sharp tongue and wit. She is a mild, patient, and grave woman who helps her neighbors during any illness or death in the village.

Beginning on the night of the robbery, the novelty of telling his troubles to his neighbors stimulates feelings of fellowship, of which Silas is barely conscious. Afterwards, without the physical comfort of his gold, he feels the need for help from outside his secluded cottage. Thus, when Dolly arrives, he feels "a slight stirring of expectation at the sight of his fellow-men, a faint consciousness of dependence on their goodwill" (p. 135). Her "desire to give comfort" is unmistakable and her "soothing persuasive tone" evokes a response from Silas as no other contact with the villagers does (pp. 136-37). The purpose of her first visit, however, is to interest Silas in going to church, and her gentle pleas fail, as Hacey's arguments had done. Nevertheless, her "exposition of her simple Raveloe theology" goes deeper than the parish-clerk's references to Sunday suits and saying the "Amen's" (p. 138). We see that her faith in the
beneficial influence of the gift of lard cakes; of her child, with his talent for singing carols; and of the church service and Christmas solemnities she describes to Silas, reveals the social cohesion and personal fulfillment that villagers find in their family life and religious traditions. Although she cannot read the sacred letters on the cakes as Silas can, she has the benefit of inheriting both the stamp which formed the letters and a deeply ingrained, unquestioning belief in the comfort sent from above and expressed through the good words of the church. However, her words are all foreign to Silas, "like a report of unknown objects, which his imagination could not fashion," since he was raised in a community with different customs and a different religion. It is impossible for them to communicate until some stronger force unlocks "the fountains of human love and of faith in a divine love," motivating Silas to accept Dolly's views (p. 140). Thus he spends Christmas in lonely misery while the villagers worship and celebrate.

It takes an event more extraordinary than the robbery to bind Silas to his neighbors. Later, when he insists on keeping the orphaned child, who miraculously appears on his hearth, the villagers' attitude finally changes from "a rather contemptuous pity for him as lone and crazy," to "a more active sympathy" (p. 179). Although he first goes to the gentry with the child, the doctor immediately sends for Dolly as the best source of help in such emergencies. After
the gossip about this event spreads through the village, both "notable" and "lazy" mothers offer Silas advice, but only Dolly's mild, unpretentious counsel is acceptable to him. She aids Silas' discovery of "the ties and charities that bound together the families of his neighbours" by offering to help with the child, while remaining sensitive to his desire to care for her from the start by himself (p. 184).

Now that Dolly's preaching is blended with expert practical instruction on the rituals of washing, dressing, and disciplining the child, and the child's welfare is at stake, Silas is more receptive to her spiritual advice. He knows that Hephzibah is a Bible name, while Dolly admits she is "no scholard," but again her "simple belief" transcends Silas' memories of Biblical words and Lantern Yard doctrines. Her concern with raising the child "like christened folks's children" has a moral and social, as well as a spiritual, significance for Silas and his new daughter (pp. 181-83). While her confusion of inoculation and baptism is comically ignorant, her warning that Silas must do everything possible to keep harm from this child, which was sent to him so miraculously, is a convincing expression of human sympathy and responsibility. Silas is still puzzled by the concepts of her religion, including baptism, but he agrees to have both Eppie and himself baptised, joining the community for the first time in "the observances held sacred by his
neighbours." It is strong feelings, rather than "phrases and ideas," that eventually awaken the memories of his previous life and enable him to participate in this human community (p. 183).

The Gentry

While the villagers encourage Silas in his new role as a foster father, the child's natural father is alive in the same community. At the beginning of the novel, after the introduction to Silas' history and his isolation in Raveloe, the focus shifts to the environment of negligence and vice that led Godfrey Cass to marry in secret, and to the social pressures that influence him to abandon his child. The scenes involving the Cass family reveal many ways in which obligations to family and community are violated by the gentry. The "chiefs in Raveloe," including Squire Cass, "could farm badly quite at their ease" in their prosperous district, and make enough "in those war times, to live in a rollicking fashion" without risking ruin through overindulgence (p. 54). "The greatest man in Raveloe," Squire Cass is the only landed farmer called "Squire," simply because he has a couple tenants. His "monument in the church and tankards older than King George" are the signs of his rank and privilege in the village, but his sons who "had turned out rather ill" are the evidence of his shortcomings. His house is the grandest in the parish, although its interior
is dark and disorderly, and his own appearance and habits are slovenly. Without a wife's wholesome influence in the parlor, the squire prefers "to preside in the parlour of the Rainbow" (pp. 71-73).

Dunsey Cass is the worst product of this lax and indifferent environment. He is an unredeemable villain, who is disposed of early in the novel, after his crimes set in motion the central conflicts of the plot. His arguments with Godfrey display a mocking tone and ruthless indifference that contrast with Godfrey's more complex, but pathetic, personality. Dunsey loves drinking, lying, cheating, and manipulating his older brother, who says Dunsey is "made to hurt other people" (p. 117). He has trapped Godfrey into a secret marriage in order to degrade him and gratify his own "jealous hate and his cupidity," while Godfrey suffers from "natural irresolution and moral cowardice," with enough conscience to regret "his own vicious folly" (pp. 77, 80). Dunsey blackmails Godfrey into giving him a tenant's rent money and takes Godfrey's horse to sell it, with no pity for Godfrey's loss of his last valuable possession.

Dunsey commits his worst violation of the values of his community and the responsibilities of his class when he steals the savings of a poor worker, Silas Marner. Ironically, his own greed and carelessness lead to his death in the Stone-pit. He postpones his idea of borrowing the gold to cover Godfrey's debt, since hurting Godfrey and swindling
horse-dealers both give him pleasure. After killing the horse, however, he must walk home in the dark and mist, and he stumbles into Silas' empty cottage. After taking the gold he "stepped forward into the darkness" toward the pit (p. 90), a stereotypical villain disappearing from the novel forever, surprising and disappointing no one in the community with his mysterious absence.

The irresponsible father remains in view through the first half of the novel, adding to our understanding of Godfrey's egoism and lack of self-discipline. The squire is "an implacable man," with an injudicious "system" for handling both his sons and his tenants. Letting evils grow through his own negligence until forced to act, he would then turn on the offender "with fierce severity and became unrelentingly hard" (p. 119). Godfrey does not enjoy lying, but he gets himself deeper into deceit, fearing his father's anger and the possibility of disinheritance. Like Arthur Donnithorne, he has "a vague longing for some discipline that would have checked his own errant weakness and helped his better will," and he would like to help manage the estate (p. 124). But the proud squire, rather than providing any constructive guidance, only belittles and reprimands him after wrongs are committed and exposed. He eventually threatens to disinherit Godfrey if he does not get his life in order; he also vows to stop supporting Dunsey, but it is too late for a severe approach to prevent Godfrey's
personal crisis, and Dunsey is already dead, as we learn later.

The New Year's Eve dance, like the birthday feast in *Adam Bede*, dramatizes the empty formalities and idle lives of the gentry, bringing many members of the community together to reveal their reputations and relationships. At this event the distances between classes and individuals are greater; only a few "privileged villagers" are invited to watch the dancing from benches at the door (p. 158), while "all the society of Raveloe and Tarley" gather for the traditional event, although most are merely "acquaintances" who are often "separated by misunderstandings" or linked only by "intermittent condescension," and their arrival is called a "siege" on the Red House (p. 142). The narrator introduces the extravagant holiday entertainment by juxtaposing different Christmas activities: the villagers' faithful and merry trip through the cold to church contrasts, not only with Silas' solitude, but also with the Cass's family party of tiresome anecdotes, card-playing, and drinking.

The "pre-eminently brilliant celebration of the year" on New Year's Eve has some charming elements suggestive of idyllic village life (p. 142). The fiddler Solomon Macey's interruption of the awkward and banal joking at the dinner enlivens the company and unites the community, as he leads them into the parlor. There the villagers are waiting to
see the charter of Raveloe renewed, as it seems, when the older folks fulfill their social duty by joining together in the dance. The "quaint procession" of dancers is described as a cheerful gathering of "decent" folk, and the squire does seem genuinely fond of the old tunes of his father's day, despite his tone of "loud patronage" (pp. 156-158). However, most of the guests are dull and unattractive when viewed individually. The sense of a warm communal celebration is undercut by satiric references to their appearance and demeanor, and to the squire's attitudes and Godfrey's secret problems, which prick at his conscience like Arthur's secret at his birthday dance.

The squire's last appearance in the novel emphasizes his conceit and pompous behavior on this occasion, which has "made the glory of Squire Cass's hospitality, as of his forefathers', time out of mind" (p. 142). Unlike the stingy Squire Donnithorne, Squire Cass maintains his pre-eminence in the district by providing more than enough to eat, and by drinking too much himself. The Raveloe gentry spend their winters, when they have little work to do, visiting and feasting, and Squire Cass indulges their appetites with the greatest abundance, although not the greatest quality, in rich fare. In his highest spirits at the New Year's dance, he enjoys his "hereditary duty of being noisily jovial and patronizing," pressing his neighbors to take snuff, and imagining the gratitude of his young guests when
their great squire eventually condescends to speak to them (p. 152). He also spends the evening bragging about his family's greatness, decrying the current decline in the country, paying loud compliments to the ladies and stamping on their gowns, making jokes at the expense of the doctor (whom he values only when he needs medical help himself), and making Godfrey uncomfortable.

Earlier in the novel he accuses Godfrey of being too cowardly to ask Nancy Lammeter to marry him; now he forces Godfrey to ask Nancy to dance, in front of the company. He is "rather impatient at Godfrey's showing himself a dull spark" when the bold compliments of the older men contrast with Godfrey's quiet but sincere reverence for Nancy (p. 152). Since the squire is perceptive about his sons' schemes with money and horses, but unaware of the secret marriage that prevents Godfrey from courting Nancy more actively, his comments contribute to the irony surrounding Godfrey's dilemma.

The background characters included among the guests are not as loud and pretentious as the squire, but details are selected which make them seem coarse and comical. Mr. Crackenthorp, the rector, and Dr. Kimble are mentioned earlier as respected professional men with good intentions. With their narrow provincial views, however, they provide no strong moral guidance in the community during the events of the novel. The rector's useless questions at the inquiry into the robbery are followed by equally ineffective comments
to Silas. After arguing that Silas' love of money and absence from church caused him to lose the gold, the rector gives him a present of food, "to dissipate unfounded prejudices against the clerical character" (p. 130). The uneducated Dolly is more successful than the rector at presenting the local morals and religion. At the dance emphasis is given to the rector's social duties of complimenting the blushing girls and leading the dance, functions which are considered as significant as his solemn church duties, and which are inseparable in the observer's mind from the impressions made by his voluminous cravat. His wife, Mrs. Crackenthorp, is the most absurd and insignificant character described—"a small blinking woman," who constantly fidgets with her finery and makes "subdued noises, very much like a guinea-pig" (p. 153).

The Kimbles' dignified position in the community is also undercut by references to their appearance and provincial attitudes, although they can both be good-natured and jovial in company. Mrs. Kimble is the squire's sister and hostess at the dance, with a figure as broad as her "double dignity" (p. 145). She is proud of the apparent cleverness of her husband and tolerant of his flirtations and jokes at her expense. He is merely a country apothecary, respected as the local doctor because Kimbles have been the only doctors in Raveloe for generations, and prosperous enough to keep an extravagant table like his brother-in-law.
When Silas interrupts the festivities with the news of Eppie's mother's death, Kimble grumbles at having to leave his card game, and calls Godfrey a fool for going out unnecessarily to see the woman. The ladies are genuinely concerned about the foundling child; Mrs. Kimble offers to care for her, but stops short of allowing the "dingy clothes" close to her ornate gown (p. 172). The doctor asserts that they might have taken the child themselves, but now Mrs. Kimble is too fat to watch an active child. Thus the fastidious and self-indulgent habits of the gentry keep them at a distance from the pauper child, just as Godfrey's reluctance to admit his shameful marriage now that his wife is dead keeps him from owning the child. It is poor villagers who care for the orphan rejected by the rich.

Priscilla Lammeter is the most boisterous and tactless female member of this unattractive group of "gentlefolks," but she functions primarily as a contrast to her pretty younger sister, Nancy. Despite Priscilla's ugliness, which she admits openly, and her honest but thoughtless remarks, which offend the other ladies and amuse Dr. Kimble, the Lammeters are an exceptionally admirable family of farmers in this Raveloe society. They are brought up to be generous and yet frugal in their household management. We are told in the first scene at the Cass's that Godfrey's "essentially domestic nature" yearns for "the neatness, purity, and liberal orderliness of the Lammeter household," so unlike
his home (p. 81). At the dance, the Lammeters are anxiously awaited guests, with places of honor at the tea-table. Mr. Lammeter's "spare but healthy person and high-featured firm face" are in sharp contrast with the figures of the squire and other farmers (p. 153). He refuses Cass's snuff consistently, never indulging in excess like the others. His daughters know that he is "the soberest and best man in that country-side" (p. 144). Although he acknowledges the favor shown by the more eminent Casses, both father and daughter have stern reservations about linking their families unless Godfrey can live up to their strict personal and moral standards. Mr. Lammeter's sister, Mrs. Osgood, also embodies the virtues of the family. While she considers Priscilla too rough, her mind is strikingly similar to Nancy's. Behind the prim and suave greeting between aunt and niece, there is "a devoted attachment and mutual admiration" lacking in the other stiff formalities of the gentry (p. 146).

The chapter on the New Year's dance opens with Nancy's arrival, when her beauty is enhanced, rather than marred, by her trip through the snow on horseback in heavy winter wraps. When her blooming cheeks contrast with "the surrounding drab" at the door of the Red House and Godfrey greets her, their relationship becomes the center of attention (p. 143). She takes her place in the novel as the virtuous supporting character who redeems Godfrey, replacing the squire and Dunsey, who have done him so much harm and will not be seen
again after this episode. While the ladies prepare for the
dance upstairs, Nancy's character is analyzed, with the Miss
Gunns from Lytherly, as sophisticated outsiders, providing
reactions of disdain at her work-worn hands, country dia-
lect, and lack of education. Nevertheless, everyone present
is struck with pleasure while observing "the rustic beauty's
toilette... Everything belonging to Miss Nancy was of
delicate purity and nattiness" (p. 147). The narrator de-
fends her against the criticism and pity of the Miss Gunns
by pointing out that Nancy is not ashamed of her life of
farm work; she is not well-educated,

yet she had the essential attributes of a lady—
high veracity, delicate honour in her dealings,
deference to others, and refined personal habits,—
and lest these should not suffice to convince
grammatical fair ones that her feelings can at all
resemble theirs, I will add that she was slightly
proud and exacting, and as constant in her affec-
tion towards a baseless opinion as towards an
err ing lover. (p. 148)

In the descriptions of Nancy and her dialogues there is
a subtle balance between her provincial narrowness and exces-
sive adherence to standards of propriety, and her pure affec-
tions and sympathy for others, attributes which are important
during the crisis in Part Two.12 Her insistence that she and
her sister wear the same gown exemplifies the absurd and
rigid forms of her private code. Although Priscilla fusses
at the way Nancy manipulates her, there is genuine sisterly
affection between them; Nancy is motivated by what she
believes is right for motherless sisters. Priscilla's "good-natured self-forgetful cheeriness and common-sense" and Nancy's "modest calm" are evidence that neither is motivated by vanity in wearing the dresses that offset the beauty of one and the clumsiness of the other (p. 151).

The sisters also have contrasting points of view on men and marriage. Priscilla gives "a rapid survey of her view of life," claiming that "fretting and stewing" about what men think of you is a waste of time, and that "Mr. Have-your-own way" is the only husband she would ever obey, since she has a good home with her father (p. 149). Yet when Nancy insists that she will never marry, either, Priscilla reveals her awareness that husbands and families are necessary for life to go on and for maiden sisters to have something to work for. She scolds Nancy for "sitting on an addled egg for ever, as if there was never a fresh un in the world," aware that Nancy is discouraged because "some folks are no better than they should be" (p. 150).

This discreet reference to Godfrey pinpoints Nancy's real reason for claiming to reject marriage. Ever since her arrival her prim and graceful exterior has been hiding agitation and confusion over Godfrey's inconsistent behavior. Her belief that "'love once, love always,' was the motto of a true and pure woman" and her ability to keep "her word to herself under very trying conditions" create her dilemma. She treasures her love for Godfrey and the flowers he once
gave her, and she is swayed by the idea of being mistress in the grandest house in her experience, but "not the most dazzling rank should induce her to marry a man whose conduct showed him careless of his character" (p. 151). Although she tries not to encourage Godfrey when he asks for forgiveness and support to help him reform, he detects signs that she is not indifferent to him. He is recklessly bold in his attentions to her before Silas' shocking entrance with Godfrey's illegitimate child. Later, after he sees that his pathetic secret wife is dead and that Silas wants to keep the child, he sees no reason to tell Nancy of the past, or to suppress his vision of a happy family life with her.

This behavior at the dance is observed by the chorus of villagers, who provide a humorous confirmation of the views of the gentry presented in this episode. Throughout the novel it is ironic that the villagers show such respect for the gentry, simply because of their superior social positions, and that they are unaware of the crimes through which Godfrey and Dunsey violate their social responsibilities. When Godfrey rides off after the robbery, the people think he is going to see the justice about the suspected pedlar, but he is engrossed in his own problems involving Dunsey and his horse. Dunsey's disappearance at the same time is not connected with the robbery because of his family's position:

Even if any brain in Raveloe had put the said two facts together, I doubt whether a combination so injurious to the prescriptive respectability of a
family with a mural monument and venerable tankards, would not have been suppressed as of unsound tendency. (p. 128)

Even though he never returns, "no one cared to be specific in their inquiries on a subject delicate to a respectable family" (p. 191). When Godfrey goes out in the snow to see Eppie's mother, he is motivated by the selfish and evil fear that she is not dead. Dolly feels that it is appropriate for her, but not for "a young gentleman," to risk wet feet on this "errand of mercy." Her comment that he has "a tender heart gives him "a twinge of self-reproach at this undeserved praise" (pp. 173-74). In Part Two the villagers express unenvious approval of the help Godfrey gives Silas and Eppie, unaware that he is easing his conscience about his own daughter.

Despite this reluctance to suspect their most eminent family of serious duplicity or crime, the villagers are shrewd observers of the characters and behavior of the gentry, as the first description of the Casses shows. Everyone sees the danger in the squire's keeping "all his sons at home in idleness" (p. 72). Dunsey is so bad they only hope he will never cause trouble that is worse than sowing wild oats. They fear that Godfrey, the more admirable young heir, is following in his brother's footsteps, since his behavior has become mysterious and inconsistent, especially in relation to the much-admired Nancy Lammeter. When the narrator sums
up the public view of the situation by pointing out that "if Mr. Godfrey didn't turn over a new leaf, he might say 'Good-bye' to Miss Nancy Lammeter," we are given a preview of Nancy's position as it is dramatized during the New Year's dance (p. 73).

Mr. Macey and Ben Winthrop speak for the villagers at the dance. Just as Mrs. Poyser is not deterred by her reverence for the gentry when their behavior provokes her shrewd commentary, "Mr. Macey's official respect" does not "restrain him" from applying his "extraordinary acuteness" to the actions of "fallible fellow-men," such as the squire and the parson. His comic argument with Ben on the attributes of the dancers contributes to the satiric portraits of the gentry, and also leads to serious comments on Godfrey's love affair. As dancers, the squire, the parson, and Mrs. Crackenthorp appear more absurd than the others. Ben considers the "nimble" Mrs. Osgood "the finest-made woman as is," while Nancy and her father merit unqualified praise, in keeping with the villagers' admiration for the Lammeters throughout the novel. They hope "a fine match" with Godfrey will bring her beneficent influence to the Red House one day. When Ben praises Godfrey's "shape" and notes that he is courting Nancy in a more cheerful spirit tonight, Macey is "provoked to increased severity" by his more critical view. Aware that Godfrey can "be turned round the finger by that offal Dunsey," Macey suspects that Godfrey is soft in the head
Although this crude analysis is a perceptive observation of Godfrey's flaws and inconsistencies, Ben's predictions come true in Part Two, since the external obstacles to the marriage of Godfrey and Nancy are now removed.

Raveloe Fifteen Years Later

Part Two dramatizes the changes in the households of Silas and the Casses that resulted from Godfrey's abandoning his child. Although both homes have improved, the gentry still do not participate in the idyllic life shared by the villagers. The "once dreary" Red House has been transformed into an immaculate home of "purity and order," with Nancy as the "new presiding spirit" for the past fifteen years (p. 211). Godfrey has become a model husband under her influence, while Nancy's beauty and virtue have survived the tests of time and disappointments. Throughout this section of the novel Nancy's behavior provides a tolerant and sensitive counterpoint to Godfrey's impatient, self-serving tendencies, yet her inflexible private morals and inbred standards of propriety are as detrimental as Godfrey's "more wavering nature" (p. 219).

The narrator's extensive analysis of the couple's attitudes toward their childless marriage is preparation for the crisis that sets their values in opposition to those of the village workers. Godfrey sees his childless home as a retribution for abandoning his child. Nancy, unaware of his
past sins, habitually examines her own conscience to look for any fault in herself, always trying harder to be a perfect wife "to lighten Godfrey's privation" (p. 216). The picture of Nancy sitting alone with her Bible on her lap, reviewing her "unalterable little code," contrasts with the active lives of the villagers, and also with her sister's life. Priscilla, as forward and outspoken as ever now that she manages her father's farm, recommends a dairy to keep Nancy occupied, since families need something to work for. Her blunt criticism of Godfrey's inability to reconcile himself to childlessness is refuted by Nancy's insistence that men have more reason to be impatient with the lack of an heir. Yet the one issue on which Nancy stubbornly opposes her husband is the question of adopting a child. The narrator exposes the rigidity of her strong opinions on every subject, which have been fixed since the age of twenty-three. She believes it would bring misfortune to oppose Providence by seeking a child that was not given naturally, so Godfrey's plan to reclaim his daughter without revealing the truth is thwarted.

When Dunsey's skeleton is discovered with Silas' gold, Nancy is shocked, as Godfrey expects, "for she had been bred up to regard even a distant kinship with crime as a dishonour" (p. 223). However, he realizes too late that he had underestimated his wife's loyalty. When he confesses that he is Eppie's father, her "simple, severe notions" do not
prevent her from agreeing that it would have been right, after all, for them to have raised Eppie as their own child (p. 224). She is unselfishly concerned with the wrong done to the child, more than with any wrong done to herself so long ago.

The flaw in the Casses' generous plans to restore Eppie to her rightful place in society lies in their insensitivity to the feelings of the working class. Their visit to Silas' cottage, the climactic confrontation of the two classes in the novel, reveals that, although Godfrey has dropped the title "squire" and has behaved generously toward Silas through material gifts, the social distance between gentry and workers is as wide as ever. Silas' uneasiness at being approached by his "betters," including one of the "tall, powerful, florid men, seen chiefly on horseback," emphasizes the aloofness of Godfrey's class (p. 227). Godfrey's assumption that "deep affections can hardly go along with callous palms and scant means" (p. 218) is contradicted emphatically when Eppie insists she must stay with her foster father because of the lifetime of strong affection that binds them.

Although Nancy, who is more sympathetic to these feelings, softens Godfrey's indignant outbursts and abrupt departure with kind words, she agrees with him that it is wrong for Eppie to reject her natural father. She is completely unconscious of any advantage that could make Eppie
prefer to remain in the working class and marry a common laborer.

Nancy, used all her life to plenteous circumstances and the privileges of "respectability," could not enter into the pleasures which early nurture and habit connect with all the little aims and efforts of the poor who are born poor: to her mind, Eppie, in being restored to her birthright, was entering on a too long withheld but unquestionable good. (p. 233)

As Q. D. Leavis points out, Nancy demonstrates "that insulation by class destroys the power of imaginative sympathy in everyone." Her suggestion that perhaps Eppie, as well as Godfrey, should make sacrifices, out of duty to her "lawful father" is the final striking indication that even in the most virtuous member of her class, natural human feelings are distorted by superficial standards of morality and propriety (p. 234).

Afterwards Nancy is relieved that her family need not know about Godfrey's disgrace after all. When she tries to help Godfrey resign himself to his fate, he agrees to try harder, but she does not attempt to refute his view that it is too late to escape the punishment he brought on himself. Thus Godfrey's story ends tragically. While he appreciates the loving wife who comforts him, his childlessness is as severe a punishment as Arthur Donnithorne's self-exile from Hayslope. Rather than achieving reconciliation with the community as Arthur does at the end of Adam Bede, Godfrey
finds an excuse to leave town on the day of Eppie's wedding, unwilling even to watch the festivities at a distance, as his family and friends do. Priscilla's ironic wish that Nancy could have "had the luck to find a child like" Eppie emphasizes the emptiness in the lives of the two childless families (p. 242). Godfrey is isolated from the harmonious life of the village, still able to provide only material gifts to show his concern for his daughter.

The harsh view of the insensitivity and sterility of the gentry contrasts with the idyllic portrayal of Raveloe life in Part Two. It begins and ends with two cheerful communal scenes, the end of a church service and Eppie's wedding. Although the gentry's aloofness is revealed in both scenes, there is more good cheer and social cohesion displayed than in the Rainbow Inn discussions or the New Year's dance, the two communal scenes in Part One. While the background characters retain their comic idiosyncracies, Dowlas can find no one to contradict his opinion, for once, since Mr. Snell and the others agree that Silas "brought a blessing on himself" by adopting "a lone motherless child" (p. 243). When the wedding party pay their respects to the aged Mr. Macey, his speech is as conceited as ever, but his claim that he predicted Silas would turn out well and recover his money is expressed in the context of wishing Silas luck.
Thus Silas is an accepted, fulfilled member of the community in Part Two. His cottage is now a cheerful home for him and Eppie, who has grown into a loving, virtuous heroine. They improve the cottage with additions, gifts of furniture, pets, and a garden, but they will never leave it, even when Eppie is married, because of the precious memories associated with it.\textsuperscript{15}

Dolly Winthrop is still Silas' primary link with the best traditional community values. As a loving godmother and friend, she reveals to Eppie "that a mother must be very precious" (p. 206). Silas trusts her judgment on every issue, from the housekeeping and Eppie's health, to the momentous question of her engagement to Aaron. During the years since Eppie's arrival, Silas has also been able to discuss the mysteries of his past tragic life with Dolly. Although her "narrow outward experience gave her no key to strange customs" and she is still modest about her lack of formal knowledge or appropriate words, she now makes sense to Silas (p. 202). He has grown more accustomed to her manner of speaking and more receptive to her simple beliefs.

Despite her limitations, her struggle to understand Silas' problem, like Mr. Macey's fondness for puzzling over moral questions, reveals a natural curiosity and wisdom more appealing than the gentry's fixed and superficial standards. Her insistence that her best insights come to her while she is working or helping the sick demonstrates that
honest labor and neighborly sympathy are morally and spiritually more beneficial than studying formal doctrines or staring at a Bible in seclusion, as Nancy does. Although Dolly realizes, both before and after Silas' return to Lantern Yard, that they can never understand life's puzzling hardships, she believes that

all we've got to do is trusten, Master Marner--to do the right thing as fur as we know, and to trusten. For if us as knows so little can see a bit o' good and rights, we may be sure as there's a good and a rights biggernor what we can know— I feel it i' my own inside as it must be so.

(p. 204)

John Holloway points out that "here, mixed up with gossip and digression and ignorance and reiteration, we have in all essentials a version of the author's own world view."

Silas agrees that "there's good i' this world" and "there's dealings with us," since Eppie was sent to him to revive his feelings of human affection and fellowship (p. 205). This sense of placid resignation concerning life's inexplicable troubles and faith that there is "a rights" beyond their earthly experience contrast with Godfrey's dissatisfaction at the unhappiness he brought on himself. Laying his dark past to rest after visiting Lantern Yard, Silas is content with the roots he has established in a new community by opening his heart to the child Godfrey rejected and adapting to the unfamiliar customs of his new home because of his love for her.
Eppie's marriage to Aaron Winthrop ensures the unity and continuity of the best elements of village life, like the weddings at the end of *Adam Bede* and *Under the Greenwood Tree*. Silas' comment that "he's his mother's lad" confirms that Aaron is a suitable match for Eppie, while his few conversations in Part Two also reveal his loving and generous nature (p. 209). The emphasis on his occupation of gardening is both realistic and symbolic. He is a diligent worker who can support Eppie and the aging Silas. His labor in the gentry's flower gardens inspires, not conceit and pretension like Mr. Craig's in *Adam Bede*, but imaginative ideas about improving the land to feed the poor. The garden he helps Eppie plant at the Stone-pits also provides the final image of life and beauty in the idyllic portrait of village life that closes the novel.

Although Eliot has returned, in the end of the novel, to the same kind of affirmation of social cohesion and continuity in village life found in *Adam Bede*, the total view of the community and its representatives is very different in the two novels. It takes an exceptional event to unite Silas with the villagers of Raveloe, after years of isolation and alienation in their midst. Even the robbery does not provide enough motivation for mutual trust and sympathy between them to flourish. The mysterious appearance of an abandoned child is necessary to revive natural feelings in Silas, and his act of charity in adopting her finally
destroys his neighbors' suspicions about him. The gentry support such actions by giving things to the poor, but they never really interact with the village workers. As Jerome Thale points out, there is "no reconciliation," but "there is at least acknowledgment and confrontation" between the fairy tale of Silas' humble life and the harsh realism of Godfrey's tragic story.  

Eppie grows into an idealized, virtuous young woman, but not because she was raised in the rural community. In fact, Silas "had preserved her from the lowering influences of the village talk and habits, and had kept her mind in that freshness which is sometimes falsely supposed to be an invariable attribute of rusticity" (pp. 205-206). As in Eliot's other novels, the small family group is more important than the larger community for achieving love and unity among people. The limitations of the village customs and characters in this novel are revealed and satirized. Many of the attitudes held by both classes are ignorant, narrow, and restrictive. Yet it is better to adapt oneself to trivial and meaningless customs, as well as to more valuable local traditions, in order to become integrated with the community, as Silas does when he takes up pipe-smoking, than to let lifelong prejudices and inflexible principles prevent one from participating in life, as Nancy does.

Both the gentry and the working class are represented by supporting characters who are often coarse, silly, and
self-centered; it is only among the workers that these flaws are mixed with a prominent display of charm, common sense, imagination, and social responsibility. Both groups are dominated by an exceptionally virtuous woman who attempts to reform the hero in her story. Nancy's pure love for Godfrey is not enough; her success is limited so severely by the past crimes of the Casses and her inheritance of rigid social standards, that she ends up as a pale, pathetic figure. Dolly Winthrop, despite her even more limited education and experience, has inherited a way of life of common work, neighborly charity, comforting communal rituals, and simple faith, which Silas sees as a beneficial model for himself and the child he chooses to raise. Despite the reality of all the darker elements in old-fashioned village life, the union of the Winthrops and the Manners presents Eliot's vision of the most vital and enduring values of the rural community, which can be preserved in an atmosphere of natural human affections.
NOTES--CHAPTER IV


8 See Q. D. Leavis' analysis of Macey and the thematic significance of his stories, and the importance of his interest in what is "reasonable," in Introduction, pp. 20-23 and p. 154, n. 5.


10 Auster maintains that Dolly's character redeems the village after the earlier presentation of its flaws, pp. 191-92.

See Q. D. Leavis' discussion of the flaws in the Miss Gunns's "superior urban standard of correctness" in contrast with Nancy's genuine refinement, p. 257, n. 3.

Fisher points out that the high and low classes are connected only twice in this novel, both times through a catastrophe—when Dunsey steals the gold and when Godfrey tries to "steal" Eppie back, p. 105.

Introduction, p. 37. Leavis describes Godfrey's and Nancy's attitude as one of Eliot's many examples of "moral stupidity." Haddakin also discusses the limitations of Nancy's private code. "Her forms, even the trivial ones, are living forms because they are suffused with feeling." They are sufficient for her social sphere, but inadequate for the reality of the outside world she encounters at Marner's cottage, p. 74.

Squires discusses the pastoral harmony in the humble rustic life of Silas and Eppie, pp. 103-105.


Haddakin (p. 69) and Q. D. Leavis (p. 39) point out that village life is not necessarily ennobling and rural manners are not idealized in this novel.
CHAPTER V. UNDER THE GREENWOOD TREE

Under the Greenwood Tree, Hardy's first successful novel, is a light-hearted portrait of the rural society which provides the background for the other, more complex "Wessex Novels of Character and Environment" written after it. As in Adam Bede and Silas Marner, almost all of the characters are natives of an isolated village, where most of the action takes place. Although this novel is set in the 1840's, the traditional customs and values preserved by the inhabitants of Mellstock are similar to those found in Hayslope and Raveloe at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This short novel does not contain the leisurely introductory scenes of everyday life found in Adam Bede or the detailed descriptions of ordinary work scattered throughout Hardy's longer novels, such as Far from the Madding Crowd; however, Hardy uses a selection of varied and interesting villagers, participating in a sequence of seasonal rituals, communal gatherings, and family discussions, to represent the social life of Mellstock with as much vividness and economy as Eliot achieves in the portrayal of Raveloe in Silas Marner.

The rural community as a unified, harmonious network of individuals is given more prominence in this novel, and is portrayed with more happiness and light comedy, than in
any other novel by Hardy or Eliot. The original title, *The Mellstock Quire*, which Hardy later changed to the subtitle, indicates that the fate of the local choir is the primary focus of the novel. The choir provides a whole group of supporting characters who dominate half of the novel. Like Adam and Silas, the heroes of Eliot's two village novels, most of the choir members are ordinary village artisans and tradesmen. Although the descriptions of their musical functions and their replacement by a church organ record the loss of an ancient village institution in the first half of the novel, their collective activities and discussions illustrate the survival of many other old and enduring rural customs, traditions, and attitudes. Mrs. Dewey and Mrs. Penny, the wives of two prominent choir members, fill out the portrait of community life by offering the conventional female point of view on domestic matters. As in Eliot's novels, family life is emphasized as the foundation of village stability and continuity. The Deweys, whose three generations include three of the eight adult choir members, are portrayed in their cottage as a typical happy village family, in which petty eccentricities and irritations are overshadowed by mutual tolerance, good humor, and love.

The oldest son in this household, Dick Dewey, is both a choir member and the hero of the love story that dominates the second half of the novel. After the choir's imminent
demise is confirmed in Book 2, the roles of Dick's fellow singers and the other villagers are restricted so that they resemble the rustic choruses in the background of Hardy's later novels, providing a blend of comic diversions, conventional attitudes, and shrewd observations on love and marriage, in general, and, in particular, on Dick's courtship of Fancy Day. Fancy's parents are added to the cast of colorful background characters in the second half of the novel. This shift in focus in the middle of the novel does not interrupt its continuity or change its mood significantly. Fancy's background and admirers are discussed in the village from the early chapters of the novel. Moreover, the emotional and moral distance between the characters in the love plot and the representatives of the community, which increases in the later novels, is never very great in this one. The external and internal factors that hamper Dick's attempts to win Fancy are temporary obstacles, faint anticipations of the conflicts that bring tragic consequences and disrupt the communities of other novels. Thus the final gathering of villagers under the greenwood tree at the wedding of Dick and Fancy, unlike the weddings at the end of Adam Bede, Silas Marner, Far from the Madding Crowd, and The Return of the Native, creates a picture of an idyllic celebration that is not saddened by the memory of recent tragic crises.
This community is not untouched by discord or change, however. Whenever the background characters appear they reveal the unromantic, practical realities of village life through a variety of earthy, satiric, and ironic speeches, reflecting on their everyday lives, as well as on the choir's problems and the love story. The unity of the double plot is established by Fancy's role at the center of both situations, as the organist who replaces the choir and the girl who captures Dick's heart. She is the first major example of Hardy's natives who return to the village and bring changes in the established order, with her education, ambitions, and sophisticated manners different from those of ordinary natives like Dick. Parson Maybold is also a newcomer with a dual role as the innovative vicar who replaces the choir with his new organ, and the richer suitor who almost tempts Fancy away from Dick with promises of a more elegant life in a distant province.

Although Hardy's novels thus begin to explore the effects of outside influences on rural life at this early stage, these threats to village stability and continuity are not caused completely by external factors invading a changeless rural world. As in *Adam Bede* and *Silas Marner*, there are social pressures and limitations within the rural society that inevitably cause problems, as well as egoistic tendencies in main characters that hinder their integration into the community. Fancy's father, a local gamekeeper, is
the one who wants to raise her above the other villagers in education and wealth, and who insists, for a time, that she is too good to marry a tranter's son. He would rather have her marry Mr. Shiner, a local farmer and churchwarden, who is the real instigator of the plan to put Fancy in the choir's place as church musician. Finally, Fancy's vanity and capriciousness are the causes of much of Dick's misery during courtship. These qualities make her, like Hetty Sorrel, Bathsheba Everdene, Eustacia Vye, and Grace Melbury, more vulnerable to temptations from outside her humble sheltered home, but these tendencies are discussed in the novel as inherent female defects, which men must tolerate or tame. Thus Fancy Day's role in the community is affected by mild versions of the problems that bring catastrophe to so many other protagonists in the novels of Eliot and Hardy: ambitious and interfering parents; isolation resulting from differences in education, class, manners, and temperament; and temptations from men with money, rank, and refinement. In Fancy's case, disaster is avoided because common sense, patience, compromise, forgiveness, and love dominate the social and personal relationships in her village. The loss of the choir, which is caused indirectly by her return to Mellstock, is overshadowed by the creation of a new family to carry on the work and social life of the village.
The Villagers of Mellstock

The community with which Fancy eventually merges dominates the early chapters of the novel. Almost all of Book 1 is devoted to the Christmas activities of the choir, their families, and neighbors. Like the communal celebrations in other novels, these scenes blend the thoughts and actions of the protagonists, and foreshadowings of future developments in their loves and troubles, with the dramatization of the community in action. But in this book and half of Book 2, the choir as a group is the center of attention. In the first three chapters the eight adult choir members, as well as the whole Dewey family, are all introduced. Their Christmas Eve gathering functions like the first scene at the Rainbow Inn in *Silas Marner*, revealing many important rural traditions and values through the group's lively and humorous dialogue. While the foremost concern of both groups is the enjoyment of drink and conversation, there is little evidence among the Mellstock choir of the darker elements of provincial ignorance, narrowness, and superstition, which Eliot's narrator sees in Raveloe, and which Hardy stresses in later novels. Throughout Book 1 the emphasis is on the atmosphere of festivity, comradeship, and good humor surrounding the Christmas celebrations.

The choir is an appropriate group to represent the unity and friendship that produce comfortable, peaceful village relations. The first chapter shows that its members are
lifelong companions who can recognize each other by voice in the dark. Michael Mail reminds Dick Dewey that he has "known us so well," and should join his friends, but Dick does not feel that "the placid emotion of friendship" requires a formal reply.\(^3\) His father, Reuben, likewise, does not look up immediately from his task when the familiar footsteps tell him "the expected old comrades" have arrived at his home (p. 44). Nevertheless, the hospitality shared by village neighbors is emphasized in the warm greetings and abundant refreshments offered by the Deweys in this scene and at the Christmas party the following evening.\(^3\) The company's conversation on both occasions is a blend of quaint traditional courtesy and familiar chatter. The first ritual at such friendly gatherings is to raise the drinks of the house; the cider on Christmas Eve is shared from a common mug after Reuben's comic difficulties in tapping the barrel.\(^4\) While the watered cider that has become "too common" among other folks can bring melancholy to the drinker and "disgrace to the name of stummilent," the enjoyment of the Deweys' good cider adds to the friends' enthusiasm as they gossip, reminisce, and sing together (p. 45).

In the choir and the families in this novel, years of familiarity lead the villagers to tolerate one another's foibles and defects. Mrs. Dewey has to hide a smile as her husband accepts humbly her scolding about his sloppiness and gullibility. Spink's comrades know without asking when
he is about to express an opinion, and assure him that they
all respect his reputation for scholarship in the village
when he almost starts an argument about his ability to
judge character by appearances. The continuity of this
tradition of mutual tolerance and loyalty is reflected in
their affection for telling anecdotes about friends of the
past; even a rascal like Sam Lawson, who once cheated
Reuben, is praised more than he is blamed, now that he is
among the revered dead.

Their humorous eccentricities, along with the narrator's
brief descriptions of all the adult Deweys and choir members,
make each one an interesting individual. However, they are
not given enough individuality or complexity to detract from
the impression of unity and stability among the community
representatives. As Albert Guérard says of Hardy's rustics,
they are compact, unchanging "personalities," who "enunciate
the stable moralities against which rural divergence and
delinquency may be measured," being able to "survive all
catastrophe." 5 In these early scenes with the choir, and
in similar group discussions in later novels, the narrator
sometimes de-emphasizes the individual differences among
background characters and reveals the common ground in their
rustic viewpoint by not identifying individual speakers.
The singers occasionally speak together with a "general
voice," particularly when agreeing with a conventional
opinion or pleasantry that has been stated, and when
discussing their music.

Thus Joseph Bowman, the choir member whose characterization is given the least attention, has "no distinctive appearance beyond that of a human being" (p. 41). Aside from his poor hearing, which adds to the comic confusion when the carolers serenade the parson, he has no specific traits that distinguish his comments from those of his companions. Although William Dewey is described in more detail, "to his neighbours he had no character in particular," but they usually "merely thought him old William Dewey" (p. 50). The observation that they may praise or criticize him if fortune smiles or frowns on them that day is a reflection on the subjectivity and changeability of personal opinion and public reputation, but it also shows how closely the lives of these villagers are bound together. The minor disagreements and irritations that spring up among close neighbors never endanger the positions of established members of the community. Reuben even excuses Farmer Shiner's rudeness to the choir on Christmas Eve by suggesting that he may be "in his worldly frame" under the influence of drink, a condition with which they are all familiar. He asks Shiner to their Christmas party to "put en in humour again." Whether their quirks and deficiencies are shown as permanent and well-known village facts, or the results of passing whims or misunderstandings, the villagers accept each other and preserve the essential cohesiveness.
of their community. As Reuben says, "We bear no mortal man ill-will" (p. 64).

Thomas Leaf, the simpleton whose defects as a human being are unquestionable and permanent, is the best illustration of the tolerance and sympathy promoted in this village. In this novel in which Hardy later admitted that he treated the villagers "farcically and flippantly at times," Leaf is the most humorous and pathetic figure. He is a "weak lath-like form," "consisting chiefly of a human skeleton and a smock-frock," with "arms dangling nervelessly in the wind as if they were empty sleeves" (pp. 41, 45). On several occasions the villagers allow him to join their gatherings, treating him with the same combination of frank criticism and kindness that they display in their other relations. They declare openly that his silliness and thin, "ghastly looks" count against him, "not with any sense of humiliating Leaf by disparaging him . . . but because it was an accepted thing that Leaf didn't in the least mind having no head, that deficiency of his being an unimpressed matter of parish history" (pp. 110, 105).

In church Leaf is reprimanded sharply by Grandfather William when he giggles at the girls' audacity in singing as loudly as the choir. When asked, "Where have you lived all your life," after this unconscious violation of the choir's pride in their place in the village hierarchy, "the quailing Leaf tried to look as if he had lived nowhere at
all" (p. 73). Even Leaf is expected to show some respect for the established social order. Usually, however, he is valued for his high treble and he is accepted as being "like chips in porridge" in communal activities—"neither good nor hurt" (p. 109). Harold Toliver calls Leaf "the supreme test of social cohesiveness" throughout the novel. Cleanliness, honesty, and the absence of a jail record are sufficient virtues to prompt Leaf's neighbors to welcome him and tolerate his nonsensical stories. When young Nat Collcombe interrupts Leaf satirically at the wedding, Reuben silences him, for the older folks have learned to indulge Leaf patiently.

Leaf's longest speeches occur at important dramatic points in the plot. He is the extreme example in this novel of Hardy's use of simple background characters to provide both comic relief and ironic undertones that qualify the tragic or idyllic atmosphere of crucial events. These functions are fulfilled with more complexity by Joseph Poorglass in *Far from the Madding Crowd* and Christian Cantle in *The Return of the Native*. Leaf's preoccupation with his brother, who died twenty-six years earlier, at the age of four hours, is an absurd interruption of the choir's important discussion. As Reuben observes, it is rather "romantical" and impractical for Leaf's mother to moon about over her eleven children who died in infancy. The earlier mention of Mr. Penny's young daughter burying three of her five children indicates that
these villagers are resigned to what "'twas to be" and do not dwell on such losses (p. 46). Nevertheless, it is a rural tragedy for Leaf's mother to have no working sons to support her; thus pity for Leaf's "melancholy family" prompts Reuben to take Leaf into the parson's parlor. Leaf's fervent desire to see "a quire go into a study to have it out about the playing and singing" just once in his life shows, in an exaggerated way, that this is a momentous occasion in village history. Yet the "accidental parenthesis" on Leaf's own history contributes to the comic bumbling that undercuts the seriousness of the confrontation with Maybold (pp. 105-106, 109-110). At the wedding Leaf's simple-minded story about a man increasing his wealth has the opposite effect. As the culmination of a series of comments introducing the practical realities of money and social position into the idyllic wedding celebration, it has more ironic significance than Leaf or his listeners realize.

Leaf's ignorance of "how many cuts d'take to sharpen a spar"—that is, his inability to work for a living—is a strong count against him (p. 105). The importance of work for these villagers is revealed throughout the novel, although most of the group scenes focus on holidays and church business. Reuben's first actions and speeches involve the delicate task of tapping the cider barrel, displaying his proud knowledge of the apple varieties that make the best cider, and describing the hours he spent making hoops for the barrel.
He is often called simply "the tranter" by the narrator. During the second half of the novel, Dick's encounters with Fancy, and the discussion with his father about her, often occur in the course of hauling things around the parish or during rare holidays from that daily work. Their business is described when Dick boasts to Maybold about the increase in trade that will enable him to support a wife. He has purchased business cards for "Dewey and Son" to "kip pace with the times" (p. 203). Grandfather William is introduced when he has to be called in from chopping wood to meet the choir. Father and son are proud of the old man's passion for two things: "cleaving up old dead apple-tree wood and playing the bass-viol" (p. 48). Mrs. Dewey's father, Grandfather James, is identified by his mason's clothes, with large pockets shared by stones, mortar-dust, and packets of food to eat on the job.

Mr. Penny, the most conspicuous and outspoken choir member after the Deweys, is noted for two features; the frequent good-natured jokes about his short stature are offset by his attempts to make himself look taller, and, more significantly, by his pride in his role as the village shoemaker. During the Christmas Eve rehearsal he suddenly pulls Fancy Day's boot out of his pocket and scolds himself for forgetting to return it. This interruption, which introduces the Days into the novel, leads to anecdotes and comments on Penny's remarkable ability to identify members of a family
by their feet. The dignity and independence of the traditional village tradesman are illustrated by Penny's reluctance to mend boots made by outsiders, and his scorn at the idea of advertising his shop to strangers by putting out a sign; he keeps "an establishment whose trade came solely by connection based on personal respect." In Book 2 Mr. Penny is shown "enthroned" in the interior of his shop, with a view of his neighbors in the street, as he is every day until evening. He punctuates the conversation with pulls at the boot he is mending when the choir gathers there to discuss the problems brought by the new parson (p. 99).

The Fate of the Choir

Their role as church musicians is another source of pride and tradition for these men. Hardy's preface describes the customs and duties that the village choirs of his childhood carried out faithfully and diligently, with very little compensation for their trouble. Their affection for the ancient carols is displayed in the Christmas Eve rehearsal, when the familiar tunes are personified in the dialogue, as if they were old friends. They enthusiastically take on the challenge of getting the tough ones right, so that when they perform for their neighbors, they are "embodying a quaint Christianity in words orally transmitted from father to son through several generations" (p. 60). The preparations and routines
involved in the annual caroling are described in detail, with William advising the others on their music and trying to keep the group in order, like a shepherd.

The conversation of the old men on the decline in village choirs is a foreshadowing of their own fate. Michael Mail observes mournfully that "times have changed" and "people don't care much about us now! I've been thinking we must be almost the last left in the county of the old string players" (p. 58). After a series of anecdotes about other former choirs in the area, and an amusing debate about the attributes of various instruments and their players, young and old finally agree with old William that strings are the most spiritual and proper instruments for church, while the newer harmoniums and barrel-organs are "miserable dumble-dores" (p. 59). Their own survival is attributed to their wisdom in sticking to strings, but soon after Christmas they learn that the new parson has brought one of the dreaded organs to Mellstock.

The caroling at Fancy's window, Farmer Shiner's house, and the parsonage illustrates the choir's concern with their reputation, and also marks the first appearance of the three characters who cause trouble in the choir's history, as well as in Dick's love life. The initial silence from Fancy and Parson Maybold, the two newcomers in the village, arouses suspicion. At first William fears a repetition of the disgrace experienced in previous years when they sang to empty
houses. When their hearty "Merry Christmas" brings Fancy
to the window to thank them, however, her beauty overshadows
their worries that her urban tastes might scorn their rural
custom. Maybold's silence also seems to be "a bad sign,"
since he does not show enough respect for the choir to come
to the window (p. 66). But when he calls out from his bed
and overhears a remark from Bowman, his sharp hearing is
taken as a sign of cleverness, and his good humor is viewed
as a compliment.

While the men are nervous about making a good impression
on the new parson, they defend their honor with loud indig-
nation when an older neighbor, Shiner, interrupts their
carol in a passionate outburst of anger. William insists
that "all who be friends of harmony" must oppose these in-
sults by singing on "fortissimo" to drown out Shiner.
William is shocked at this "onseemly" behavior from a church-
warden, the most "dreadful scene" of his career as a caroler
(pp. 63-64). Although village harmony seems to be restored
when Shiner joins the merrymaking at the Dewey's party, the
Christmas incidents are the beginning of a sequence of events
that destroys this important source of tradition and cohesion
in the village.

The next blow occurs in church on Christmas morning.
Not only is the choir's performance sub-standard, as usual
after their late-night adventures, but this year they are
assaulted by a phenomenon which "had never happened before
within the memory of man." The school-girls—called "brazen-faces hussies" as soon as the sermon begins and the choir can whisper among themselves—are singing loud enough to challenge their leadership (p. 72). The description of the gallery stresses the choir's pride in their superior position. "Enthroned" above the rest of the congregation, they are familiar with every detail of the church and every action of the lowly villagers beneath them. More importantly, their right to dominate the music has never been questioned before by their "humble and respectful followers" in the nave. All except the ignorant Leaf are appalled that anyone who has never sat in a gallery would dare to undermine its ancient function. When this threat from the younger generation provokes a sarcastic comment from Spinks on the choir's apparent uselessness, only his "initiated" comrades could appreciate "the horrible bitterness of irony" in his words and the "ghastliness" of his laughter (pp. 72-73).

When the choir gathers at Penny's shop in the spring, these signs of the decline in their reputation have culminated in the news that Maybold intends to "turn us out of the quire neck and crop" (p. 100). While some of the men respond by complaining peevishly about the new parson's innovations and interfering ways, Reuben, displaying the deeper insight and resoluteness of the elder Deweys, has a plan for defending their honor. He believes calling on Maybold as a group, to request a postponement of their replacement, will be a
persuasive demonstration of their dignity and unity. His
formal reminder that they "all know one another very well
... was received as a comment which, though familiar,
should not be omitted in introductory speeches" (p. 104).
Like Mrs. Poyser, Reuben will not let the choir be ousted
from their traditional position without speaking out in
their defense. As he tells Maybold, "I always like to look
things in the face" (p. 111). Maybold's maid, with her
local manners, provides another example of the villagers' in-
clination to forsake propriety and express their own opinions
bluntly. Although Maybold has warned her not to be so out-
spoken, when she sees the surprising appearance of "every man-
jack" of the choir on the doorstep, she blurts out, "'tis
thoughted by many in town and country... that you be
going to get it hot and strong!" (p. 108).

While Reuben's awe of the parson and his courteous man-
ner prevent him from arguing "hot and strong," he tries to
appeal to Maybold's sense of justice and fair play. The
choir's desire to die a "glorious" and "respectable" death
at Christmas, rather than at some nameless mid-year Sunday,
shows the value they place on their own dignity and reputa-
tion among other parishes (p. 112). The identities of
William and the other old men, who are most deeply affected
by this forced ending to their ancient customs, are insepar-
able from their roles in the choir. Bowman earlier mentions
that William would be "ready to die for the quire" (p. 102),


and Reuben emphasizes to Maybold that William, who is a
different man with his bass-viol and Sunday clothes, would
give up his life sooner than his music, if forced to make a
choice.

Maybold appreciates the choir's enthusiasm, but he is
oblivious to the advantages of preserving their traditional
roles in the church. In his preface Hardy points out that
the regrettable "displacement of these ecclesiastical bands-
men by an isolated organist" actually worked against "the
professed aims of the clergy," since it decreased the in-
terest of the people in church affairs, and thus "an impor-
tant union of interests has disappeared" (p. 33). On the
day when Fancy takes over as organist, "the old choir,
with humbled hearts," feel strange sitting scattered in the
nave with their families, and some would have preferred to
stay away completely. "Having nothing to do with conducting
the service for almost the first time in their lives they all
felt awkward, out of place, abashed, and inconvenienced by
their hands." The "venerable body of musicians" believe their
plainer music was "more in keeping with the simplicity of
their old church" than Fancy's ornate music (p. 195).

In other writings Hardy was realistic and unsentimental
about the fact that material progress and innovations from
the outside world brought gains as well as losses in the
quality of rural life. The choir members are somewhat un-
reasonable and trivial when they scorn Maybold's refined
and zealous new ways, although some of the old ways are more colorful. He has the font repaired to avoid having to spit on the babies, and he does not leave his parishioners alone, like his predecessor, but visits them more often than they care to be reminded about religion. Reuben and William insist on judging fairly this parson with his "hearty borussnorus ways," who is friendly enough to shake hands with a humble tranter in his dirtiest work clothes (p. 102).

The loss of the choir receives much more attention than Maybold's other public actions, however, and the reasons for replacing it seem petty and artificial in the light of the villagers' attachment to the old music. Both Maybold and Shiner, who has pressured the parson to make the change quickly, are suspected of favoring Fancy because of their infatuation with her. Musically, the innovation is based on outside standards of propriety and refinement. Trying to be honest and sympathetic with the men, Maybold stresses that, while the choir music is good, he prefers organ music as "most proper" for the church (p. 112). The choir members are powerless in this situation because the rigid hierarchy in rural society places Parson Maybold and Shiner, a farmer and churchwarden, above them in terms of social class and authority over church business. The distance between the parson and his parishioners is revealed here in the attitudes of the choir members more than in the behavior of Maybold. The deference shown to a gentleman like the parson, exaggerated
when Leaf calls him "your holiness," is also seen in Reuben's comically inept attempts to address Maybold in a refined, respectful manner. His strong emotional speeches about the choir's fate are interrupted by the insertion of numerous apologies for his "common way" (pp. 110-11). This humble and self-deprecating manner, which is so charming and humorous in Reuben and other of Hardy's rustics, also reveals the limitations of these simple, country-bred people in any unfamiliar or threatening situation. In later novels the passivity of rural natives with more complex problems allows them to be victimized by corrupt and alien forces.

Throughout these critical scenes with the choir, the comedy in their quaint speech and provincial attitudes undercuts the drama of their confrontation with Maybold, even more so than in Mrs. Poyser's indignant outburst against the tyrannical Squire Donnithorne. The choir's timidity and awe of the parson result in a sequence of increasingly farcical actions, beginning with Reuben's offer of an appropriate dosage of strong drink to fortify their nerves before facing a gentleman, and his attempts to keep a dignified and unified formation in his modest flock of sheep as they shuffle hesitantly to the parson's door. Reuben is less intimidated than the others, but his amusing introductions of Leaf and William, followed by an awkward search for Maybold's fallen pen, undermine his serious intentions. His "high class" errand is brought to an abrupt and hilarious climax when the curious
men outside peer into the doorway, abandoning propriety because they have heard noises and fear violence within. The "excitable" Mr. Penny draws attention to Maybold's bleeding chin, the men offer some homely advice on razor cuts, Maybold refuses Reuben's kind offer of some fur from his hat to stop the bleeding, and the embarrassed parson ends the interview (p. 115).

This clumsy "ancient body of minstrels" is granted only a brief extension of their life as a choir (p. 114). Reuben, recognizing the parson's absolute authority in this issue, says in the middle of the interview, "since death's to be, we'll die like men any day you name" (p. 112). During the discussion at Penny's he is philosophical about the fact that "your pa'son comes by fate." They have no choice but to "take en as he is, ... and thank God he's no worse" (p. 101). While Reuben understands why Maybold wants his own way in church like any tradesman in his shop, the men are bitter at hearing that Shiner is behind the change in the music. Reuben even lets an exclamation of dismay slip out in front of Maybold, pointing out that Shiner has no ear for music, but does feel enmity for the choir because of the Christmas Eve dispute. Later, when Reuben hypothesizes that Shiner wants to show off Fancy in church, the men feel the rightful hierarchy in ecclesiastical affairs is upset:

The the music is second to the woman, the other churchwarden is second to Shiner, the pa'son is second to the churchwardens, and God A'mighty is nowhere at all. (p. 118)
This speech is an eloquent expression of Hardy's observation that the foundation of the country church was weakened when the old customs were taken away because of the changeable preferences of those in power.

Despite some resentful and sarcastic comments about Shiner and Maybold, including observations that "words be wind" and not much was gained by the visit, Reuben is satisfied that they spoke their minds and Maybold took it "like a man" (p. 117). The irony in this story of the choir is that, while an important source of village tradition and harmony is lost forever, acquiescence, forgiveness, and resignation are necessary to preserve the harmonious relations so vital to the small community. Reuben's interview with Maybold ends with dignity and respect, in spite of all the comic bumbling; Reuben admits that "mortal men musn't expect their own way entirely; and I express in all our names that we'll make shift and be satisfied with what you say, ... and ... make room for the next generation" (p. 116).

Although the confrontation is described several times in terms of a war with the enemy, Reuben points out that it is impossible to fight when the opponents are so civil to each other. Maybold means well, he is kind to Leaf and William, and he does compromise by letting the choir stay on until Michaelmas. In return, the choir accepts his decision quietly. After Fancy takes over the playing, Maybold observes that the old choir "joined in the singing with the

The choir's loss is unfortunate, but it does not threaten their livelihood or homes, as the Poysers' disagreement with their squire does, and it does not become an occasion for bitter protest or personal despair, like the loss of the Winterborne house leases in *The Woodlanders*, for example. The Deweys are the leading peacemakers whenever there is dissension among their comrades. Despite their comic foibles, they display dignity, integrity, and common sense in their generous treatment of the parson who destroys their beloved choir. Old William, the most devout character and the one who insists that they all go to church after they have been disbanded, creates a figure with a "youthful sparkle," "a certain nobility of aspect," and "a Titanic shadow," as he stands in the setting sun, remaining true to his principles by defending Maybold's character and facing stoically the loss of his lifelong avocation (p. 102).

*The Young Lovers and their Families*

The same spirit of tolerance and forgiveness brings a happy, and more fruitful, ending to the romantic trials of Dick Dewey, after a series of frustrations and disagreements. The youngest of the grown-up choir members, Dick does not play a prominent role in any of their group scenes, but is
preoccupied with Fancy Day, while the older men are engrossed in the devastating loss of their role as musicians. When the excitement of the others outside the parson's house is at its peak, Dick actually loses interest and wanders away toward Fancy's school. This is not the first time he forsakes the choir at a dramatic moment. In the middle of the Christmas caroling the others notice he is missing and their comments show that it is a serious offense to desert the choir when his treble is essential to their harmony. It is so "nasty" and unthinkable for a "strapping lad" to be "leaving his work half done and turning tail like this," that his grandfather begins to fear some "fatal tragedy," such as drowning, has overtaken him. After they find him loitering back at the schoolhouse, doing nothing, Spinks observes that "the stupidness lies in that point of it being nothing at all" (pp. 65-66).

Dick's father, suspecting the nature of Dick's "fatal" infliction, later reports to the choir on the progression of Dick's love sickness. It is a condition that separates him from family and community, as these incidents show. When Reuben calls him a "lost man" the choir members are seriously concerned to hear of Dick's new erratic and obsessive behavior. Their comments on Dick and Fancy in the first half of the novel prepare the older characters for being restricted to the role of chorus in the love story of the second half. The family and community scenes set up the contrast between
the older and younger generations, while Books 3 and 4 are
devoted primarily to the lovers isolated from the community.
During their most serious quarrel, for example, Dick runs
off into the woods alone and gathers nuts furiously, aban-
donning his mother's bag of nuts when Fancy finds him to make
peace.

These amusing little incidents, however, do not have the
tragic and antisocial consequences of the crises of other
protagonists, such as those of Hetty Sorrel, Bethsheba
Everdene, Eustacia Vye, Michael Henchard, and Grace Melbury,
who are separated from their communities and have frightening
experiences in wild natural settings. Dick's beloved is
tempted by a richer man, but does not subject him to the
severe suffering and isolation experienced by Adam Bede, for
example, before he can restore his community's harmony with
forgiveness and a happy marriage. Dick's separation results
from the temporary and stereotypical freaks and crises of
young love, and the lovers' quarrels are caused by Fancy's
typical female defect of excessive vanity. As Reuben ob-
serves in his practical way, he has traveled that path him-
self, and "the sooner begun, the sooner over; for come it
will" (p. 103).

There are problems created by Dick's choice of a woman
slightly above him in rank, who has been educated in a more
sophisticated society; moreover, when she turns out to be
the choir's rival, his preference for her seems to be an
alliance with the enemy of the traditional community. He is proud of "her triumphant début as organist," and disappointed that a friend's funeral keeps him away that Sunday (p. 192). However, Dick assures the choir that Fancy considers herself their friend, and she insists she is not eager to play in church at their expense. Although Reuben worries about Dick making himself miserable over one who has attracted the attention of richer men, and at one point he blames his wife for inviting her to their home, he acknowledges the advantages of marrying into a family "rather better in the pocket than we" (pp. 118, 137). More importantly, the inclusion of Fancy in the caroling and Christmas party shows that the Deweys welcome her to their friendly village as they would any other new neighbor. Even though she is the leader of the schoolgirls whose loud singing causes such indignation among the choir on Christmas morning, Reuben, with weaker "party feeling" than the others, does not speak out against one who is to be a guest in his home that evening (p. 75).

The Deweys' harmonious family creates a stable background for the emotional drama of Dick's courtship of Fancy. The family discussions and the Christmas party provide both a contrast between the romantic dreams of young lovers and the practical perspective of the older generation, and a model for the tradition of solid village life which Dick and Fancy are expected to perpetuate. Since the Deweys, like the
Poyzers in *Adam Bede*, occupy the moral center of the novel, many critics have commented on the timeless values they represent. Like the Poyzers and the Winthrops in *Silas Marner*, they are an exemplary family with a diligent, thrifty, congenial style of living. Andrew Enstice describes their home as Hardy's most idealized prototype of the cosy parish cottage, where work and home life are blended—"the imperfect human paradise from which his characters are cast out, to take their solitary way through the Victorian economic reality of the nineteenth century."

Under this roof, the young children are adored and admired by their proud parents, while the grandparents provide a link with the past. Grandfather William, with his "ardent vitality," "humorous and kindly nature," and "firm religious faith," is the idealized spiritual leader of the family (p. 50). Grandfather James has a less prominent role as an "inharmonious" contrast to the musical William. A somewhat miserly and slovenly old man who lives alone, James embodies some of the less attractive realities of the aging village artisan, interjecting cynical comments on ceremonial occasions. As John F. Danby observes, this novel places special emphasis on the continuity of generations in the village, so that personal problems are less significant than individuals such as the self-centered lovers might think.

Mr. and Mrs. Dewey, with Mr. and Mrs. Penny as a secondary example, represent the typical successful village
marriage. The contributions of Mrs. Dewey and Mrs. Penny to several of the choir's gatherings illustrate the traditional duties and concerns of the rural housewife. Like Mrs. Poyser and Dolly Winthrop, they are devoted mothers and wives, preoccupied with their housework, whose sharp and candid comments on the transgressions of those around them provide amusing examples of country gossip and folk wisdom. Mrs. Dewey is shown in the early chapters of the novel tending food at the fire, supervising the family washing before church, admiring her economical use of materials in Reuben's new trousers, scolding Reuben for being sloppy and sweating too much, and complaining about the mess left after the party. Mrs. Penny's main complaint against the new parson is his habit of "mumbudgeting," calling on housewives without warning, so that she has not been able to do her scrubbing without the "confusing" experience of meeting "a gentleman at the door when ye are in the mess o' washing" (pp. 100-101).

As this anxiety about entertaining gentlemen shows, these women are concerned with keeping up the level of respectability in their families. Their husbands, like Martin Poyser and Ben Winthrop, are portrayed as the stereotypical clumsier and coarser animals, scolded affectionately by their more refined wives. On Christmas Mrs. Penny agrees with old William that it is "fair and honourable" to make the young folks wait until midnight before dancing on a sacred holiday
(p. 77). During the dancing, when the laws of propriety make the stout men uncomfortable, Reuben declares, with his usual common sense, that it will become "the native manners of the country" if the men all remove their jackets together, but his wife is dismayed at his "low notions" and "work-folk way." She disapproves of Michael's coarse anecdote about the relationship between chewing and music, while Reuben believes indecent stories with bad morals are the only true stories. Mrs. Dewey blames her husband's faults on his family background, boasting that her family "kept themselves up" more than any others in the parish (pp. 82, 87-88). The sloppiness of her father, James, in his mason's jacket, and her preference for the word "taters" over "tatties" show, however, that she did not lower herself from a much higher level of society when she married Dewey. Differences in social class and refinement of manners threaten the union of Dick and Fancy, but it appears in the end that genuine affection and growing familiarity will ensure lasting tolerance and loyalty in their marriage, as they have done for the Deweys and Pennys. Although Mrs. Penny loves to contradict and tease her husband "in times of peace, . . . like all good wives . . . she coalesced with him heartily enough in times of war" (p. 100). We do not see these families tested by disgrace, death, or homelessness, like the Poysers or the protagonists of other novels; nevertheless, their conversations and the choir's disaster
show that families and neighbors support each other when threatened by unfamiliar situations.

At the Christmas party the preoccupation of the older folks with mundane domestic matters, frank arguments about social conventions, and nostalgic anecdotes contrast with the excitement of the young people, especially the love-struck Dick, as the dancing and flirtations grow more intense. Fancy's delicate beauty is heightened by the proximity of the thumping and quivering of the older dancers. They join in the traditional dances enthusiastically, but complain afterwards of fatigue and sweat, and prefer eating to dancing.

When the subject of love and marriage arises, the women are usually more sentimental than the men. Later, when Dick asks Reuben how he proposed to his wife, he remembers little except that he was oiling his boots when he proposed and sweating during the wedding. At the party Mrs. Penny relives more affectionately the past scenes she describes, and yet her simple story of meeting the little shoemaker, whom she married "afore I knew what I was about a'most," lacks the drama and fervor of Dick's fresh experience with romance that evening (p. 85).

The distance between the perspectives of young and old is increased after the guests leave, when Dick feels "a disagreeable closeness" with his family in the disillusionment following Fancy's departure. He is disgusted with Reuben
and the fiendish James for being glad the guests are gone. Reuben enjoys the hearty snack he can now eat in peace, while Dick is still idolizing the "pretty little crumbs" on Fancy's plate. Mrs. Dewey, "returning to the natural marriage voice," complains of the heavy work caused by the mess of Christmas parties, and goes to bed exhausted. Dick is horrified that all parents are "so blind to romance," vowing that he and Fancy would never be "so dreadfully practical and undemonstrative of the Passion" (pp. 90-91).

The actions and comments of the older generation help deflate the idealized figure of Fancy as well as Dick's romantic dreams. For Dick and Maybold the familiar places are transformed by her charming presence whenever they see her—at the church, the schoolhouse, or the Christmas party. Although Spinks says at first her "good pink face" is "only a face," all the men are unanimous in their adoration of Fancy's "spiritual vision" on Christmas Eve, yet they are sometimes cynical about the heartaches that beauty may cause (pp. 55, 66). The fact that Fancy first captures the attention of the choir through the sudden appearance of a common boot helps to undercut the romantic aura surrounding the new schoolmistress, even though it is described as a pretty boot and Dick begins to adore it before he sees its owner. Whenever the older men refer to her as "a figure of fun" who is "just husband-high," it is clear that the more experienced men anticipate that she will bring unrest to some unattached
man in the village, although there is some debate about who the victim will be before Dick wins her.

A number of comments emphasize Fancy's role as the bringer of outside influences into the village. Her boot has been made elsewhere, which is an issue of concern to Mr. Penny. One of the children points out that her role is to keep them from making "pigs" of themselves at Maybold's Christmas dinner, while she feels obligated, "as village sharpener," to begin the supper conversation at the Deweys' party (p. 86). Her witty remark is overshadowed by a sequence of homely speeches on funerals, local music, and eating, which make the other villagers seem more colorful and entertaining than Fancy, although not as polished or sophisticated. Her ability as an organist is her only accomplishment in bringing a permanent change in village customs. On that score she becomes a "bitter weed" to the choir, at the same time that she is developing into a source of growing delight and anxiety for Dick.

Although Dick joins Mr. Shiner in keeping on his coat during the dancing, to impress Fancy, the differences between her refined manners and Dick's plain country habits and speeches are revealed in the scenes in which they become acquainted. At the Christmas party his problem in attracting Fancy is the opposite of Godfrey Cass's at the New Year's party in *Silas Marner*: Dick has no social status or wealth to offer, yet he has the diligence and integrity that Nancy
Lammeter knows Godfrey Cass lacks. At first Dick displays all the comic awkwardness of the stereotypical bashful young lover, but as their relationship develops his native courtesy, sincerity, and frank affection help bridge the distance between them. When Fancy is worried about her reputation as the schoolmistress if she is seen stopping at a country inn with him, he solves the problem in a simple, straightforward manner by proposing at once, and then he jokingly plays the role of a worldly, experienced engaged man with the landlord.

Fancy's father is the one who tries to keep her from joining Dick's class of ordinary village tradesman. Immediately after the choir's confrontation with the parson, their discussion turns to the subject of Geoffrey Day, providing a transition into the second half of the novel, where the Day family is introduced and the choir as a group almost disappears. The mystery of whose heart Fancy is trying to capture, which makes her a "riddle" and "a twister," leads to the observation that she has probably inherited her father's traits. The men all marvel at Geoffrey's "closeness," and sarcastically associate his aloofness with his "sound understanding," apparently because he has been able to accumulate a fortune without his neighbors knowing much about it, including how much it is (pp. 118-19).

Although Mr. Penny's earlier mention of the history of Geoffrey's feet and the family resemblance in Fancy's feet
demonstrates humorously the familiarity among these neighbors and stresses Fancy's local heritage, several factors separate the Days from their Mellstock acquaintances. Their house is actually in the next parish, isolated in Yalbury Wood, where Geoffrey is head gamekeeper for the neighboring aristocracy. The house is warm and cosy, with familiar little oddities remembered since Fancy's childhood, suggesting that it was once a home similar to Dick's congenial cottage, although slightly more luxurious. The striking feature of the house, however, is the duplication in all the household goods, arranged by Fancy's mother years before in preparation for Fancy's marriage. The Days are like the Dodsons in The Mill on the Floss, in their preoccupation with status, wealth, and possessions, although these concerns do not remain permanent obstacles to Fancy's happiness, as they do for the Tullivers.

Geoffrey's speech and actions reveal that, in many respects, he is a working man with humble origins like Dick's family. His comic encounter with the bees during the honey-taking, when he is only mildly annoyed at having bees in his clothes, shows that he is not finicky about his own appearance or comfort. Nevertheless, he is friendly and talkative only with those slightly richer than himself, avoiding familiarity with those whom he has risen above economically, including his trapper, Enoch. Like Michael Henchard and George Melbury in later novels, he is overly sensitive about
his reputation and his daughter's accomplishments, because of his own lowly background. His "closeness" stems from his awareness that when he talks his similarities in speech and ideas to his social inferior are revealed, as when his frank "household moralizing" about wives being "a provoking class of society" seems to disturb Fancy's "educated ideas" (p. 125).

When the question of Fancy's future arises, however, Geoffrey is quite articulate and emphatic. Although he knows he lacks Fancy's sophisticated breeding, he is determined that his daughter will marry into a higher level of society. When Dick finally feels compelled to ask for Fancy, Geoffrey calls it "a very foolish errand." He then proceeds to explain quite plainly that Fancy's mother was a teacher who condescended in marrying a lowly keeper, that Fancy acquired her accomplishments at her aunt's boarding school, and that she was first in her classes in her teacher's training. Moreover, Geoffrey lives frugally himself and has Fancy work as a schoolmistress, even though he has risen high enough for them to live better, so that she can equal a gentleman suitor "in pocket" as well as "in polish." After this outburst "modest Dick" agrees it was presumptuous to ask for a woman "so superior to him" (pp. 181-82).

These disagreements over social status and the marriage choice do not lead to the kind of discord and separation that plague Clym Yeobright and his mother in The Return of the Native, or the Melburys and Giles Winterborne in The
Woodlanders, but they are resolved amicably in this novel. The "spell" Fancy uses to change her father's mind is a relatively harmless little deception, performed in the cause of pure love. Through various sources of local gossip, Geoffrey learns that Fancy has almost stopped eating. Although he insists that he is acting for the best in refusing "that penniless Dick o' thine," he places his only child's health and happiness above his worldly ambitions. She not only gets him to give in, but she persuades him to accept Dick willingly; he agrees, since he sees "'tis hurten thee to live without en." Thus there are no remnants of disobedience or hard feelings to mar the wedding (p. 191).

Mrs. Day, Fancy's step-mother, is an amusing eccentric who carries the family materialism to extremes. When she finds that Dick has been asked to stay for dinner, she becomes obsessed with what people will say about her everyday things, so she changes the tablecloth and dishes while they eat, unpacking her best dinner ware abruptly. Geoffrey excuses his wife's "queerness" calmly, pointing out that he has accepted her ways and has not tried to reform her because second wives are "a rum class" of women (p. 124). Fancy smooths over the incident by taking the blame herself for not setting out better things. Thus the Days are another example of the peace and stability achieved in country life through tolerance and resignation. On Fancy's wedding day their home is the scene of a communal gathering, a rare
event there, and Geoffrey joins in the conversation with his guests. His wife locks herself up with a "queerness" in her head, and later busies herself with the yearly task of cleaning the cupboards, refusing to let a wedding interrupt her work. But this odd unsociable behavior is tolerated sympathetically, like Leaf's mental deficiencies. Reuben believes her to be "a very good woman at bottom" (p. 223).

**Dick's Rivals in Love**

Farmer Shiner is Dick's rival because his money and social status make him Geoffrey's choice for Fancy's husband, but his few appearances in the novel show that in personal attributes he is no match for young, ardent Dick. He enters the novel bellowing at the choir from his "queer lump of a house," with its "sly and wicked leer," while his later action against the choir shows even more disrespect for community traditions (p. 63). His refusal to "cast off" when dancing with Fancy is another defiance of tradition. Dick questions his right to "hack and mangle" what the dance-maker ordained, but both Dick and Mrs. Penny acknowledge that a neighbor and guest should not be contradicted too strenuously (p. 81).

The Christmas party and the honey-taking are the two occasions when Dick and Shiner are shown in direct competition for Fancy's attention. They both look silly playing
the role of determined and antagonistic rivals, especially when Fancy is stung by a bee and they turn into "twin acrobats," contradicting and echoing each other in their rival attempts to help her (p. 179). Although Shiner seems sure as "a high-class man" that his "superior knowledge" gives him the upper hand, his overconfident attitude contributes to his defeat. At the party Dick wins Fancy for the first dance because she prefers his modest courtesy to Shiner's cool assurance. Shiner's "importance of station" and sense of superiority prevent him from joining in "trifling" actions such as tasting the honey, while Dick indulges in many charming and furtive little gestures that provide excuses for touching Fancy (p. 178).

Geoffrey is the only one to praise Shiner as "a nice solid feller," trying to impress on Dick that their friendship is likely to lead to a closer union with the farmer (p. 125). Although Fancy is quite aware of Shiner's gold and silver accessories and his bold stares, and she admits to enjoying flattery, the enviable gold chain is one of the details used to satirize the pretentious figure of Shiner, as it quivers when he dances. At the party, his character is "principally composed of a crimson stare, vigorous breath, and a watch-chain," with a mouth that never smiles (p. 78). When he finally engages in a stiff exchange with Fancy about love, his declaration that his attentions are offered "coolly and practically" results in an absolute refusal from her
(p. 176). Dick's humble but passionate devotion is preferable to Fancy, even though her father favors Shiner's cash.

When Dick's other rival approaches Fancy at a vulnerable moment, with a more fervent declaration of love than Shiner's, there is a more serious, although short-lived, threat to Dick's happiness and Fancy's integration into the community, just when Dick thinks all external obstacles to the marriage have been removed. Fancy's behavior on the day she takes over as organist is a dangerous violation of community values for several reasons, culminating in Maybold's unexpected offer that evening of a more luxurious life as mistress of a parsonage in another county. She impulsively accepts this proposal, which would separate her from her native district completely. Her hysteria shows that she is aware of doing wrong, and after a sleepless night she sends a note to Maybold refusing his offer, at the same time that he writes to say he has discovered, through Dick's innocent boasting, of her commitment to another. Dick's optimistic plans for the wedding and the thriving hauling business are more wholesome and cheerful than Shiner's proposal, with his desperate promises about the travel and material advantages necessary to raise Fancy to the level of refinement required for a parson's wife.

This incident shows that Fancy has not adopted the habits of tolerance, patience, modesty, and loyalty that bring contentment to the older members of the community.
She is tempted so easily by Maybold's offer because she is weary of living alone, waiting for the wedding, and Dick has appeared to her as a shabby and pathetic figure that evening. He has attended a friend's funeral, given his umbrella to a lady, and walked out of his way in the rain to see her, but she will not invite his dripping body in or endanger her curls by leaning out of the window far enough to kiss him. His shiny wet suit, damaged by the marks of his friend's coffin, cannot compete for her favor with Maybold's dry suit of "superior silk" (p. 198).

The events of this day are the culmination of a series of incidents in which Fancy's vanity and capriciousness pain and confuse Dick. His lack of experience with women contrasts with the older men's familiarity with such problems. Their attitudes are a blend of sympathy for Dick, tolerance of the inevitable provoking way of women, and scorn at Dick's lovesickness and Fancy's flirtatiousness. They automatically associate a pretty girl with a "delusion," dropping comments throughout the novel on the sauciness and vagaries of womanhood, and the difficulties of managing wives. Reuben tries to convince Dick that women are "all alike in the groundwork" and any "respectable body" will do when the time eventually comes to marry. Although he thinks the uncertainties of courting Fancy have made Dick "as mad as a cappel-faced bull" and there is no reason to rush into marriage, he admits defeat with good humor when Dick reminds him that he fell prey
to the same impulses himself in his youth (pp. 136-38).

When Dick identifies his father's dismay at the waywardness of modern young women as a trite and conventional repetition of "what all the common world says," Reuben insists that "the world's a very sensible feller on things in jineral" (p. 136). The marriages in this novel show that through good-humored tolerance and long familiarity, the older couples have achieved stability in their lives. Nevertheless, the world's common sense on "things in jineral" cannot always accommodate individual cases and unfamiliar deviations, as the later novels show more dramatically. Reuben says one "ought to be able to unriddle such a little chiel as she," but his limited perspective does not help Dick interpret Fancy's perplexing behavior (p. 118).

Dick has a serious talk with her which shows that the kinds of coquettish and evasive behavior common in more sophisticated circles are unacceptable to his simple and honest viewpoint:

... it is best to be truthful. Whatever they may say about a woman's right to conceal where her love lies, and pretend it doesn't exist, and things like that, it is not best; I do know it, Fancy. And an honest woman in that, as well as in all her daily concerns, shines most brightly, and is thought most of in the long-run. (p. 149)

Dick's open affection and loyal devotion lead to a sincere commitment from Fancy, but she does not settle down as an honest, contented village housewife until she has made a
harmful mistake. Reuben's shrewd prediction on Christmas Eve about the new parson and the new schoolmistress—that "she'll wind en round her finger, and twist the pore young feller about like the figure of 8"—has a more serious outcome than he ever realizes (p. 67).

After they are engaged, Fancy's continued preoccupation with her own appearance is most provoking to Dick. Grandfather James points out bluntly at the wedding that her clothes often seem more important to her than Dick himself, although Grandfather William replies philosophically that "'tis their nature," quoting the Bible on the importance to the bride of her raiment (p. 219). The climax of Fancy's vain defiance of rural convention on the subject of modest dress for one in her position comes on her first day of playing the organ, when she is the center of attention and the old choir is reduced to two paragraphs of comment. The "sober matrons," who insist on bonnets only for church, are shocked at her hat with a feather, while the daughters of the higher class of small gentry are envious because they have hats or curls, but Fancy has both. She can show "an audacity unparalleled in the whole history of village schoolmistresses at this date," since her father has enough cash to make her feel independent. She has provoked Dick already by looking "distractingly beautiful" on the day he will be away and by talking about "managing" Maybold if he questions her unconventional clothes. She is aware of Maybold's
admiration this Sunday while she sits near him at the organ, without realizing the intensity of his attraction (pp. 193-95).

Thus Fancy's coquettish ways and her inconstancy in accepting Maybold's proposal that evening harm two innocent men in a more serious way than does her rejection of the cool and pompous Shiner, who merely looks silly in the role of suitor. Maybold's attitude is somewhat condescending, too, but he is portrayed as a sympathetic and religious man, who has agonized over his attraction to Fancy until concluding that his love "is as genuine as that I could bear any woman!" (p. 199). The descriptions at the end of Book 4 of his joy when Fancy accepts him and his disillusionment when he hears she is committed to another honest man create the most solemn scenes in the novel, lacking the humor that relieves the seriousness of the choir's crisis. Maybold's suffering is emphasized by the comedy in Dick's unconscious prattle and in the playfulness of the errand boys carrying the notes as they cross paths.

Since Dick never learns of this incident and Maybold is absent on the wedding day months later, there are no serious detractions from the happiness of the celebration. Dick simply wonders innocently how he might have offended Maybold to make him so indifferent to his wedding. Nevertheless, Fancy's brief surrender to temptation, in which Maybold is an innocent agent, is a crisis more threatening to village
morality than the more deliberate and visible action of disbanding the choir. The disagreement over the choir ends with amicable and frank discussion, while Fancy's dilemma is resolved through secrecy. We see in Book 5 that Maybold's discretion and forgiveness have enabled the engagement to go forward without discord, but Fancy has not acted on his advice, in the last line of Book 4, to confess and let Dick forgive her. Although Dick has forgiven her for smaller transgressions, his tolerance is never put to this severer test. The openness, honesty, and trust displayed in village relations since the first chapter are undermined when the last line of the novel reminds us of Fancy's "secret she would never tell." There is irony in Mrs. Dewey's remark that the "couple is so exactly in tune" and Dick's observation that "we are so happy . . . because there is such full confidence between us" (pp. 224-25). Although Fancy promises there will be no future secrets, Dick assumes her worst mistake in the past was exaggerating a flirtation with Shiner that actually never existed.

The Wedding "under the Greenwood Tree"

Because of the reminders of Fancy's secret, a number of critics have noted the ambiguity, or sense of "uneasy compromise" that is carried through the wedding scenes to the end of the novel.14 There are many details and comments at the
wedding showing the confrontation of old and new, and introducing some of the less cheerful realities of rural life into the idyllic celebration, as the practical and homely discussion of the older generation is blended once again with the romance and excitement of the young couples. This time the choir members and their families are joined by new representatives of the younger generation, including another engaged couple, in the bridesmaids and best man. The old people are allotted, "somewhat grudgingly," a space under the greenwood tree, while the young ones dance energetically, yet the "stories of great impressiveness" told by the "gaffers and gammers" seem so interesting the dancers are occasionally distracted from their "whirling throng" (p. 222).

The down-to-earth and ironic commentary from the older folks increases in seriousness as the day progresses. Benevolent Grandfather William has very few speeches, for a change, while "grim" Grandfather James interjects the most pessimistic remarks. But the comedy in the rustic dialogue, as usual, helps maintain the light and merry atmosphere of the scene. When the morning conversation turns from flattering accounts of the calling of the banns to ominous anecdotes about bridegrooms who didn't come, Fancy becomes rather perturbed that the chinks in the unceiled floor allow the "mischievous" and crude comments of the men below her room to be shouted up to her. Mrs. Dewey and Mrs. Penny, assisting her as substitute mothers, help calm her nerves.
by sharing their own experience of getting through the wedding "as brave as a sodger." They make Fancy recite their motto, "'Tis to be and here goes," although the excited bride is rather skeptical about the virtue in this conventional philosophy (pp. 211-13). This realistic, but hopeful, attitude about getting through the trials of married life surfaces again later when Mrs. Penny says, "Well, 'tis humps and hollers with the best of us; but still and for all that, Dick and Fancy stand as fair a chance of having a bit of sunsheen as any married pair in the land" (pp. 223-24).

There are many reminders of the practical realities of everyday life interspersed throughout these scenes. Geoffrey is first seen doing his chores early, with his apron over his best clothes, just as the Poysers are shown taking care of their farm on feast days as well as work days. Reuben's nostalgia about the white trousers he had saved since his wedding is deflated by his wife's news that they have been cut up for one of the boys. When James persists in being contradictory by inserting a remark about couples being "too poor to have time to sing" into the discussion of the newlyweds' future happiness and prosperity, the conversation turns to memories of pinching pennies to support growing families. This topic inspires Leaf's silly story about a man multiplying his wealth. Reuben's jovial and indulgent comment that the story is "better than the history of England" is intended to humor Leaf when he dares to join the conversation.
Nevertheless, this speech on the last page of the novel reminds us that the desire for improving one's wealth and social position is a significant factor in the history of a village like Wellstock, as well as in the nation's history, affecting the marriage choices and the fate of simple country trancers like Dick Dewey (pp. 224–25). In The Woodlanders social divisions and economic misfortune bring disaster to another virtuous, diligent villager who loves a woman above him on the social scale.

The only visible sign of disharmony in the community on this festive day is the figure of Enoch, seen at a distance right after the ceremony. Dick, trying to reunite him with his neighbors by overlooking, in honor of the occasion, his recent disgrace in the Weatherbury stocks, is offended when Enoch refuses his invitation to the party, because he no longer works for the Days. Peter Casagrande emphasizes Enoch's banishment as one of the signs that Wellstock life is not as placid as it seems.⁵ Although Geoffrey smooths things over by defending Enoch's manners when he is feeling more like himself, Enoch, like Grandfather James, is one of the disquieting voices of cynicism in the background of the novel. Enoch's earlier remark that "without money man is a shadder" is an explicit statement of the ironic undercurrent running throughout the wedding celebration (p. 174).

This grim comment refers to the necessity of making money from bees, and when Dick's new bees almost make him
late for his wedding, Geoffrey calls him "a genuine wise man" for not wanting to risk losing the bees (p. 213). The signs of Dick's prosperity and joy outweigh all the other reminders of economic necessity and hardship in these scenes. The bees are not only a realistic indication of Dick's future productiveness, but Mrs. Penny also points out that the swarming of bees on a wedding day is a good omen. The best man's awestruck account of the abundance of household goods and provisions already collected in Dick's new house shows that Dick is well on his way to leading a prosperous and comfortable life. At the end the happy couple depart "side by side in the excellent new spring-cart," "amid a medley of laughter, old shoes, and elderwine" (p. 225).

While Dick will never be as crude and unromantic as his Grandfather James, who insists that marrying can be put off more easily than tending a swarm of bees, Dick's behavior at the wedding, beginning with this concern about the bees, shows that he is already turning into a practical and responsible family man, like the other men of the village, with the exemplary integrity and kindness of his father and Grandfather William. His down-to-earth attitude is contrasted with Fancy's more imaginative preoccupation with her wondrous and enviable position as the bride. As a married man of business Dick stresses the importance of time while she delays in changing her bonnet. As his father predicted, the freakish behavior of the insecure
young lover is a temporary condition in solid citizens like the Deweys. Michael Squires points out that Fancy's improvements in education and accomplishments are balanced by her moral inferiority to Dick and the other villagers. The narrator tells us her eyes are "too refined and beautiful for a tranter's wife; but, perhaps, not too good" (p. 216).

Thus the traditional values of the rural community are preserved and celebrated at the end of the novel. Fancy has introduced a stricter observance of propriety at the wedding, getting Reuben to wear an awkward pair of gloves for the first time in his life and forbidding the fathers from using their ancient local speech and gestures, which are "so very humiliating to persons of newer taste" (p. 221). However, these relatively trivial new refinements are overshadowed by the solid values and traditions seen in Dick and the company of background characters. Fancy's return to the rural district has caused the old choir to be replaced by a newer fashion in church music, but her refined ways do not dominate the wedding. In the debate about whether the wedding party will take the customary march around the parishes to show themselves to their neighbors, and then whether male and female should pair off in the procession to the church, everyone, from the old men to the young engaged couple, confirms the permanence of these customs in past and future weddings. Although Fancy says, "respectable people don't nowadays;"
on both questions she chooses tradition over propriety,
deciding she prefers the way her mother did it (p. 217).

Like Eppie in *Silas Marner*, and unlike Grace Melbury in *The Woodlanders*, Fancy Day chooses marriage with an honest working man in the rural society in which she was raised, foregoing the opportunity to live a more luxurious life in a richer man's house. Although she is not as innocent as Eppie, having been raised by a materialistic father and educated elsewhere in a higher society, her story is not marked by the irrevocable tragic losses shown in the histories of Silas and Eppie's real parents, or the ironic disillusionment that comes to the Melburys. Harold Toliver points out that in Hardy's novel of village life, structured according to the seasons, the second winter is skipped over, a sign that tragedy has been avoided. The springtime weddings in both Eliot's last village novel and Hardy's first one celebrate the endurance of the happy and harmonious elements in traditional village life. In *Silas Marner* the worst violations of communal responsibility are confined to the squire's corrupt family, and the integration of a mysterious outsider is achieved through the miraculous appearance and beneficent influence of a child, while *Under the Greenwood Tree* portrays the gradual changes and adjustments brought about by the confrontations of the old and the young, the newcomers and those who have never left the village, the ordinary tradesmen and those slightly above them in wealth and social status.
In Hardy's novel, even more than in Eliot's, the eccentricities and limitations of the villagers are overshadowed by humor and sympathy in their relations with each other, as well as in the author's treatment of them. Hardy has selected characters and events which demonstrate that differences and disappointments can be overcome by tolerance, patience, and honest affection. This is the last time he portrays an ideal village in which this happy but fragile balance is maintained. In the members of the old choir and their wives the villagers' narrow experience, provincial attitudes, and resignation to what fate brings are shown as both strengths and limitations. They ensure the stability of the community but they also make the villagers vulnerable to undesirable influences and changes. Although the choir is lost, the men go on peacefully with their work and family lives. In later novels this stable rural community retreats further into the background, with more of its weaknesses and hardships exposed, as it is seen in relation to strong characters and complex problems that its traditional values cannot accommodate.
NOTES--CHAPTER V

1 See Merryn Williams' background on the agricultural society in Hardy's novels. Williams points out that the counties of Hardy's Wessex were slower than the rest of England in introducing modern conveniences and discarding old customs and superstitions, in *Thomas Hardy and Rural England* (London: Macmillan Press, 1972), pp. 4, 7-8.

2 Merryn Williams (p. 128) argues that the novel portrays the "complex adjustment of social relationships," not a conflict of old and new orders. Raymond Williams also stresses that Hardy's novels deal with pressures from outside and inside the rural world, in *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 200.


6 Author's Preface, *Under the Greenwood Tree*, p. 35.

See, for example, "The Dorsetshire Labourer," Longman's Magazine, 2 (July 1883), 252-69, rpt. in Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings, ed. Harold Orel (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1966), pp. 168-89; and Clym Yeobright's inner debates on the difficulties of raising the intellectual level of bucolic life without changing its social and material conditions, in The Return of the Native.

Casagrande discusses this novel as a "comedy of forgiveness," calling it "Hardy's most complete exhibition of the human powers of redemption that reside in the community and the family," p. 81.


Michael Millgate discusses the contrast between the grandfathers, the emphasis on the succession of generations, and the moral implications of the characters' different responses to music, in Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist (New York: Random House, 1971), pp. 47-48.


David Wright observes that Dick and Fancy "are less interesting than the Mellstock rustics," Introduction, p. 14.

Toliver, p. 67. See also Millgate's discussion of the unease and restraint at the end of the novel, p. 54.

Casagrande, pp. 84-85.


Toliver, p. 67.
CHAPTER VI. THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE

More than any of Hardy's previous novels, The Mayor of Casterbridge is dominated by the figure of a single hero. Because it focuses on the tragedy of one very powerful character and because it is set in a large market town rather than in a village or on the Wessex farms or heathland of the earlier novels, there are inevitable differences in this novel's portrayal of the provincial community. Nevertheless, both the society of the town and the agricultural economy on which it depends are of major importance in Michael Henchard's story, as the provincial town society and middle-class materialism of St. Ogg's are for the Tullivers in The Mill on the Floss. This is the only one of Hardy's novels with the community named in the title. In the descriptions of Casterbridge there is emphasis on the close relationship of the surrounding farms and the town. Hardy changed the topography of Dorchester slightly to depict Casterbridge as a "compact" square set in the countryside, with field work going on only a stone's throw from the busy town streets. He also mentions farmers of the area whose names are familiar from previous novels, such as Shiner, Everdene, and Boldwood.

Despite these references to the familiar and traditional agricultural world of Wessex, this novel's vision of that
world is darker and more pessimistic than that of the earlier novels. While Under the Greenwood Tree ends by affirming that cohesive traditions and values are kept alive in a spirit of community harmony, The Mayor of Casterbridge stresses that the provincial ways preserved in this "rare old market-town" are on the decline. Elizabeth-Jane, the outsider through whose eyes we first see the town, exclaims that is seems "an old-fashioned place." It is an "antiquated borough . . . untouched by the faintest sprinkle of modernism," where "the curfew was still rung" and home-brewing was not yet "abandoned by the smaller victuallers"; the local practices of watching the weather anxiously and helping the neighboring farmers in the fields at harvest time are "primitive" habits.¹ Since the main action of this novel takes place in the same decade as Under the Greenwood Tree (the 1840's), and several decades earlier than Far from the Madding Crowd, this shift in emphasis can not be attributed to a systematic historic progression in Hardy's portrait of the decline of agricultural Wessex in successive novels. It does reflect Hardy's growing awareness that the old life was passing away, and his increasing disillusionment with the traditional community and conventional values.² Thus in the descriptions of Casterbridge and the selection of background characters, this novel reveals more of the inherent weaknesses and hardships of rural life, a development begun in Far from the Madding Crowd and The Return of the Native.
Therefore, a comparison of *Under the Greenwood Tree* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* reveals a reversal of emphasis in the portrait of the community and the protagonists' relationships within it. In the first novel, Dick Dewey is a young village native with a strong family and lifelong companions to give him support. His fortunes are on the rise and his marriage helps reunite Fancy Day with the rural society of her birth. In the later novel Hardy has chosen to skip Henchard's rise to power and prosperity in Casterbridge, focusing on his social and psychological decline, and his growing alienation from community and family. The men of the Mellstock choir eventually accept the change in church music, and thus preserve the peaceful relations in their village, because of their attitudes of humility and resignation, but Henchard's impulsive and inflexible temperament does not allow him to survive the social and economic changes occurring in Casterbridge.

Henchard and the other main characters and supporting characters are all outsiders looking for happiness and security in Casterbridge. Except for the family problems that contribute to Henchard's downfall, we do not see the family lives of any of the characters in the novel. In *Under the Greenwood Tree*, the community as a harmonious network of families and neighbors dominates the novel, while the natives of Casterbridge occupy a much smaller place in the background of their novel. Among those who function as a local chorus
during the crises of Henchard's and Farfrae's lives are some of the most unsavory and pathetic characters in any of the rural novels of Eliot or Hardy. There are no strong, upright voices of the community like Dick Dewey's father and grandfather, or like Mr. Macey and Mrs. Winthrop in *Silas Marner*. In *Under the Greenwood Tree* the loss of the choir is overshadowed by the love and stability in family and community relations; the same forces of disorder that bring tragedy in the later novels are kept at bay and every expression of dissatisfaction or cynicism is balanced by a display of common sense and tolerance in the village natives. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge* the few demonstrations of sympathy, genial comradeship, and fond reminiscing among the background characters appear as faint echoes of the solid and enduring values of rural life as they are affirmed in the earlier novels of Eliot and Hardy.

*The Henchards before Casterbridge*

The mayor of Casterbridge is a poor, homeless hay-trusser at the beginning of the novel. His inner strengths and weaknesses are so complex and powerful they create a wide psychological and emotional distance between him and the other characters, and he should not be viewed primarily as a symbol of the defeat of rural life by new forces from the outside. Nevertheless, his story does reveal the difficulties and limitations in the lives and habits of both the
country-bred laborer and the old-fashioned provincial tradesman. One effect of Hardy's focus on humble, ignorant, and disreputable rustic characters in his choice of background figures is to show Henchard's kinship with them, even when he is elevated to a position of power above them.

Some significant comments are made by unidentified voices or by individuals who make very brief appearances in the novel. This anonymity makes them representative voices of rural life, but it does not reflect their unity and harmony, as the group discussions of the Mellstock choir often do. Instead, as Hardy gives less attention to the development of strong and familiar characters rooted in one community, he relies more on isolated and alienated individuals to express the bitterness and cynicism produced by the hardships of rural life, a development culminating in the assortment of grim and antagonistic background characters in _Jude the Obscure_.

This use of anonymous voices is especially important in the first chapter at Weydon-Priors Fair, where we see the origins of Henchard's problems before he finds prosperity in Casterbridge. This opening scene shows that there is no community for many rural laborers. The novel's first conversation brings together the unemployed Henchard and a turnip-hoer, a "pessimist" who declares that there is neither employment nor shelter in the vicinity—only the "pulling down" of houses (p. 37). Henchard himself has an indifferent and
cynical attitude in this first appearance. The plight of irregularly employed farm workers and cottagers who lose their homes had been introduced in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, and plays a more important role in *The Woodlanders* and the tragedy of Tess. It reappears in this novel when Farfrae benevolently hires an old shepherd and his son, so that they and the boy's sweetheart will not be separated.

Gabriel Oak, in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, finds himself looking for any work he can get at a hiring fair, but when he arrives in Weatherbury he is welcomed by men who remember his family affectionately and speak to him about his boyhood home. With Michael and Susan Henchard there is no trace of former family ties or roots in a particular location. In this novel Henchard's lack of employment in the first chapter leads him to cut himself off from his family, rather than finding it a source of support and comfort. When he settles in Casterbridge the past, particularly the irresponsible and antisocial act of selling his wife, is a shameful secret rather than a social asset. The practice of secrecy and deception with regard to one's past, which is the most serious threat to the pastoral comedy of *Under the Greenwood Tree*, brings catastrophe to both Henchard and Lucetta in Casterbridge, as it does to most of the ill-fated egoists in the novels of Eliot and Hardy, from Hetty Sorrel and Arthur Donnithorne in *Adam Bede* to Eustacia Vye and Damon Wildeve in *The Return of the Native*. Oppenness and trust are
necessary for the survival of a stable, unified community.

The selection of details and comments of people at the fair contribute to the atmosphere of rural decay and disillusionment at the beginning of the novel. The turnip-hoer shuns the fair as a place where the weak are robbed of their money; the Henchards enter it in its declining hours, when the real business is over and the lower classes of clientele gather to indulge in drinking and pleasure-seeking. This rather sordid scene is the grimmest introductory view of rural life in any of Hardy's novels. Even Tess is introduced at a picturesque village May dance. The "antiquated slop" served by the "haggish" furmity woman, which she surreptitiously laces with rum, and the discussion of inexpedient marriages and ruined hopes form a dramatic contrast to the congenial opening scenes of Under the Greenwood Tree, where lifelong friends and a loving family share wholesome cider, cheerful conversation, and beloved old music (pp. 38-40).

The degenerating company of furmity drinkers laughs at Henchard's desire to sell his wife, and one unattractive man offers to act as auctioneer, but their "jovial frivolity" ends abruptly when they see a real cash transaction rather than a self-indulgent ironic farce (p. 43). Even this decadent crowd is shocked at this wicked deed carried out shamelessly, before their eyes, by the ill-tempered stranger. In Casterbridge a similar group of degenerate characters is used to expose the hypocrisy of Henchard and Lucetta.
Susan Henchard

Susan Henchard is the one supporting character in this novel who represents the perspective of the simple, uneducated country dweller, and she evokes more sympathy from the background figures than any of the others in Henchard's circle. She is not an articulate voice of rural folk wisdom, piety, or common sense, like Mrs. Poyser and Dolly Winthrop in Eliot's village novels, or even like Mrs. Dewey and Mrs. Penny in Under the Greenwood Tree, although she has some of the shrewdness and concern for family respectability seen in these other provincial housewives. Her role and some of her activities are similar to those of Thomasin Yeobright in The Return of the Native. Both allow themselves to be ruled by conventional standards of propriety, and both achieve a period of respectability and prosperity in their marriages but no real happiness. They are passive recipients of what fate brings, although they both show some independence and strength of will in severe crises. In the opening scene Susan's "hard, half-apathetic expression," showing that she expects anything from life, "except, perhaps, fair play," and "the atmosphere of stale familiarity" between husband and wife contribute to the depressing view of country life (p. 36). Douglas Brown identifies her attitude as the "patient impotence" of many of the rural victims in Hardy's novels. While Hardy (reluctantly) allows young Thomasin to begin a new, happier life on the heath with Diggory Venn at the end of their
novel, Susan Henchard merely dies, weary of life, after she is settled in Casterbridge.

The sale of Susan by Henchard creates a moral dilemma more complex than the confusion preceding Thomasin's marriage to Wildeve. At the three major events in Susan's life—the wife sale, her remarriage to Henchard, and her death—there is a rustic chorus present whose comments reflect the ambiguities of her situation. At the fair a staylace dealer warns Susan to ignore Henchard's threats to sell her, and scolds him for his immorality and cruelty. After Susan has gone with Newson, however, the same woman and her companions praise the "comely respectable body" for her "woman's sperrit," saying Henchard deserved never to get her back, and she will probably be better off with the sailor (p. 45). Susan's defiant outburst before she leaves pinpoints Henchard's worst flaw—his fierce and irrational temper, for which he punishes himself more severely in the end than anyone else does. The observations of the bystanders hold true for the next twenty years, for Susan is treated better by Newson, and Henchard is unable to find her when he repents of his rash deed.

Although Hardy does not deal explicitly with the inadequacies of the marriage and divorce laws until *The Woodlanders* and *Jude the Obscure*, Susan's "strange experience"reveals that a slavish adherence to what one considers proper and respectable can bring unhappiness, especially when combined with
the ignorance of an uneducated country woman. Henchard blames her simple intellect for the disgrace caused by her belief in the validity of her transfer to Newson, and yet both men and the narrator insist that the innocent faith of the illiterate woman made her completely guiltless. Ironically, her socially irregular act of living as a dutiful wife with Newson results in twenty years in a poor but happy family, while her intellectual awakening when a neighbor scorns her acceptance of the wife sale brings "torture to her meek conscience" (p. 57). Her reformed sense of what is legal and honorable causes so much sadness that Newson allows her to think he is dead, and she subsequently returns to her lawful, but less affectionate, husband.

Although this story is hidden from the daughter, Elizabeth-Jane inherits a "vicious . . . craving for correctness of procedure" and a terror of any "semblance of irregularity" (pp. 239-40). Her childhood in poor fishing villages has also given her some of her mother's meekness and sense of resignation to life's uncertainties, but she develops into a complex main character in her new life in Casterbridge. Susan does not lack shrewdness or sharpness as completely as Newson thinks; she takes a number of bold, resourceful, and sometimes deceptive steps in order to achieve security for her daughter. For herself, however, she is humble, unambitious, and uneasy with the deception behind remarrying Henchard and telling him Elizabeth-Jane is his child. On
arriving in Casterbridge she astonishes Elizabeth-Jane by saying she would rather die than approach Henchard in his high position. Susan has a comfortable life once they are settled in his luxurious house, but she simply fades away, appearing as a pale and fragile ghost, while Elizabeth-Jane energetically uses her new freedom and prosperity to improve her intellect and manners, in order to fit into this higher level of society.

The choral discussion outside the wedding emphasizes the ironies in the secrets behind the remarriage and in Henchard's attitude that he is punishing himself by appearing to marry beneath him, "lowering ... his dignity in public opinion" (p. 112). The town gossips watch the courtship and marriage with amazement. The lowly idlers outside the church describe the newlyweds with the bluntness and comic imaginativeness of the unsophisticated laborer, and with an unconscious degree of accuracy and prophecy in their comments. They see Susan as "a mere skellinton" and a "poor twanking [peevish] woman," whose birth was no more respectable than theirs, while Nance detects "a bluebeardy look about" Henchard that will "out in time." The experienced Mother Cuxsom is skeptical about the advantages of catching any husband. The disagreement over which of the couple is better off in this match and Solomon's comment that "we hardly know how to look at things in these times" reflect on a situation more confusing and unconventional than they realize. Although
Henchard's secret is not out yet, rumors are spreading that he began as a "poor parish 'prentice" (pp. 113-15). These comparisons with the experiences of the humble onlookers and the presentation of the marriage from their perspective suggest that Henchard cannot escape his past; his efforts at covering up former sins and aspiring to live in a high and prominent social position create a fragile and dangerous situation within an enclosed and tightly structured community like Casterbridge.

Susan, at least, escapes the return of poverty and disgrace that is in store for Henchard. It is appropriate that the same group of townspeople who watch her wedding gather at the town pump to describe her death. Mrs. Cuxsom's narration of the last wishes of the "thoughtful woman" and her simple preparations for her own laying out remind us that Susan retained the humble, traditional views of the ordinary housewife and loving mother. The argument over whether it was a practical or "a cannibal deed" for Coney to dig up and spend on drink the coins used as weights for her eyes is reminiscent of Joseph Poorgrass' disobedience in Far from the Madding Crowd, when he stops to drink while transporting Fanny's body. It is another instance of a conflict between the common sense and comfort of the poor laborer and the rigid conventions of "respectability." Coney's defense reveals the desperate measures one might resort to when threatened by poverty and thirst; moreover, his irreverent
act is more harmless than the suffering brought to Susan in her lifetime by Henchard's drinking, or than the difficulties caused by Susan's own surreptitious action of hiding Elizabeth-Jane's real parentage until after the mother's death. Despite the irony caused by our knowledge of the Henchard secrets, Mrs. Cuxsom's final sympathetic remarks provide a dignified and elegaic reflection on the passing of Susan the dutiful housewife, and the end of all "her wishes and ways" (pp. 148-49). This scene contrasts with the sudden death of Lucetta, who violates conventional morality knowingly to seek her own happiness, and who evokes no sympathy from the humble town natives.

**Henchard and Farfrae in Casterbridge**

Although Susan is fearful and confused at finding Henchard elevated to such a high position when she arrives in Casterbridge, and she worries about appearing "respectable" enough to avoid disgracing him, she and Elizabeth-Jane learn about him first from ordinary workers whose reports of him are not entirely favorable. Henchard does not have the support of a unified community when we first see him in Casterbridge; instead, his reputation is already declining. In Susan's first dialogue with Casterbridge natives she hears complaints about the corn-factor's bad wheat. A woman later identified as Nance Mockridge, the background character
who voices the harshest criticism and resentment toward those above her socially, scorns the band playing in Henchard's honor, expressing the bitterness of the poor who suffer from the most "unprincipled bread" ever baked in Casterbridge (p. 62).

Outside the mayor's dinner at the King's Arms, where the "plainer fellows" are allowed to watch the "gentle-people" feasting, old Solomon Longways and Christopher Coney explain Henchard's Casterbridge life to Elizabeth-Jane. Their commentary ranges over the middle ground which they maintain throughout the novel--partly sympathetic and deferential toward those who have improved themselves and risen to prominence, and partly irreverent and cynical. Robert Kiely points out that "the rag-tag chorus of townspeople who stand at the edge of events" comes closest to the truth in their discussions because they disagree with each other and express contradictions about "what they see without trying to force it into a rational or moral pattern."

The old workmen describe their employer's rise from "nothing" to "a pillar of the town" and his "celebrated" oath of abstinence from "all tempting liquors," but they also mention his harshness to any worker caught drinking, and they end by explaining his "mistake" of distributing the bad grain (pp. 63-67).

The discord created between the mayor and the townspeople by his temper and bad judgment is dramatized for the first time when his triumphant speech is interrupted by
"inharmonious" voices from the minor tradesmen at the bottom of the table and from the peevish "loungers" outside, asking for reparation for the bad grain (p. 67). Henchard's stern insistence that he could not help what was done in the past reflects an alienation from those who depend on him that increases as the novel develops.

At the Three Mariners, the inn frequented by the middle classes in Casterbridge, the bustling hospitality, the enjoyment of the popular home brew, and "the lively bursts of conversation and melody" create a more genial atmosphere than the tense portrayal of divided classes at the King's Arms (p. 81). While Henchard's character and fortunes deteriorate until he sinks lower than the poor people who criticize his wheat, the newcomers, Donald Farfrae and Elizabeth-Jane, are seen here to be superior in intellect and sensibilities to the ordinary Casterbridge natives. Farfrae makes himself at home immediately in this community, and is praised for his talent in expressing emotions through song, just as Gabriel Oak is welcomed by the company at Warren's Malthouse and is admired for his superior abilities.

The provincial ignorance of the natives is shown in their humorous misconceptions about Scotland. Elizabeth-Jane scorns their "wretched humours," realizing that Farfrae is more refined than these rustics. Their denigration of their home and each other is more pessimistic than Clym Yeobright's similar conversation with the heath folk in The Return of
the Native (chap. III, 1). Although their claims that Casterbridge is "a old, hoary place o' wickedness" full of dishonest poor people are conscious exaggerations, they create a grim picture of provincial life, anticipating the corruption that surfaces in Henchard's story and brings disaster to Farfrae and Lucetta (pp. 81-85). While Farfrae's song about home makes him an idealized, romantic figure in their eyes, in Casterbridge there is no sense of the strong attachment to home for its own sake that persists through the end of The Mill on the Floss despite Maggie's alienation from the community.

In the next scene at the Three Mariners, after Henchard's condition has declined drastically, the contrast in the point of view of the main character and the community is reversed again, in order to emphasize Henchard's moral decay on the occasion of his first drink in twenty-one years. In place of the familiar and somewhat degenerate chorus of Coney and his comrades, Hardy now chooses a more virtuous and "sedate" segment of the Casterbridge population to witness Henchard's degradation. While the intemperate Christopher Coney earlier sympathizes with the comfort Henchard will find when the "bondage" of his oath is ended and he can drink "without stint," the more moderate church goers who are present on this day are shocked at Henchard's drunken behavior (p. 66).
The narrator describes in detail the "convivial custom" of the forty men who gather each Sunday, limit themselves strictly to a half-pint of liquor, and discuss the sermon (p. 255). The presence of the friendly and conscientious members of the traditional church choir makes this scene reminiscent of the congenial community gatherings in Under the Greenwood Tree. They welcome Henchard to their circle, now that he is no longer their social superior, and agree to retune their instruments to help revive his spirits with some music. But Henchard returns their neighborly manners with rough demands and then violence, forcing the frightened choir to sing a psalm full of curses. Although his desire for music to calm his "volcanic" nature is pathetic (p. 258), the choir is shocked even more when Henchard admits that the curses were meant for Farfrae, who has passed by in the street. The horrified performers declare that, if they had known Henchard's intent, no threats of violence could have induced them to comply with his abominable purpose. As Henchard is painfully aware, Farfrae's talent with sentimental songs boosted his popularity in Casterbridge, while Henchard's perversion of the choir's sacred music shows his growing alienation from Farfrae as well as the whole community.

This recklessness about exposing his degradation publicly follows a series of incidents in which Henchard's declining reputation is revealed to himself and others through the comments of a variety of anonymous townspeople. After Farfrae
angers Henchard by disagreeing with him in front of the workmen, an innocent little boy repeats to Henchard the opinions of people who prefer to deal with Farfrae because of his cleverness and even temper. The rivalry between the two men is dramatized on the public holiday when no one attends Henchard's old-fashioned outdoor entertainment. At Farfrae's more innovative and lively street dance Henchard sees admiration for Farfrae in the women's faces and overhears two men compare his own outmoded methods of doing business with Farfrae's productive ingenuity. Later, after Henchard's jealousy has led him to fire Farfrae and the two are competitors in trade, one of Henchard's own waggoners, in a dispute with one of Farfrae's waggoners, expresses a resentful prejudice like his master's, telling Henchard the female onlookers side with Farfrae because he is a "damn young dand" who has stolen the favor of all the women (p. 217).

While he is still master of his own business Henchard is overly sensitive about his superior position and reputation. Like Geoffrey Day in *Under the Greenwood Tree* and George Melbury in *The Woodlanders*, he is careful to keep his distance from ordinary workers in order to conceal his similar origins and tendencies. He is old-fashioned and superstitious enough to consult a rural weather prophet about the harvest, but too proud to enter the man's cottage or partake of his tempting stew. He also scolds Elizabeth-Jane for being too friendly with his employees. When the scornful Nance
overhears Henchard insult her during one of these reprimands, she gets revenge by telling him Elizabeth-Jane waited on guests at the Three Mariners on her first night in town, in order to help pay for her room. Henchard's own sensitivity to such indignities is more damaging than any real gossip. By this time the "cheerful souls" at the inn have forgotten this interesting incident from Elizabeth-Jane's humble past, while Henchard considers the news "a social catastrophe," and ultimately drives his step-daughter away by treating her with increasing roughness and indifference (p. 162). Like Tom Tulliver, Henchard lets rigid ideas about family respectability come between him and the loving woman (his sister, Maggie, in Tom's case) who wants to share his home.

The detached townsfolk who have expressed sympathy for Susan Henchard do not question the established social hierarchy, but they are more fair and charitable in their appraisal of Elizabeth-Jane than is the rash, class-conscious Henchard. Just before Lucetta's death, on her proud day of social elevation at the Royal Visit, Buzzford reveals the perceptiveness and common sense of ordinary natives by scorning the way people "worship fine clothes" and asserting that Elizabeth is more beautiful and worthy, despite her social inferiority (p. 290). Thus the chorus at the Three Mariners later approves of Elizabeth's marriage to Farfrae, although there is some debate about the social appropriateness of the match. Coney points out Elizabeth's sensibleness
and popularity, calling the revival of the couple's former romance "a neat patching up of things" (p. 329). This marriage of the new mayor of Casterbridge at the end of the novel represents the continuation of stability and prosperity in the town, although Henchard's alienation overshadows Elizabeth's wedding and happy reunion with her real father. Moreover, the significance of Elizabeth's and Farfrae's success in Casterbridge is qualified by the narrator's comments at the end of the last Three Mariners scene, stressing that Farfrae's domestic happiness creates only a momentary distraction from the townspeople's absorption in their own daily lives. Ironically, community interest and action are more energetic when there is a scandal to expose or misfortune to discuss, and Farfrae is somewhat less popular as a productive mayor and tradesman than he was as a humble, singing wayfarer when he arrived. In general, then, the community is less cohesive and more indifferent to the fates of the protagonists than it is in any of the earlier novels by Eliot or Hardy.

The few glimpses of Henchard's and Farfrae's colleagues on the Town Council also suggest weakness and indifference in the traditional community, since they have less life than the humble laborers among the "secondary set of worthies" who act as chorus. While we see very little of the daily occupations or personal lives of Longways, Coney, and their comrades, we see even less of the merchants and town
officials with whom Henchard and Farfrae work. Despite many similarities between the situations of Henchard and Edward Tulliver of *The Mill on the Floss*, as they experience bankruptcy, social decline, and death, this novel does not contain lively, detailed portraits of the middle-class men and women like those who surround Tulliver. John Holloway points out that, although Henchard and his old-fashioned ways are defeated, he has more vitality than the representatives of the successful new order, and among the background characters the same is true of the distinction between the native men in power and the rather degenerate but interesting lower class citizens. The narrator remarks on the occasion of Susan's wedding that Farfrae, as a serious and thoughtful man of business, lacks "the special genius" of the rustic onlookers who appreciate the drama of the event (p. 113). The actions and attitudes of other gentlemen of the town are described occasionally, but the chorus of work folk comes alive through their humorous, quaint, and frank dialogue. They provide glimpses of genuine comradeship, human concern, and fond reminiscences of their families and happy youths, while the town officials are shown primarily in connection with legal proceedings and business transactions.

Henchard's peers are silent figures at the mayor's banquet at the King's Arms, with their feasting described in bestial images, in contrast with the younger, animated tradesmen and humble onlookers who are bold enough to
challenge Henchard. The Councilmen, primarily "fine old crusted characters who had a decided taste for living without worry," had elected Henchard for "his amazing energy"; they promote Farfrae to mayor prematurely because they "have had older men long enough" (pp. 132-33, 141, 267). These men have also suffered from Henchard's unruly temper and feel little loyalty for him when Farfrae challenges him in trade. In one of their few dialogues in the novel an alderman and a lawyer tease Henchard publicly about Farfrae's beating him in trade and in the rival holiday entertainments, while Farfrae himself later urges them to invest in a seed shop for Henchard because of his past virtues, despite the abuse Farfrae has suffered from him in the meantime. When he is bankrupt there is sympathy for him throughout the town; he is moved when the Commissioners and creditors admire his honesty in settling his debts fairly and refuse to take his watch, yet the creditors at this meeting are mainly farmers rather than town tradesmen, including Everdene and Boldwood from the rural world of Far from the Madding Crowd. During another crisis toward the end of the novel, the town officials Grower and Blowbody bluster about trying to rouse the cowardly constables and cut short the skimmity-ride, but they are duped by the pranksters, helpless to prevent the shrewd and energetic rogues from spreading their back-street atrocity through the town.
Henchard, Lucetta, and the Slum Dwellers

The most degenerate background characters emerge in the later stages of Henchard's decline and contribute to his and Lucetta's destruction. The old furmity woman from Weydon-Priors Fair brings about the crisis which makes Henchard lose in the struggle to hide his shameful past, to maintain a position of authority in Casterbridge, and to persuade Lucetta to marry him. The process of physical, economic, and moral decay shown in the woman's scattered appearances in the novel makes her an appropriate participant in Henchard's downfall. The decline of the country fair has driven the furmity seller into the town, where she is arrested for cursing and disgraceful conduct outside the church. At her trial, where Henchard sits as a magistrate, her knowledge of legal proceedings, gathered through her long acquaintance with crime, undermines the efforts of those in authority.11 She not only makes the constable and clerk appear foolish, but she blurts out the story of Henchard's sale of his wife in her tent twenty years earlier. Her public declaration that he is no better than she brings Henchard's hidden kinship with the town derelicts into the open.

Ironically, he behaves most honorably at the moment when his social position and honor in Casterbridge are about to decline rapidly. Agreeing immediately and openly that he should not sit in judgment on the old woman, he leaves the
court, but the damage has been done by the years of secrecy. This time the gossip is more harmful than he deserves, since the fresh news of his youthful "mad freak" overshadows his admirable accomplishments in Casterbridge in the intervening years (p. 242).

The furmity woman and other low characters in the second half of the novel contribute to the portrayal of Henchard's tragic alienation from self and community by revealing the complexity and limitations of his moral decay. While he is not as pathetic or dishonest a character as some of them, he punishes himself, and occasionally attempts to get revenge on Farfrae, by associating himself with local dreg-licks. After his bankruptcy, he appears on the far bridge frequented by the hopeless town failures, placing himself lower than Coney, Mother Cuxsom, Abel Whittle, and others who visit the nearer bridge without shame in times of bad luck. He vents his jealousy of Farfrae and Lucetta by disgracing himself in the street during the Royal Visit. He also associates with Joshua Jopp throughout the period of his financial decline. Jopp is the most unscrupulous character in the novel, the only citizen whose opinion does not even matter to Henchard in his disgrace. After being sent away because Henchard impulsively hires Farfrae in his place, Jopp reappears in the second half of the novel to play on Henchard's worst tendencies. He tries to help Henchard beat Farfrae in the market and later enjoys getting
revenge for being fired by telling Henchard about Farfrae buying his property, increasing Henchard's bitter jealousy.

During the period of Jopp's absence from the action his character deteriorates while he is reduced to living in Mixen Lane, the slum inhabited by the poorest and most disreputable members of the community. The detailed description of the lane and its denizens stresses the vice, misfortune, and disease among the outcasts from the town and "decayed villages" who gather there (p. 279). Peter's Finger is the lowest of the three inns representing the social divisions in Casterbridge; the narrator cynically refers to it as the church of Mixen Lane. A conversation between two of the fugitives from respectable society, an ex-poacher and an ex-gamekeeper, helps create an atmosphere of decadence and carelessness on the night Jopp accompanies Nance Mockridge and Mother Cuxsom to the inn. The company's reminiscing, malicious gossip, and laughter about the skimmity-ride plans are corrupt variations of the congenial community discussions at the Three Mariners, or at the country inns in earlier novels, or at the Rainbow in Silas Marner.

With the furmity woman present, this company includes several who feel animosity toward Henchard and Lucetta. Bearing a grudge against Lucetta for not hiring him despite his threats to reveal her past, Jopp reads aloud from the love letters Henchard asked him to return to her. Nance
identifies Lucetta as the writer and suggests the skimmity-ride. They both express contempt for Lucetta's hypocrisy and pretensions when it is revealed that she married Farfrae in spite of a previous liaison with Henchard. Laurence Lerner calls Nance "the outspoken enemy of respectability." After the Royal Visit, when Lucetta is at the height of her prominence as the mayor's wife, sitting with the leading ladies of the town, Nance undercuts her glory by saying she "do like to see the trimming pulled off such Christmas candles" (p. 290).

Like Henchard, Lucetta has made herself vulnerable by aspiring to live in a high position in Casterbridge while hiding the secrets of her past. She is less successful than the other characters at ever becoming integrated with the community. Despite her constant observations of the marketplace from her window in High-Place Hall, she acknowledges the oppressiveness of having no personal connection with the bustling crowds outside. Marrying Farfrae quickly improves her outward social status, but multiplies her hidden violations of conventional morality. While Nance voices mock horror and humility at Lucetta's disgrace to respectable womanhood, the furmity woman reveals the ironic ambiguities in Lucetta's situation by pointing out, with some truth, that she was better off being deterred from marrying Henchard after the scandal caused by the old woman's courtroom revelation.
As the major example in this novel of the survival of an ancient folk custom, the skimmity-ride contributes to the pessimistic view of traditional provincial life. Its participants expose and scorn their neighbors' mistakes, rather than preserving community harmony and unity. It is ironic that the virtuous outsider, Newson, contributes money to have this supposedly humorous custom revived. It disrupts the community's peace in the dark of night, and undermines the power of those in authority. During and after the skimmity-ride the helpless and frightened constables appear as fools, while Nance and the others coolly hide their guilt. Not only does this custom have inherently antisocial and destructive implications, like the superstitions in Silas Marner and The Return of the Native, for example, but Hardy uses it to develop the tragic plot. The Mixen Lane crowd enjoys laughing at the disgrace brought to those above them, while Jopp views the event as a means of revenge. Moreover, the prank has consequences more serious than any of them intended, for the unexpected scandal leads to Lucetta's sudden death.

Although the Mixen Lane rogues control the events surrounding their successful skimmity-ride, Coney, Longways, Buzzford, and their cronies demonstrate feelings of sympathy, communal responsibility, and fair play at this time. After the Royal Visit the chorus of acquaintances breaks up into these two groups who disagree. Longways chides Nance for
the ignoble passion of her jealous animosity toward Lucetta. While the scandal concerning Lucetta is spreading rapidly through the back streets, Coney and Longways decide to investigate the skimmy-ride plans and try to protect its victims. Longways realizes the scheme is "too rough a joke, and apt to wake riots in towns"; he acknowledges fairly that, since Farfrae and Lucetta have been "right enough" citizens while in Casterbridge, their former sins are no one's business (p. 290). Yet they decide only to protect Farfrae by indirect means, because they fear the vengeance of the pranksters if they expose the scheme, and they decide with the rest of the town that Lucetta deserves the scandal. Unfortunately, their "well-intentioned but clumsy contrivance" of sending Farfrae out of town through an anonymous letter actually does more harm than good, since Farfrae's long absence aggravates Lucetta's condition after her collapse (p. 299). Henchard's own attempts to help get Farfrae home are more courageous but just as futile, since he has lost his good name and neither Farfrae nor his household will believe anything Henchard says.

Despite the remorse of even Jopp after Lucetta's death, she never evokes sympathy from the Casterbridge natives. She and Henchard both illustrate the experience of isolation within a crowded, thriving community. While gossip and class divisions widened by envy and animosity are features of community life in all the provincial novels of Eliot and
Hardy, Lucetta's death provides an extreme example of the destructiveness of these habits. As Merryn Williams points out, the society that disapproves of Lucetta's false way of life destroys her. 14 Lucetta's punishment is more severe than her violations of the code of respectability warrant, while in Hardy's next rural novel, *The Woodlanders*, the village is helpless to defend itself against the more powerful and destructive influence of another outsider, Mrs. Charmond.

Abel Whittle

Abel Whittle, the poor, clumsy hay-yard laborer, offers a final moving reminder of the human sympathy, forgiveness, and lifelong loyalty prevalent in the rural communities of earlier novels. He is one of a series of simple-minded, timid background characters in Hardy's novels, who provide both comic relief and examples of the melancholy realities of rustic life. Hardy's varied uses of these related characters reflect his changing perspective on the strengths and weaknesses of the provincial community.

Thomas Leaf, in *Under the Greenwood Tree*, is accepted as a helpless but harmless simpleton whose presence illustrates the tolerance and compassion of the villagers. Joseph Poorgrass in *Far from the Madding Crowd* and Christian Cantle in *The Return of the Native* show that ignorance and
superstition in the minds of trusted working men can be harmful; both are used as unconscious agents in the ironic twists of fate that plague the protagonists. Although Poorgrass is normally a modest, obedient, God-fearing farm worker, his morbid fear of corpses and his impressionable nature allow him to be persuaded to prolong a visit to the malthouse while he is transporting Fanny Robin's body. The delay in Fanny's funeral leads to Bathsheba's heart-breaking discovery that Fanny bore Troy's child. Christian Cantle is more addle-brained, self-deprecating, superstitious, and lazy than any of the workers in previous novels. Like Poorgrass, he allows others to distract him from an important errand—delivering the Yeobright inheritance money. As a result of his greater ignorance, gullibility, and negligence, he loses the money gambling and keeps it a secret, contributing to the fatal misunderstanding between Mrs. Yeobright and Clym. With these characters the increasing emphasis on native deficiencies and irresponsibility, and their involvement with disruptive forces, reveals Hardy's growing awareness of the weaknesses of the traditional community, especially when it is confronted with unconventional and complex problems. Abel Whittle's role reflects pessimism about the survival of cohesive community values in a different way. After Henchard has lost all support in Casterbridge and is so alienated from himself he cannot survive, the weakest and silliest representative of the community
is the only one who offers comfort and human fellowship in his final days.

Abel's earlier appearances in the novel heighten the irony and poignancy of his dogged loyalty to Henchard in the end. When Henchard punishes him for sleeping late, the inflexible, hot-tempered master ignores the remorse and public disgrace felt by Abel at being dragged out to work without his trousers, even though Henchard himself is excessively sensitive about his public reputation. Farfrae's opposition to this treatment of Abel creates a serious clash between Henchard and his manager, while Abel is chosen later to tell Elizabeth that the more humane conditions with Farfrae as master are worth a reduction in pay and increase in work, because constant fear of a harsh master makes riches worthless. When Henchard is reduced to working in the hay-yard himself, Whittle is so amazed at this reversal of situations that Henchard cannot bear his pitying stares, and Elizabeth offers to work next to him in Abel's place.

After Henchard becomes estranged from Elizabeth and everyone else, this feeble creature whom he had abused and then shunned follows him out into the heath and refuses to forsake him. Abel's self-sacrificing compassion is like Bob Jakin's loyalty to Maggie at the end of *The Mill on the Floss*, when she has been rejected by the rest of the community, although Henchard appears more pathetic and undeserving than Maggie. Abel's immediate response when he sees
Henchard leave town in despair is to forgive all rough treatment of himself, because Henchard had been generous to his mother in former days. Thus, even though Henchard's rash and misguided deeds of the past contribute to his destruction, he receives some comfort through a reminder that he once lived as a responsible and charitable citizen of Casterbridge. While Abel is unable to read the will stating that Henchard cut himself off from all human society and remembrance, his simple explanation of Henchard's last days expresses pure human sympathy.  

Henchard's kinship with the humble and ignorant Casterbridge natives, which exposes his faults and pretensions through most of the novel, is now a positive force in the light of Abel's unselfish devotion. As John Paterson points out, Henchard returns to a primitive world of brotherhood with Abel, where time is told by the sun. Even on the wilds of the heath Abel finds shelter and neighboring woodsmen who help him provide "the humblest" of humble dwellings for Henchard's tragic end (p. 351).

The narrator describes Casterbridge as a thriving, prosperous community, with vigorous acitivity in the marketplace and camaraderie among those who share the labor of town and field. The inhabitants go on with their daily lives and business, welcoming newcomers like Farfrae and Elizabeth-Jane, who improve themselves and adjust to social changes. The novel's focus is on Henchard, however, and his growing
alienation from his successful young protege and step-
daughter. His attempts at atonement for the rash deeds of
his youth do not keep his wife, the only traditional house-
wife and mother in the novel, from fading away, nor do they
save him from public scandal in Casterbridge.

A variety of background characters comment on the
harsh realities of provincial life and the ironies in
Henchard's public and private life, with just a few traces
of communal responsibility and comradeship among the com-
munity representatives. Whereas Eliot stresses the honest
but repressive code of respectability of the Dodsonian
inhabitants of the provincial town as the context for the
Tullivers' tragedy in *The Mill on the Floss*, in Casterbridge
the most energetic and resourceful citizens are the corrupt
and contemptuous denizens of the back streets, who expose
the hypocrisies and contribute to the demise of Henchard and
Lucetta. The fatal skimmity-ride, the only prominent folk-
ritual portrayed, is the climax of the communal scenes,
which all reveal the deterioration of Henchard, in contrast
with the rise of Farfrae, just as the communal gatherings
in *The Mill on the Floss* are all marred by the problems of
the Tullivers. In the end Henchard returns to wandering the
countryside without family, home, or occupation, more hope-
less and alienated than he was before entering Casterbridge.
Before his death Abel Whittle provides a feeble but eloquent
reminder of the unconditional acts of sympathy and charity
that should bind people together in unified communities, but which are often overshadowed by the destructive influences of ambition, envy, and poverty.
NOTES--CHAPTER VI


3 Although Douglas Brown's overemphasis on Henchard as the representative of the defeated old order has been refuted by many subsequent critics, his discussions of Henchard's problems as skilled laborer, mayor, and merchant are valuable in many details, in Thomas Hardy: The Mayor of Casterbridge (London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1962).


5 Brown, p. 9.

6 Robert B. Heilman argues that the narrator's pessimistic view of the hopelessness, ignorance, and helplessness
of Susan and, to some extent, Elizabeth-Jane, are overshadowed by the dramatic force of their actions, in "Hardy's 'Mayor' and the Problem of Intention," Criticism, 5 (1963), 202-207. It is true that Susan gets what she wants more than other characters do, as Heilman points out, but her shrewd and strategic actions relate primarily to her daughter's future, while most of her behavior in the novel is hesitant and submissive.

Andrew Enstic mentions Susan's death as one illustration of the novel's emphasis on the transience and unimportance of individual lives, in the context of the permanent and "enclosed" landscape of Casterbridge, in Thomas Hardy: Landscapes of the Mind (London: Macmillan Press, 1979), p. 30. Robert Kiely also discusses the diverse and transient choral figures as voices of the permanence of change in nature. He calls Nance Mockridge in this scene "the most ominous spokesman for the inevitable turn of nature's wheel," "Vision and Viewpoint in The Mayor of Casterbridge," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 23 (1968), 199.

Kiely, 198-99.

John Paterson notes the growing realism in Hardy, illustrated by the harsher and more skeptical view of the peasantry in this novel, as compared with earlier novels, in "The Mayor of Casterbridge as Tragedy," Victorian Studies, 3 (1959), 165.

Holloway, pp. 236-37. Paterson also discusses Henchard's great strength and will, pointing out that he contains in heroic proportions the taciturnity, fatalism, and rough humor of Coney and Longways, p. 163.

Paterson points out that the "farical treatment" of this episode reveals the moral delinquency of the society that has elevated to prominence a corrupt man who has not atoned for past sins, pp. 167-68.


Brown stresses the inactive and false lifestyle of Lucetta when she and Elizabeth watch the market through her window, pp. 32-33.

Gregor describes Abel's instinctive act as "the purest form of human gesture," a perspective contrary to that of the timeless heath, pp. 23-24. Lerner mentions Abel's inarticulate awareness of the spiritual loss of Henchard's death, and Abel's resemblance to Lear's fool, pp. 66-68.

Paterson also discusses the similarities between Henchard and Abel, both of whom realize they have something wrong with them inside, pp. 160-62. Peter J. Casagrande analyzes Abel as a final sign of regeneration, like Marty South in The Woodlanders, in Unity in Hardy's Novels (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1982), pp. 197-99.
CHAPTER VII. THE WOODLANDERS

In The Woodlanders Hardy returns once more, as Eliot does in Silas Marner, to an examination of life within a small rural community. Little Hintock is a tiny, isolated, self-contained village like Hayslope, Raveloe, Mellstock and Weatherbury in the early novels of Eliot and Hardy. It is even more secluded and enclosed than these others, since, as the title and the detailed natural descriptions indicate, it is buried deep within the woods—"one of those sequestered spots outside the gates of the world."\(^1\) There is also more emphasis on the complex interweaving of individual destinies in this confined environment, and this time the close relationships among the inhabitants are more destructive than beneficial. None of the mainstays of village life—family ties, shared work and companionship, closeness to nature, strong associations from the past, or inherited traditional values—is sufficient to bring happiness to any of the main characters or supporting characters. Although there are indications in the background that stable and harmonious elements of rural life endure, moral weakness and confusion dominate the social relations in the novel. Evidence that the traditional community is dying out occupies more of the
foreground than in previous novels, with almost no hope of regeneration within its restrictive boundaries.²

In Eliot's last village tale, *Silas Marner*, the realistic details revealing the weaknesses in the rural society are overshadowed by the legendary story of the reformed young squire, the rehabilitated miser, and the idealized village maiden. The humble but articulate community representatives of Raveloe bring the positive values of village life into the foreground, while the important rustic characters in *The Woodlanders* are defeated by their own inner weaknesses, as well as by the limitations of their upbringing and social status. There is no possibility that the young pastoral characters—Giles Winterborne and Marty South—will marry and continue the traditional community roles of their families, as do Silas' foster daughter, Eppie, and Aaron Winthrop.

In Hardy's more realistic and pessimistic plot the outsiders are never integrated into the community and the most deserving natives do not find fulfillment. The four main characters represent a wide range of social positions and attitudes in relation to the rural community. Although Grace's romantic and marital problems are the focus of the plot, the fates of all four characters are closely connected to their involvement with rural life and traditional values. Giles is a virtuous, industrious dealer in wood products and cider, exceptionally talented, like Gabriel Oak on the
farm, in the skills of his trade and in reading the signs of nature. Unlike Gabriel, he is not able to overcome economic misfortune or separation from the woman he loves, who is his social superior. Her father, George Melbury, is a more prosperous timber merchant. Although he is another old-fashioned village native who is content with his own simple life, he works to raise his daughter to a higher social level, like Geoffrey Day in Under the Greenwood Tree and Mrs. Yeobright in The Return of the Native. Unlike these other ambitious parents, he succeeds in elevating Grace socially, with disastrous results: his conflicting loyalties, as they influence Grace's choices, are central to the novel's presentation of provincial weaknesses and unfulfilled hopes. As he explains to his workmen, who question the way he spoils Grace, a humiliating incident from his youth made him vow to give his daughter the cultural refinements he never had. After her extended and expensive education, Grace feels out of place in Giles's rustic world, while her accomplishments attract the attention of the more eminent but corrupt newcomers in Hintock, including Dr. Fitzpiers. He is an aloof, sophisticated outsider, whose brief and superficial involvements in village life depend on his capricious romantic attachments and professional interests.

Although Grace has a lifelong affection for her home and a romance with a humble working man, like Eppie in Silas Marner and Fancy Day in Under the Greenwood Tree,
unlike them, she chooses social position and worldly experience over the opportunity to settle down with her devoted childhood sweetheart. While her situation is very similar to Fancy's when she returns home, Grace's education and her father's ambition prevent her from participating in the ordinary social life of the village, as Fancy does in the school, church, and holiday activities. The outcome of Grace's misguided choices is neither comic nor tragic, but creates a gloomy and ironic view of the irreconcilability of modern attitudes and traditional rural values. She does not escape her dilemma through death, like Maggie Tulliver and Michael Henchard, earlier protagonists who are hopelessly alienated from their communities. Nor does she receive a second chance for a happy rural marriage after the death of her corrupt husband, like Bathsheba Everdene in Far from the Madding Crowd and Thomasin Yeobright in The Return of the Native; Grace's husband lives and the divorce laws prevent an attempted reconciliation with Giles. Ironically, Grace develops a growing but futile longing for the simple, honest life that her father and Fitzpriers regard as inferior, yet it is also clear that she never could have been happy with Giles's rough way of life, which provides neither the wealth and refinements to which she has grown accustomed, nor the inner strength and resilience to survive in unfamiliar and unconventional circumstances.
Thus the dominant feeling toward traditional village life in this novel is a strong sense of nostalgia for an ideal that no longer exists. The community is vulnerable to the corruptions of outside influences because of its own inherent weaknesses and its inability to resist or adjust to modern ideas. The passivity and inflexibility in the country-bred intellect are manifested in the social decline and death of the virtuous rustic hero, Giles, as well as in Melbury's broken spirit and thwarted hopes. As a number of critics have noted, because Giles sleeps outside so that Grace can hide in his cabin alone without compromising her honor, his death is an extreme demonstration that the conventional values instilled in the unsophisticated village native are as rigid as the artificial social restrictions and proprieties associated with the higher classes and urban culture. J. I. M. Stewart observes that this novel stresses two forces present in many of Hardy's works: "the keen sense of social distinction possessed by countrymen, and their ready acceptance, as a condition of any secure social standing, of the letter of man-made moral law."

The debilitating effect of this adherence to unalterable ancient doctrines is also reflected in Melbury's conflicting goals that both neglect the genuine human feelings which should determine the marriage choice: his solemn oath to make amends for a wrong done to Giles's dead father, by encouraging Grace to marry Giles, and his growing conviction
that social elevation would bring her greater happiness. Despite his excessive love for her and sincere sympathy for Giles, his concern with status and family respectability, like the Dodsons' obsessions in *The Mill on the Floss*, actually causes him to treat his beloved daughter and her humble suitor harshly at times, ignoring her sensitive fears and hopes when he pressures her to do what will bring the most prestige or the least disgrace to the family during her troubled romances and marriage.

As the weaknesses in the community representatives become more prominent in each rural novel, there is less defiant protest against the misfortunes and corruptions that threaten their way of life. When Mrs. Poyser "has her say out" with the squire, when Eppie defies the Casses out of loyalty to her poor foster father, and when the Mellstock choir confront the parson "man-to-man" in their clumsy way, the villagers' inherited deference to and awe of those in authority give way to their pride in their own rights and values. Mrs. Glegg and Dr. Kenn, in their very different ways, attempt to defend Maggie Tulliver in her disgrace, but they are unable to help her rejoin the society of her native town. Although the most energetic acts of protest in Casterbridge are misguided and destructive, involving some degenerate characters, Henchard at least dies as a powerfully defiant and tragic figure. Giles, on the other hand, is the first rustic hero to die so young in these novels, and the
first to retreat so passively and hopelessly in the face of unfamiliar problems and unjust circumstances.

Most attempts made by Giles and others to rebel against their fate are feeble and ineffective or even counterproductive gestures. Neither direct appeals based on honest values nor the support of friends and relations help the village natives avoid disaster. Melbury's most daring attempt to protect Grace is his straightforward and eloquent, but pathetic, plea to Mrs. Charmond to leave Grace's husband alone. Although his emotional appeals touch the sentimental woman, she runs away with Fitzpiers anyway. Blaming himself for "the domestic disaster" resulting from Grace's marriage, Melbury "entirely lost faith in his own judgment" and age-old values (p. 253). His last futile attempt to save Grace and reunite her and Giles, when the naive father is duped by an unscrupulous provincial lawyer in regard to the divorce laws, causes Giles to pity his friend's "overstrained mind" and "childish enthusiasm" (p. 304). He deteriorates into a helpless, irritable recluse, whose depression, ironically, causes Grace more anxiety than does her own dilemma. He refuses to advise her further, functioning in the end almost like one of the chorus, as his private thoughts about Grace's "forlorn hope" and skepticism about Fitzpiers' future fidelity coincide with the comments of his workmen (p. 390).
There are no strong supporting characters who perpetuate the attitudes and habits that bring lasting unity, harmony, and contentment to the village, like the Poyzers in Adam Bede, the Winthrops in Silas Marner, and the Deweys in Under the Greenwood Tree. As in The Mayor of Casterbridge, there are two supporting characters who represent opposite extremes in their relation to conventional rural values. Felice Charmond is a sophisticated newcomer like Lucetta Templeman, but more decadent and indifferent toward her new home. As both a wealthy, aloof landowner and an adulterous lover, she does more harm to the whole community than Lucetta does in Casterbridge. Unlike the troubles caused by irresponsible outsiders in earlier novels, the damage caused by Charmond and Fitzpriers in the lives of the villagers, through a complicated sequence of romantic and social entanglements, is unmitigated at the end of the novel.

Marty South, on the other hand, is the only supporting character representing traditional village life. She is a poor woodland worker, a passive victim of rural hardships like Susan Henchard, but more hopeless and pathetic because, while she is young, intelligent, and sensitive, the roughness of her physical labor and solitude of her life are unrelieved in the novel. Although she is Giles's "counterpart" in thought, spirit, and daily life, "his true complement in the other sex," as Grace realizes after his death (p. 357), her love for him is never returned. Her
character is thus important to the novel's view that the natural virtues and loyalties produced by a wholesome rural life are often overshadowed by misfortune and hopelessness.

As in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, the narrator tells us that there is a thriving community in the background, in which the Little Hintock inhabitants interact while they work, gossip, and reminisce—in Andrew Enstice's words, "an undercurrent of permanent community which is never defined, but never falters." We know that Melbury, Giles, and Farmer Cawtree share their resources and their laborers to help each other with their interdependent rural occupations in different seasons. However, many small details substitute for the lengthy descriptions of everyday life found in the earlier novels. Ian Gregor points out that "the diminishing role 'the locals' are called upon to play in the successive novels" reflects shifts in Hardy's interests and the "increasing self-enclosure of the rural world." There is a chorus of laborers, whose two main discussions frame Grace's return home and her departure in the end. But, as Gregor notes, they have even less involvement in the events of the novel than do the degenerate background characters in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. We are told that they and Melbury relate familiar ancient tales as they work or rest around a pleasant fire; while this is particularly important in chapter 19, when Fitzpieries as an idle onlooker is attracted to Grace and this "sylvan life," there is very little
presentation of the congenial, quaint, and humorous dialogue that is interesting for its own sake in earlier novels. The few communal scenes and choral discussions among the background characters relate primarily to the disruptions caused by outside influences in the villages.

Although almost all of the characters are inhabitants of Little Hintock and only a few important scenes take place away from the village and woods, in a nearby town, the first chapter introduces the "despised smaller" Hintock village through the eyes of antagonistic outsiders. The Mayor of Casterbridge contains the harshest introductory view of the hardships of rural life in Hardy's novels, but this novel opens with the most detached and antipathetic observations on village life. Barber Percomb is lost in the "tomb-like stillness" of the "lonely" and "deserted highway." He is out of place in the country, with his "finical style of dress" and his reputation for catering to the genteel in his shop in town (pp. 35-36). He is used to visiting luxurious Hintock House, but not the humble village cottages. Unlike the anonymous traveler in Adam Bede, who admires Adam, and the local landlord who gives him a somewhat sympathetic introduction to Hayslope, Percomb and Mrs. Dollery, the driver who gives him a ride, have no interest in Little Hintock aside from their brief business involvements there.

Since Mrs. Dollery drives an old-fashioned rural van and believes she can "see the world a bit" at Abbot's Cernel,
her emphasis on the obscurity of Little Hintock and her declaration that "I wouldn't live there if they'd pay me to" reveal that even to country-dwellers life at Little Hintock seems secluded and obsolete (pp. 36-37). Percomb reappears in the last chapter to repeat similar sentiments. Although he has not returned to Little Hintock in the intervening three years, he asks the natives how anyone, particularly a man of means like Melbury, can live in "such a one-eyed place" without going "melancholy-mad" (p. 387). The men have no response to this attack on their home; ironically, Melbury has been driven almost mad with melancholy, not because of his own dissatisfaction with village life, but because his ambitions for Grace have caused so many conflicts in Little Hintock.

Family Life in Little Hintock

The features of village life stressed in the introductory chapter are "listlessness," limited intellect, and inaction, relieved occasionally by great dramas caused by "the concentrated passions and closely-knit interdependence of the lives therein" (p. 38). The family histories and relationships of the characters in this novel reveal moral weakness and social decline, as well as the destructive effects of conventional values, social ambitions, and narrow provincial beliefs. As in The Mayor of Casterbridge, there are no
strong supportive families in the foreground or background of the novel, like those in Eliot's village novels and Under the Greenwood Tree, to help the protagonists achieve a happy and productive integration into the community. Instead, family connections and reputations prove to be more detrimental than beneficial, as they are for Maggie Tulliver in The Mill on the Floss. Whereas the networks of families that are the foundation of village life in the other earlier novels bind relatives and neighbors together in times of joy or sorrow, in Little Hintock the intermarriages inevitable "in most villages so secluded" (p. 55) and the economic interdependencies and hardships result in a complex tangle of conflicting loyalties, thwarted hopes, and personal calamities. The Winterborne and South families are in the process of dying out in the novel, while young Tim Tangs and Grace Melbury both leave their parental homes in the end.

Tim emigrates to keep his new wife away from Fitzpierres, at the same time that Melbury's only child must also leave in order to rejoin her husband, because his scandals and disagreements with her father make it impossible for them to live in Hintock. The reunion of the heroine and her family early in the novel is overshadowed by conflict and division, as is Henchard's recovery of his family, because the father's social ambitions and concern with public reputation blind him to the human feelings that should govern his relations with his daughter and hers with others in the community.
Grace grows increasingly "uneasy at being the social hope of the family," especially when her father forces her to look at the title-deeds she will inherit and she begins to feel like one of his investments—"a mere chattel" (pp. 117-119).

One of Melbury's detrimental provincial beliefs is his conviction that an alliance with Fitzpiers' decayed aristocratic family is more likely to bring Grace happiness than is marriage into a poor but diligent family of her own village, whose characters he has known all his life:

That touching faith in members of long-established families as such, irrespective of their personal condition or character, which is still found among old-fashioned people in the rural districts, reached its full perfection in Melbury. His daughter's suitor was descended from a line he had heard of in his grandfather's time as being once among the greatest, a family which had conferred its name upon a neighbouring village; how then could anything be amiss in this betrothal? (p. 189)

Later Melbury is crushed when Grace denigrates the level of cultivation he has worked so hard to achieve for her, and blames him for separating her from the village where she had been so happy as a child, by keeping her at school and pressuring her to marry Fitzpiers. The central family relationship in the novel thus produces discord and unhappiness, rather than contributing to the unity of the community.

Melbury's stubborn, misguided manipulations of his daughter's actions contrast with the docile role of his wife, the only village housewife in the novel. There are no strong
and articulate spokeswomen for the enduring values of the traditional family and community, as there are in all of Eliot's provincial novels, although Mrs. Melbury displays a little native shrewdness and much common sense, like her predecessors in earlier novels. While her most valuable trait is her ability to soothe Melbury with calm words when he is in turmoil about Grace, "when strenuous argument would have had no effect" (p. 62), her opinions about the best match for Grace shift in accord with her husband's views. In their first appearance in the novel her simple questions prompt Melbury's explanation of his conflicting ambitions for Grace. His wife reminds him of Giles's virtues and devotion, assuring Melbury that it is not a sacrifice to marry Grace to a poor but "honest and upright" man, and that it is best to "stick to what's sure," rather than brooding over other possibilities (p. 50). Later, however, Mrs. Melbury encourages Grace to view Fitzpiers' attentions as a triumph, and then discourages George from worrying about Fitzpiers' infidelity before he has evidence (p. 245). Her homely and cautious advice is of little use at this point, however, because the corruptions of Fitzpiers and Charmond are incomprehensible to the conventional views of Mr. or Mrs. Melbury. Her efforts in the background to act as mediator and smoothe things over during Fitzpiers' departures and returns do not prevent scandal or separation from disrupting the family and community.
Although Mrs. Melbury is a weak and ineffectual figure in the background of the romantic drama surrounding Grace, she has been a loving step-mother, and is thus a reminder of the happy village home Grace recalls from her childhood. She dislikes the expense, worry, and excessive love lavished on Grace by Melbury, but this dutiful second wife accepts her subordinate position passively. Melbury views her as a "homespun" woman who agreed to their arranged marriage because of Grace's attachment to her after the death of his first wife, another illustration of his disregard for other human feelings and relationships in his single-minded concern for Grace's welfare. Because of Mrs. Melbury's mild and submissive ways the marriage "had worked satisfactorily enough" (p. 62), unlike his later pursuits for Grace's happiness. Thus, like Thomasin Yeobright in The Return of the Native and Susan Henchard in The Mayor of Casterbridge, Mrs. Melbury accepts a life of stability and respectability without the lasting mutual affection seen in the poorer but happier marriages of the Deweys and the Pennys in Under the Greenwood Tree.

Little Hintock originally seemed strange and unappealing to Mrs. Melbury. As a non-native she presents a somewhat detached view of the process of growing accustomed to the cold floors, dreadful hooting owls, and overwhelming loneliness of the isolated village. Although she believes Grace could also "shake down here in Hintock, and be
content" (p. 111), neither Grace nor Fitzpiers, with their modern education and worldly experience, can adapt to this bleak life as a simple, unambitious soul like Mrs. Melbury can. Despite Grace's growing nostalgia for the simple virtues and homely scenes familiar since childhood, even when her attachment to Giles is strong she feels out of place in his humble home, or in the common tavern in town where he is used to eating. Fitzpiers is even more discontented and restless in the country, since he lacks the lifetime of memories that give Winterborne, Melbury, and Grace "an almost exhaustive biographical or historical acquaintance" with and undying interest in every detail of the landscape (p. 154). Mrs. Melbury has neither this lifelong attachment to the place nor the intellectual interests and wider experience that would make her dissatisfied with this limited environment. She thus exemplifies a dilemma in Hardy's view of rural life that is suggested in the Mellstock choir's resignation to their demise and becomes crucial in later novels as the roles of the community representatives weaken and the protagonists have more difficulty adjusting to country life—that is, maintaining unity and contentment within the old-fashioned provincial community requires a narrow view and passivity that are impossible for intelligent, complex characters. 11
John South is a dramatic illustration of paralysis and decay in Little Hintock families. The first scene in the village shows Marty South doing her father's work at night in their humble cottage, with the coffin-stool, now used as a work table, symbolizing their former prosperity. Her father, lying upstairs ill, is introduced merely as "a weak voice" with a "moaning strain"; a sympathetic workman later says he has ever been "all skin and grief" (pp. 45, 120). His lingering illness and premature death provide one of Hardy's most striking demonstrations of the dangers of rural ignorance and superstition. Practical young Marty knows that his lifelong fear of the tree outside the house is nonsense, but she also realizes that others before him have fallen prey to similar mysterious obsessions. This grotesque incident shows that a close relationship with nature, a life of diligent labor, and intense associations from the past, which are sources of strength for earlier heroes like Adam Bede and Gabriel Oak, do not guarantee contentment or survival for the Souths or Giles Winterborne. South's belief that the tree has human sense and rules him as a slave is related to the many images of predation and decay associated with the woods throughout the novel.

This idea that the tree controls him and his regret at not chopping it down as a child are also violations of the woodsman's customary practice of nurturing and then harvesting the trees, as is Dr. Fitzpiers' order to cut it down without
the permission of the landowner. South's illness is the occasion for Fitzpiers' first interaction with Hintock natives in the novel, and his first involvement with destructive forces in the village, since his experiment of felling the tree ends South's "fragile life," rather than curing him.

Marty's father's death also emphasizes and increases her solitude. She is shown sleeping in her room near the corpse, with nothing left to live for. When she is neglected by all the neighbors in her sorrow there is a cruel absence of the communal sympathy and support that are usually displayed on such occasions, while the villagers rally around Giles "like one family" with compassion for his economic catastrophe at the same time (p. 136).

Giles is also the last survivor of his family. His social and economic inheritances from his parents, as well as his family's connections with the Souths and the Melburys, make him the victim of confusing and frustrating obligations and dependencies that distort the natural human relations among the villagers. Since the leases on his houses are dependent on John South's life, Giles cannot even ask about his neighbor's health for fear of seeming mercenary. He objects to this old method of leasing houses for the tenant's lifetime, which leads to these mixed feelings among friends and relations, while South, with a morbid and helpless awareness that his life is more valuable to Giles economically
than it is in any personal way to himself, apologizes for
the almost dishonest "trick" of dying at fifty-five (p. 123).

Giles realizes too late that the old leases hidden
under the Winterborne mattresses for years could have been
insured for his own lifetime. Instead, his father's and
his own action leaves him at the mercy of the new landowner,
Mrs. Charmond, who, ignoring the human intentions and moral
rights implied in the leases, enforces the law that enables
her to pull the houses down. Although the narrator de-
scribes in detail the villagers' sympathy for Giles despite
his taciturnity during this crisis, he retreats "into the
background of human life and action thereabout" after the
destruction of his familiar family home brings the loss of
everything he values most, except his woodland work (p. 141).

His lifelong relationship with the Melburys had been main-
tained by a distant family tie and Melbury's guilt over his
old romantic rivalry with Giles's father, but this premature
loss of the family property obliterates Giles's remaining
hopes of ever providing a suitable home for Grace.

Grammer Oliver and Robert Creedle

Despite the lack of strong and beneficent family rela-
tionships to provide support for the main characters, the
Melburys and Winterbornes have faithful old servants who
have been lifelong companions for Grace and Giles. Grammer
Oliver and Robert Creedle are two hardy survivors of the old
traditional community, who make a number of blunt and
striking observations on the problems of their young mis-
tress and master, and the actions of the village's new-
comers. As with many of Hardy's rustic background figures,
the significance and irony in their comments result from
a combination of the crankiness, eccentricity, and ignorance
of the uneducated, aging laborer, with the native wit and
often melancholy philosophical perspective of those with
long, direct experience of the hardships of rural life.
Moreover, the strength, energy and humor in these old villa-
gers emphasize the lack of these qualities in the main char-
acters and supporting characters, just as the doomed Michael
Henchard and the disreputable older Casterbridge natives
have more vitality than the successful, educated younger
generation. Although Creedle is just "a swaying collection
of old clothes" early in the novel (p. 97), he outlives the
last Winterborne. Grammer Oliver is hailed by a workman
as being "dapper and stirring" in her old age (p. 57). Her
illness in the novel is the first time in her life she is
forced to stop work and stay in bed, but later she feels as
young as the romping village girls.

Robert Creedle is pointed out in the first group scene
in Melbury's work shed as the only laborer worthy of descrip-
tion. With his relics of past wars and adventures that he
wears on "his uneventful rounds," seldom thinking of "their
associations or their stories" (p. 56), he is one of the
signs in Little Hintock of a decline from past glory. He is also Giles's constant companion—"his trusty man and familiar," who is housekeeper, gardener, and general assistant to the young man without a wife or family (p. 101). As both a loyal friend and a tactless, outspoken observer of Giles's misfortunes, the irritable and melancholy old man voices the blend of sympathy for Giles and exposure of his weaknesses that is carried throughout the novel.

When Giles is about to lose the houses because he failed to insure the leases in time, Creedle pessimistically stops tending the garden and claims to have warned Giles, declaring himself "a prophet in Hintock," with his "poor, long-seeing way" (p. 121). Then, "with a face of seven sorrows," he points out that Giles's "sperrit" lost the houses for him (p. 138), referring to Giles's uncharacteristic act of defiance against Mrs. Charmond when her carriage blocked the road for his wagons, which made her disinclined to leniency on the issue of the leases.

Creedle's criticisms of Grace emphasize both the incompatibility of her sophisticated ways and ordinary village life, and her infidelity to poor Giles. After her marriage Giles silences Creedle harshly because the old man is driving Giles mad with gloomy and insensitive reminders of the property he lost through losing Grace. Creedle is an intrusive cynic, like Grandfather James in Under the Greenwood Tree, except that in Giles's life despair is justifiable, and there
are no jovial relatives or friends to outnumber the cranky old man.

Although Creedle's comments seem more callous and impertinent as Giles's fortunes deteriorate, a lifetime of familiarity with the Winterbornes makes Giles seem more like his relative than his "maister," and he expresses inconsolable grief at Giles's death. His sorrow is intensified by the fact that there is now no one left to mourn for him or bury him when his time comes. Having grown up with Giles's father, as if they were twins, he recalls the childhood and decline of two generations of Winterbornes. This bond of lifetime companionship has been broken prematurely by Giles's retreat into solitude and his final rash sacrifice for Grace. After bewailing the fact that he had not seen Giles in those last few days, Creedle's outburst of grief provides an elegy more intense and tragic than Mother Cuxsom's simple remarks on the passing of Susan Henchard in The Mayor of Casterbridge. While Susan's death was viewed as the end only of one good woman's "wishes and ways," Creedle realizes the demise of the Winterbornes is a devastating loss for the community: "now I've seen the end of the family, which we can ill afford to lose, wi' such a scanty lot of good folk in Hintock as we've got" (p. 353). 14

Grammer Oliver is a permanent part of the stable, traditional home that is familiar and dear to Grace, even though it appears smaller and shabbier after her recent worldly
experiences. Although little space is devoted to the every-day lives of the villagers, Grammer's recurrent presence at her household tasks, particularly her first appearance with the workmen, when they tease each other and discuss the daily routine, is a reminder of the easygoing and productive lives of the ordinary natives. This conversation soon focuses on Melbury's anxieties about Grace, however. While Grammer's expression of sympathy suggests that worry about one's children is a universal parental experience, the men are aware that Melbury's exceptional devotion to Grace and her lengthy stay at school have created complications beyond those normally experienced by village parents. Grammer's most important speeches and actions involve Fitzpiers, one of the outsiders discussed below, who changes Grace's life.

The Outsiders and the Villagers

Many of the villagers comment on the strangeness and disruptiveness of Fitzpiers and Charmond, from anonymous voices and workers in the background, to Marty, Giles, and Melbury, whose lives are affected drastically by these outsiders. Hardy remarks several times that the rumors about their actions "agitated" the little village. As in The Mayor of Casterbridge, the community's interest is most active when there is misfortune or scandal to discuss, while there is less attention paid to favorable events, such as weddings. In this novel the selection of group discussions suggests
that the most lively and interesting conversations of the villagers dwell on the peculiarities and corruptions of the newcomers. Even an ordinary sad occasion, like the death of Marty's father, attracts less interest and neighborly sympathy than do the deaths of Adam Bede's father or Michael Henchard's wife. Mrs. Charmond's character, on the other hand, is "a highly popular and frequent" topic of conversation in Hintock (p. 57).

Most of the natives' observations about Charmond and Fitzpiers underline these outsiders' own expressions of dislike for Little Hintock and other images that emphasize their indifference or contempt. For example, in the woods, the picture of Charmond "listlessly" watching Marty work and carelessly tossing down a cigarette contrasts with Grace's feeling "acute regret at the sight of these woodcutting scenes, because she had estranged herself from them; craving, even to its defects and inconveniences, that homely sylvan life of her father" (p. 265). Charmond tells Grace earlier that "such an outlandish place" makes her "dreadfully nervous" and "oppresses" her (pp. 90, 92).

Charmond's servants, like the servants of the gentry in Adam Bede, also reflect her aloof and scornful attitude. Her "majestic coachman" tells Marty it is the first time she has offered a villager a ride, "for as a rule she takes no interest in the village folk at all." His observation that she yawns because "she finds it dull here" leaves Marty
incredulous that one "so rich and so powerful" could be as discontented as the poor (p. 71). During Giles's argument with the coachman over the right of way, the coachman declares "haughtily" that their time is more precious because they are headed for Italy, while Giles is going to "some trumpery little village or other in the neighbourhood." Giles's waggoner is amazed that "a woman that does nothing" is out so early, until he remembers "she can't endure the winter here" (pp. 128-29).

Fitzpiers has more interest in the community, although his involvements are always harmful. He observes the villagers moodily, as he dabbles in his many other studies, exploiting individuals at his leisure more than he benefits them as a doctor. During his sporadic periods of devotion to Grace he toys with the idea that "the secret of happiness lay in limiting the aspirations," like the workmen whose "thoughts were coterminous with the margin of the Hintock woodlands" (p. 167). By placing in the mind of this inconsistent and patronizing dilettante the notion that "calm contentment" would result if he could "accept quiet domesticity according to oldest and homeliest notions," Hardy actually stresses the incompatibility of modern attitudes and simple village life (p. 170).

Grammer's main function is introducing Fitzpiers to Grace by describing his reasons for settling in Little Hintock and his scientific and philosophical studies. She
is a perceptive observer of the actions of both her employers. As a servant in whom Fitzpiers has confided as if she were his mother, she presents a somewhat sympathetic view of the lonely newcomer, yet her version of his statements of discontent, with her emphasis on his yawns, underscores the strangeness and idleness of this man who, as the narrator concludes, has "nothing in common with the life around" (p. 81). His claims that he was "made for higher things" are undercut comically by Grammer's scornful assertion that only the aged know what real cleverness is; his philosophic aphorisms seem absurd when they are quoted by the old country woman who calls them "the oddest of rozums." Nevertheless, she acknowledges that he is "a real projick" (prodigy), and her colorful descriptions spark Grace's interest in this educated new neighbor (p. 79).

Grammer's confession that Fitzpiers has offered her money for her skull is the most grotesque illustration of the disparity between Fitzpiers' pursuits and traditional village life. Although the discussions of his anatomical studies dispel the earlier suspicions that he deals in black magic, his plan to obtain Grammer's skull and his examination of a portion of John South's brain suggest that he is a kind of predator among the village natives. Even though Grammer is clever enough and strong enough to get the agreement cancelled and live for years after her one illness, while she is sick the impressionable old woman regrets her
"rashless" secret pact with Fitzpiers, tortured by morbid fears of dying with an obsession like John South's. Ironically, her desperate move to escape Fitzpiers' influence brings about the beginning of his influence over Grace. Grammer's fretful pleading with Grace to visit Fitzpiers on her behalf, which results in the first meeting between the girl and the doctor, is one of many incidents in which Grace is manipulated by others, mainly her father and Fitzpiers, because of their own misguided desires and ambitions.

Once Fitzpiers marries Grace he is full of complaints about lowering himself by returning to Hintock, insulting Grace by "confessing" sarcastically that he feel as if he "belonged to a different species from the people who are working in that yard"--the workmen including Giles and others whose blood is as good as her own, as Grace points out (p. 209). After one "heroic" and condescending submission to a meal with her village friends, Fitzpiers refuses to mix with the "wide-elbowed and genial company" whose welcome home visit brings grateful "tears of friendship" to Grace's eyes (p. 212).

Ironically, the villagers' inbred humility and allegiance "with all the strength of inherited conviction to the aristocratic principle" coincide with his own feelings of superiority (p. 213). Grammer's early comment that "he's stooped to make himself useful like any common man" (p. 79) and the later tirade of Mrs. Cox, his former landlady,
reflect the same self-deprecatory attitude that makes
Melbury tremble with pride at Grace's elevation to Fitzpiers' higher class. Mrs. Cox, disgruntled at losing her profitable tenant, discloses the decline in his reputation, now that he has married into a family "which is only Hintock-born such as I be meself." She also repeats Mrs. Charmond's observation that "he ought to have done better than that" and "he has spoilt his chances" (p. 211). As a knowledgeable doctor from an old aristocratic family he automatically received the kind of deferential treatment that the hard-working, self-made timber-merchant knows he can never enjoy. As Grace's husband, however, Fitzpiers is "a traitor to his own cause"; his mysterious cleverness and superiority are deflated in the eyes of the villagers, who take their business back to the old doctor they despised (pp. 213-14).
This illogical attitude provides more evidence that class consciousness and social prejudice are as deeply rooted in the humble villagers as they are in the powerful upper class.

In the beginning the background characters' views of the corruption of Charmond and Fitzpiers seem to stem from narrow-minded gossip, provincial ignorance, and superstition. Charmond is introduced in the novel through Creedle's comical outburst, based on his brother-in-law's testimony, on her "wicked" habit of eating Sunday dinner in swallow dress, "a- stript to such a wanton figure," after piously kneeling in church. Creedle's views are colored by his "grieved
remembrances" of her late husband's curse as he fired Creedle from his employ (p. 57). Regarding the "clever and learned young doctor," a nameless traveler in the first chapter tells Percomb that "they say he is in league with the devil" (p. 38), a belief repeated by Melbury's workmen. Although Cawtree admits it is "only an old woman's tale" and "well-informed" Melbury scoffs at their superstitions, the story about the books on black magic that frightened the parson's wife and were then marked "Beware," after being sent to the wrong address, confirm the men's beliefs that doctors with evil associations, like bad-tasting medicines, produce the best cures (pp. 60-61).

Unlike Silas Marner, shunned in Raveloe because of similar suspicions and superstitions associated with his skilled occupation, Charmond and Fitzpiers ultimately deserve these speculations about their morality that have such absurd and prejudicial origins. Marty knows from the beginning, when her landlady wants her hair, that Charmond is selfish and promiscuous. Later a workman observes aptly that "she's the wrong kind of woman for Hintock," since she does not know one tree from another (p. 275). The rumors of her affair with Fitzpiers, which naturally spread quickly among the close-knit woodlanders, begin with vague conjectures, but in the end, "rumour, for a wonder, exaggerated little" (p. 253). When Fitzpiers begins his deceptive nightly rides, the workmen's superstitious theories about
the horse being "hag-rid" by witches and their simple amazement at a gentleman's safe return asleep on a horse provide clues for Grace's more perceptive realization that Fitzpiers is visiting Charmond (p. 232). Then when Melbury goes to confront her openly, Charmond is in "a fool's paradise," the only one in the parish unaware of "the rumour of her own weaknesses" (pp. 258–60).

In spite of all their own faults, ignorance, and gossiping, the villagers seem incredulous and relatively innocent when this hypocritical behavior disrupts their community. And as always in Eliot's or Hardy's portrayal of simple, honest, country folk, there are elements of sympathy and fair play blended with their frank criticisms. Although Giles knows about the affair and Charmond's disreputable past as an actress and a "charmer," he keeps it to himself until Melbury presses him for advice. Despite Giles's own experience to the contrary, he acknowledges that she is known for generosity, his "manly" heart refusing to condemn her without evidence. Melbury despairs of winning over a woman from an "unstable tribe," "who made cross-loves and crooked passions her study for years" (p. 257). Yet he and a workman both admit that she has been a good friend to them, if not to Grace. In business she is indifferent but fair, and the woodland work that calms Melbury's nerves is never threatened in this novel of personal and social catastrophe. Ironically, her capricious nature makes her easier to
manipulate as a landowner, sincer her honest tenants use "that marvellous subtlety of contrivance in steering round odd tempers that is found in sons of the soil and dependents generally" (p. 224). One workman even sympathizes with her obvious depressed and guilty spirit before she leaves home; his companion agrees that "without charity we be but tinkling simples," even though they both realize her departure will benefit Grace (p. 275).

Fitzpiers writes a deceptive letter to ward off the excited "country talk" about his own disappearance, until a "clinching rumour" finally reveals evidence that he is on the Continent with Charming. This news ends all speculation about Grace's position as an abandoned wife and plunges Melbury deeper into "the Valley of Humiliation," his concern with reputation making him more upset than Grace is at the loss of Fitzpiers (pp. 297-98). 17

Communal Gatherings in Little Hintock

The communal celebrations in this novel also reveal the disruptions caused by outside influences and the insufficiency of village traditions for maintaining social stability or cohesion. In each major novel after Under the Greenwood Tree there is less attention given to the congenial conversation and festive customs of the community representatives at holiday gatherings, and more emphasis on their
intellectual deficiencies and harmful old beliefs, as well as on the social and moral divisions among main characters. Just as the community gatherings in The Mayor of Casterbridge show Henchard's growing alienation and deterioration, the few village celebrations in The Woodlanders depict Grace's inability to rejoin her native community and the corruptions associated with Fitzpiers.

Early in the novel Giles's Christmas party is his most ambitious plan for winning Grace's favor, and the most dramatic indication that her education has made her unsuited for ordinary village life. Even before he begins Giles is aware that he cannot compete for her attention with sophisticated companions like Mrs. Charmond and that "homely Christmas gatherings in the jovial Hintock style seemed so primitive and uncouth beside the lofty matters of her conversation" (p. 98). His own modesty and self-deprecatory manner cause the initial catastrophe of the Melburys' early arrival, because he failed to tell George the invitation was for a formal evening party. As a result, his humble bachelor housekeeping and awkward preparations are exposed to the scrutiny of the guests he hopes to impress. Despite the Melburys' persistent efforts to be polite and uncritical, their dismay at blunders like the excess oil on the furniture and the stew splashed on Grace cannot be concealed. Grace's "kindly pity" and "suppressed sympathy" are more depressing to the sensitive Giles than open contempt would
be (p. 103).

This party contains the same ingredients as the Deweys' rousing Christmas party in *Under the Greenwood Tree*—wholesome and plentiful food, country music, and traditional dances—but as Creedle admits later, these amenities are overshadowed by the company's lack of wit and the total failure with the Melburys. Grace cannot even remember the country dances, so Giles misses the lively and intoxicating opportunities to embrace his beloved that Dick Dewey enjoys with Fancy Day. Although Dick is worried about Fancy's social superiority and there are some good-natured, frank arguments among the older folks about respectable behavior, these problems are presented in a light-hearted way, with the emphasis on the tolerance and good humor of the Mellstock natives. Farmer Shiner's pompous manners are comical, his rivalry never posing a serious threat to Dick's courtship of Fancy. At Giles's party crude and simple country habits are set against the Melburys' well-intentioned but patronizing comments. Instead of fervent romantic memories and hopes like Dick Dewey's, Giles is left with a dismal sense of defeat and futility after his party.

The background characters at the party help dramatize the social distance between Giles and Grace. The humorous and homely image of Mrs. Melbury hanging her silk train on a nail and seizing Giles's apron contrasts with Grace's idleness when Giles and her father insist that she should not
help with the cooking like her parents. Giles regrets inviting the other guests, whose crude ways dominate the gathering, instead of filling in the background. Caetree and the hollow-turner unsociably monopolize the new decks of cards and indulge in their own favorite game in a corner, marking on a table with chalk and intruding on the others with their harsh rhymes. Even the old cards that the others must use contribute to the atmosphere of hopelessness at Giles's house, with their decayed pictures of royalty and ancient stains left by the hands of dead generations. When Melbury hears his less refined neighbors singing a bawdy song on the way home, he is indignant that Giles asked them to meet "the sort of society" that could be tolerated by the "old folk," but was not suitable for Grace (p. 109).

Creèdle is the most explicit representative of Giles's humble roots and commentator on the mishaps of the party. The quaint and comical banter and recollections that dominate the conversation at country gatherings in earlier novels are found here only in the old servant's chatter before and after the party, and in the kitchen with the hired boy, who admires his cleverness. His old-fashioned manners provide the most hilarious touches of comic relief in this somber novel; he defends serving the stew in his everyday style even if it does splash, and he asserts the harmlessness of finding a slug in one's cabbage, as long it is well boiled. Unfortunately, these homely blunders occur at Grace's place
at the table, prompting Creedle's melancholy observation that the party was doomed to failure. Several of his cranky outbursts reflect on the ironies in Giles's need for a wife to keep house and the impossibility of winning Grace. Creedle's final assertion that girls "schooled . . . so monstrous high" should "hob-and-nob elsewhere," and that bachelors should give parties "only to their own race" confirm Giles's growing conviction that Grace is beyond his reach (p. 110).

The Midsummer Eve ritual is the one communal gathering in this novel that attracts the attention of the whole village, but it does not celebrate unity or harmony in this community. Mrs. Cox, Fitzpiers' housekeeper, disapproves of it as "an ungodly performance," while Grammer Oliver enjoys it like a young girl (p. 175). There is also much disagreement and confusion among the onlookers, particularly those speculating on Grace's romantic future. As a revival of an ancient custom this observance is not inherently antisocial or degrading like the skimmity-ride in The Mayor of Casterbridge, yet the girls are hesitant and fearful at their attempt to tamper with pagan magic more than is customary in order to see their future husbands. Although the focus of this night is on the marital union of young couples (the happily-married Mrs. Penny in Under the Greenwood Tree recalls fondly the successful outcome of a similar Midsummer ritual), this particular enactment is used,
like the skimmity-ride, to dramatize the heartaches, thwarted hopes, secrets, and infidelities of the main characters involved.

The nocturnal frolic begins with Grace impulsively joining in like an ordinary village girl and ends, ironically, with Fitzpiers both stealing Grace away from Giles and seducing another village maiden, Suke Damson, for the first time. Since the girls failed to keep their adventure secret, and most of the village turns out to watch or interfere, the magical rite becomes a real human game of sexual hide-and-seek. Grammer Oliver is more perceptive and sensible than anyone else at this point in the plot when she prophecies, with a rather macabre comparison of his interests in her own skeleton and Grace's living body, that Fitzpiers will marry Grace before the next Midsummer. She believes Fitzpiers belongs with someone like Mrs. Charmond, while Giles is a better match for Grace, so she decides to "act the part o' Providence," advising Giles to catch Grace when the girls run by. Mrs. Melbury counteracts that maneuver by placing Fitzpiers in the competition, having noticed even before her husband does that the richer man favors Grace (pp. 176-77).

This gathering also provides another opportunity to dramatize the passivity of both Marty and Giles. Not only are Marty's isolation and cynicism emphasized when she refuses to participate with the other maidens, but she also
allows herself to be used in the unsuccessful attempt to
steer Grace into the arms of the man Marty loves herself.
The triumphs in this chase, as well as in the later plot
developments, go to the outsider, Fitzpiers. He perverts
the rustic courtship ritual when he embraces his future wife
and then takes Tim Tangs's place in the pursuit and conquest
of the "hoysdenish" Suke; the only magic involved is her
transformation in the moonlight from a coarse country girl
into a beautiful lover (pp. 179-80).

When Grace later marries Fitzpiers, unaware of his
promiscuity, the wedding is not portrayed as a happy village
celebration. Although it is not carried out in secret or in
another town, like the ill-advised marriages to corrupt out-
siders in previous novels (Bathsheba and Troy in Far from
the Madding Crowd, Thomasin and Wildeve in The Return of the
Native, Lucetta and Farfrae in The Mayor of Casterbridge),
Grace has to bargain with her father and Fitzpiers for per-
mission to have a traditional ceremony at the village church
with her "dear friends" present. Fitzpiers, ashamed of
lowering himself publicly, is reluctant to appear at "the
horrid little church here, with all the yokels staring round
at us, and a droning parson reading" (p. 195). The only
part of the wedding dramatized in the novel is the excitement
aroused when Mrs. Dollery delivers the wedding dress. With
the humble workers and neighbors looking on, the arrival of
the fashionable gown, created by strangers' hands in the
city, is a social triumph for all the Melburys. In this chapter devoted to Grace's last-minute suspicions and anxieties, the wedding itself is skipped over, announced only by a terse statement that "she was the wife of Fitzpiers" five hours after waking on the eventful day (p. 203).

Later a more humble village wedding is described, when Fitzpiers encounters the brightly dressed wedding party of Suke and Tim Tangs. The innocent Tim's account of their "gay procession" around the parishes is reminiscent of the idyllic traditional weddings at the end of *Silas Marner* and *Under the Greenwood Tree*, but this one turns into another illustration of the irreparable harm Fitzpiers has brought into the lives of the vulnerable, weak-willed villagers. Suke's role throughout the novel has been that of the coarse, lusty village hoyden who is easy prey for the doctor's philandering.18 At the Midsummer Eve ritual, at the scene in which Suke and Tim are nutting, and at this wedding procession, the affair with Fitzpiers brings deception and irony into the idyllic setting. Suke, although she is a brash, impudent "giantess," is also pitiable, since she, like Mrs. Charmond, feels a genuine affection for Fitzpiers that he does not deserve. When both women boldly appear at the Melburys' to ask if Fitzpiers is killed on the night of his riding accident, Grace, with both satire and compassion, addresses her rivals as his true wives. Although Grace realized earlier "what gall she could drop into poor Tim Tangs'
honey if she chose" (p. 238), Suke's new "small husband" seems to be the last to learn of his bride's indiscretions. But when the wedding procession is interrupted, Suke's tears at saying good-bye to Fitzpiers and other hints cut short the bridegroom's marital bliss and rousing jokes (pp. 364-65).

The Futility of Revenge and Renewal in Little Hintock

Tim's wedding is thus not the end of jealousies and uncertainties for the simple young laborer, as it is for Dick Dewey in Under the Greenwood Tree, but the beginning of increased misery and division. Although old and young Tim Tangs are part of the chorus of workmen throughout the novel, we first see into their cottage and into Tim's mind during his last unhappy days in Little Hintock. His bitter regrets at leaving his father and his native village to avoid the disgrace of Suke's reputation at home are compounded by his realization that the marriage is a failure and is not likely to improve abroad. Because of his resentment at Suke's confessions of inconstancy and her attitude of "listless indifference" toward him (p. 375), Tim becomes involved in the sequence of ironic misunderstandings and mishaps that end the novel. He suspects Fitzpiers of returning to the vicinity to meet Suke because, with his simple, unsophisticated views, he is ignorant of the complicated sentimentalities and inconsistencies that would lead a man like
Fitzpiers to pursue the wife he once abandoned. Suke is careless enough to let Tim see her sneak out for one last glance at her former lover and insolent enough to confirm Tim's faulty assumption that she is anxiously waiting to meet Fitzpiers. Tim is so outraged at these exaggerated impressions of the situation that his final deed before "Hintock was dead to him" forever is the violent, furtive act of setting a man-trap for Fitzpiers (p. 379).

Like the skimmity-ride in The Mayor of Casterbridge, Tim's use of the man-trap is the revival of an ancient practice. The narrator's somewhat satiric explanation of the history and varieties of the man-trap are more detailed than any other descriptions of provincial customs in this novel. The "cobwebbed" old specimen Tim drags out brings to mind his great-uncle and other local poachers and innocent victims, as well as childhood memories of playing with the dangerous but obsolete relic. The gruesome details about the trap's teeth and the individuals it has lamed or killed emphasize the brutality of Tim's vindictive desire to "spoil his pretty shins for'n" (p. 376). It is a hideous act of revenge, as the skimmity-ride is for Joshua Jopp, carried out under cover of night to expose the hypocrisies of those who have violated conventional values. Although the intent and potential for physical harm are greater, however, Tim's plan fails, while the skimmity-ride is more destructive than anyone intended. As David Lodge observes, "The belated
effort of the Hintock community to defend itself, or at least revenge itself, against the mischievous Fitzpiers . . . is characteristically clumsy, old-fashioned, and fallible.\textsuperscript{19}

Thus this gesture of defiance is a more pathetic illustration of both the harshness and the weaknesses of traditional rural life, since it is carried out by a misguided, simple-minded victim, rather than by a stage villain like Joshua Jopp or a scornful back-street shrew like Nance Mockridge. Fitzpiers' indiscretions are more insidious than Lucetta's (although he is not guilty of the immediate charge of seducing Suke after her marriage) and yet, he never even realizes the trap was set for him. Ironically, instead of being punished for his sins, Fitzpiers suffers only a moment of mental anguish when he fears Grace has been hurt, while the mishap hastens his success in persuading her to leave Hintock with him. The only exposure or damage caused by the trap is Grace's temporary loss of her torn skirt, and the home she leaves behind so abruptly is forgotten quickly in her concern over returning to the refined life of the stylish inn in town without even a comb or brush.

The man-trap incident is one of several scenes at the end of the novel that keep the focus on the perspective of the old-fashioned community and surround the romantic reconciliation of Grace and her husband with a series of awkward and cynical twists. When Melbury rounds up the workmen to
look for Grace, the chorus of laborers, with their mixture of conventional and eccentric opinions, provides the final comments on the fate of these unheroic protagonists. Even though Grace has been shown contemplating her marriage vows and considering her return to Fitzpiers seriously, the circumstances of her sudden disappearance seem absurd and anti-climactic in the context of the men's reactions. Melancholy old Creedle provides unnecessary grapnels, ropes, and tragic groans; then the men are surprised that Grace's trip to the garden for parsley ends in a fashionable hotel in town, rather than in some accidental catastrophe. Melbury's anxiety about "the sinister event of the trap," as he follows the clues to Grace without suspecting Fitzpiers' involvement, turns to perplexity and then embarrassment when he tells "his faithful followers" their seven-mile search was a mistake (p. 387). The "gawkiness" of the men in the hotel in their work clothes and their blunt complaints are somewhat reminiscent of the Mellow Stock choir's appearance in the parson's study, when their serious mission ends in an ironic farce. In both situations there is a tolerant acceptance of the actions of those with more power and money, but among themselves (and in Melbury's case, in his private thoughts), the villagers express their disapproval freely.

When the men stop at the humble old tavern in an "antique back street" for "a drop o' sommat to strengthen our nerves" for the walk home (p. 389), the novel ends with
the kind of homely and amusing scene, full of country gossip and anecdotes, that is a familiar ingredient in many rural novels, although the number of congenial communal gatherings has diminished since Hardy's early novels and their tone has darkened. This time Hardy records some of the men's quaint old stories that he only alludes to in the earlier group scenes, but the focus of this discussion is the fate of "the reunited pair." With Melbury out of the room the men feel free to criticize bluntly—particularly the bark-ripper, who can "afford to indulge in strong opinions" because he is not a regular employee of Melbury's. "Poor Creedle," who has personal reasons for voicing the harshest condemnation of Grace's infidelity to those at home, because he is thinking of mistreated Giles, complains bitterly that "young women do wax wanton in these days" (p. 390). As in so many other conversations of the local choruses in the novels of Eliot and Hardy, even comical, simple-minded digressions and platitudes carry significance in relation to the main plot. In a few short speeches these men touch on most of the problems in romance and marriage examined in the novel, with Upjohn's theory of the five "climates" of courtship and the anecdotes about couples reconciling listlessly and tricking each other suggesting that marital inconstancy, deceit, and disillusionment are universal experiences.

Although the hollow-turner finds the bark-ripper's desire to give Grace "a good shaking" too harsh, his own
condemnation of couples who "make a country-talk about their parting for ever, and excite the neighbours, and then make fools of 'em like this" reveals the extent to which the villagers feel that their lives are intertwined and that the peace of the community is disrupted by unconventional and irresponsible behavior. The close relations among the villagers are also emphasized in the workmen's first discussion in the novel, when their memories of Grace's childhood and her parents' history are blended with recollections from their own lives. Creedle's prediction then that "'tis a tempting o' Providence" to keep Grace at school so long, even though "learning is better than houses or land" (p. 58), anticipates the dilemma from which there is no happy escape for Grace, while the contradictions in the men's later arguments also reflect the ironies in her predicament. Although her recent aloof and vacillating behavior toward her husband seems so shocking in a girl like her that it could "freeze yer blood," they are skeptical about how long she can keep Fitzpiers "tame." As they disagree about whether women have grown cleverer or have always been artful with men, they acknowledge that Grace, being "a wonderful scholar," is different from other women they have known, and would not be content with a quiet and submissive role (pp. 391-92). Their tales of indifference and conflict in country marriages reveal that the life Grace leaves behind is more dismal than idyllic. Thus, while these final scenes present a harsh and
cynical view of her reunion with Fitzpiers, it is also clear that her earlier bitter longings for "the good old Hintock ways" (p. 74) were based on a nostalgic ideal that has little basis in the real life of the villagers.²⁰

On their way home the men encounter Marty South, whose final poignant soliloquy offers a more dignified but equally gloomy view of the life Grace has forsaken. Described at her first appearance as a victim of Time, Marty from the beginning embodies the grim reality that diligence, humility, and loyalty do not necessarily bring unity or contentment within the traditional community. As John Holloway points out, Marty and Giles are the only characters in touch with natural goodness, but it is no longer a source of strength; their virtue is combined with debility.²¹ When Grace grows to regret her separation from Giles and ordinary village life, she declares bitterly, "I wish I worked in the woods like Marty South! I hate genteel life, and I want to be no better than she!" (p. 251). Throughout the novel, however, Grace and others continually refer to her as "poor lonesome Marty." Despite the virtues Grace has learned to admire in Giles and Marty, the details of Marty's life provide some of the strongest evidence that Grace is longing for a pastoral ideal that does not exist.

Although this novel contains no portraits of unemployed country wanderers or destitute slum-dweller, like The Mayor of Casterbridge, Marty's role demonstrates some of the
hardships of rural labor, particularly for a woman who must support herself. The early scenes at her home contain the most detailed descriptions of everyday life in the novel. As the young girl sits up at night making spars because her father cannot work, with the doorway covered to hide her shame, her rough hands and the glove that is too big add to the impression that she is a sexless and prematurely old figure. Her outdoor work provides almost her only contact with Giles and others, and the woodland labor is the only enduring source of pride and strength in this novel, but the necessity of toiling so hard also subjects Marty to shame, solitude, and injustice. As Michael Squires observes, her work is more tedious than Giles's and provides less delight, making her a more realistic, stoic figure. Although she has taught herself in a few hours to make spars better than her father's, she has to keep her skill a secret because Melbury would pay less for a woman's work. During the barking season she is seen "encaged" in the upper branches of the felled trees, resigned to doing the delicate work requiring more skill and patience because her time is worth less than the men's (p. 165).

Like Giles and others in the village, Marty is also victimized by outside forces. Her first scene focuses on Percombie's attempts to persuade her to sell her luxuriant hair, the only feature that gives her pride in her womanhood. She calls him the devil for tempting her so persistently, while
he reduces her to a commodity as all of her but the hair becomes "a blurred mass of unimportant detail" in his sight (p. 41). Although he calls her a "simpleton" for turning down a sum that would take so many hours of hard labor to earn, she is perceptive enough to figure out that Mrs. Charmond is the buyer who wants the hair in order to attract lovers, and proud enough to refuse this demeaning disfigurement. As soon as she hears Melbury talk about uniting Grace and Giles, however, Marty immediately gives up all hope of happiness for herself, cuts off the hair, and sets out on the twelve-mile walk to Percomb's shop.

After thus making herself "ugly—and hateful," as she declares wretchedly to Giles, she suffers from a cold in the head and from his tactless comment that her head "looks like an apple upon a gatepost!" (p. 53). After the death of her father makes her life seem even more hopeless and empty, her careless attitude toward herself is illustrated when several very different village girls walk through Fitzpiers' freshly painted gate; he contrasts her resignation and indifference about the paint stain on her only black gown with Grace's later self-conscious and delicate maneuvers to avoid the paint. Having become so early in life a passive victim of rural hardships and "the Unfulfilled Intention, which makes life what it is" and appears in the woods as well as in city slums (p. 83), Marty appears throughout the novel as an eloquent but pathetic pessimist. Giles is dismayed when she
says the trees they plant "sigh because they are very sorry to begin life in earnest—just as we be," yet he agrees with her that the birds are "lighter-hearted than we" because the weather is their only worry (pp. 94-95, 99).

Marty is portrayed as a faithful and heroic character when she stands stoically in the cold to help Giles plant trees, but since she receives few rewards her single-minded devotion is self-destructive, like Giles's fatal sacrifices later for Grace. Although Giles admires Marty's skill and thinks kindly of her "struggling bravely" at home (p. 76), he is unaware of her as a woman. During his first appearance, when they walk together silently, "hardly anything could be more isolated or more self-contained than the lives of these two" (p. 52). Thus at the end, when Grace perceives that Giles should have married Marty because she "alone, of all the women in Hintock and the world, had approximated to Winterborne's level of intelligent intercourse with Nature," Marty is the realist who admits they had never spoken of love in all their time together outdoors (p. 357). Grace's thoughts about the mysterious language of nature shared by these two woodlanders, like the famous passage in which she recognizes Giles as "Autumn's very brother" (p. 235), are a glorification of a pure pastoral life that has little relation to the real conflicting passions that divide these characters. She indulges in "mournful fancies" that grow out of her instinctive attraction to
the simple life of her childhood, her disillusionment with sophisticated society, and her regret and guilt at losing Giles (p. 358). In reality there was never any hope that Marty's devotion would be rewarded, as Gabriel Oak's is in *Far from the Madding Crowd* after the troubles that divide him from Bathsheba are ended. For Gabriel and Bathsheba the "good-fellowship" that develops in the context of "hard prosaic reality" produces "the only love which is strong as death."²⁴ Although Marty's love is this strong, her passivity and ill fortune ensure that Giles never even knows it exists.

Between the early scenes of Marty's dismal life and her important speeches after Giles's death, she appears on the sidelines of the dramatic events of the novel. She not only suffers from being a sensitive, perceptive observer of the disastrous romantic triangle in which Giles is hopelessly devoted to Grace, but she repeatedly allows herself to be used as a confidant or assistant in situations which are painful to her, such as the attempt to bring Giles and Grace together on Midsummer's Eve. When Giles gives her a ride to Sherton, she insists "with playful malice" that it is "the right of another woman" to ride up the town street in the wagon (p. 66). But then she cannot avoid seeing his reunion with Grace in the street or encountering them on the road home. Giles later consults her about a party to which she is not invited and at which he hopes to woo Grace--an
indiscretion that is surpassed in insensitivity when Melbury causes Giles intense pain by confiding in him about Grace's marital problems. Despite her jealousy of Grace, Marty, with her humble and honest ways, allows herself to function as a helper, chaperone, and companion to Grace, even helping to save her life and her reputation after Giles's death by bringing her the medicine she had initially refused and by telling Fitzpiers and Melbury that Giles did not stay in the cabin with Grace.

Although she most often plays the role of the unappreciated martyr, Marty performs a few bold but surreptitious acts of defiance that grow out of her frustrated love for Giles. While Susan Henchard's more secretive schemes usually accomplish her desired ends and improve her daughter's life in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Marty's misguided gestures never help her cause, but only make her look more pathetic. The rhyme she writes on Giles's wall predicting that he will lose Grace as well as his houses is true, but is seems like a cruel and perverse joke. Those catastrophes make him retreat from life, not turn to Marty. Later Marty thinks she is playing her "only card" when she writes to Fitzpiers to tell him the origin of Mrs. Charmond's abundant hair, believing in her naivete and ignorance of fashion that "her revelation is a fatal one for a lover" (p. 273). Ironically, the letter has the desired effect of sending Fitzpiers back to Grace because it takes only a trivial
argument about the hair to end the waning affair with
Charmond, yet this development does not help Marty. In
fact, Fitzpiers' initial return prompts Grace to flee to
Giles in the woods for help, which leads to Giles's death.
Since Marty does not realize Giles is sleeping near the
cabin, exposed to the elements, her devotion, like Creedle's,
does not enable her to save Giles's life, while Grace and
Fitzpiers ultimately benefit from her actions. In gratitude
for the letter that separated him from Charmond, Fitzpiers
buys Marty Giles's cider-press, a treasured memorial, but a
pitiful consolation for the loss of the only life she valued.

The confidence that springs up between Marty and
Fitzpiers in this scene, and her faithful companionship with
Grace as they religiously tend Giles's grave together, sug-
gest the kind of mutual understanding and reconciliation that
unite community members after sorrows in earlier novels. But
Grace's return to Fitzpiers necessitates leaving her home and
leaving Marty alone at the grave in the end. Although Grace
tells Fitzpiers at one point that she worships Giles during
these vigils she and Marty swore to continue, Fitzpiers suc-
cceeds in getting Grace's "heart out of that grave" (p. 373).
Grace chooses her best opportunity for a new life, given the
constraints of the marriage laws, while Marty, who has lost
all her girlishness at Giles's death and considers Grace a
kind of traitor who has forgotten him, remains to eulogize
his goodness.
Marty's vow to think of Giles every day and continue his work, like Abel Whittle's selfless devotion to Michael Henchard at the end of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, is a poignant reminder of the unconditional, unselfish loyalty that should bind members of the close-knit community. Although Marty's final passionate monologue is "loftier" and more sublime than Abel's clumsy speeches, however, she embodies a more hopeless view of rural life. There is no humor in Marty's character, as there is in Abel, or in the workmen who have just commented ironically on Grace's fate. Marty is the strongest and most talented survivor in her community, not the silliest and most incompetent like Abel, yet she was not able to communicate with Giles before his death or help him, as Abel helped Henchard, even by providing a shelter for his last illness. Abel will eventually forget his sorrow when he returns to the town where the marriage of the new mayor has just been celebrated, but grief and loss dominate the final view of Little Hintock, with no evidence of renewal or progress within the community. As a "solitary" and sexless expression of "abstract humanism," Marty can speak with dignity about continuing Giles's work and keeping his memory fresh; when the moonlight is gone and her "marks of poverty and toil" return, however, there is no harmonious family or social life to give purpose to her existence among her neighbors in her native village (p.393).
In this novel old-fashioned village life has positive value only for those attached to it through strong lifelong memories. As the first line of the novel indicates, it is "for old association's sake" that one might take the "for-saken" road through the woods toward Little Hintock (p. 35). There is no integration of outsiders in this village, no successful celebration of enduring customs and values, and no future for the families and friendships portrayed within the community. Like Maggie Tulliver, Grace idealizes the rural life of her past because of happy childhood memories and disillusioning experiences with temptation and scandal in "respectable" society. Whereas Maggie's refusal to marry her rich suitor or leave her home creates a dilemma from which the only escape is death, Grace's discontent within the limited environment of her village leads her to go away with her husband, even though he has had no roots or loyalty in the past. George Fayen calls this novel "an act of memory." Just as Marty appears as an abstract figure at the end, the natural virtues and pastoral pleasures associated with traditional village life are viewed as ideal relics of the past that cannot survive in the modern world. There are brief glimpses in the background of hardy, congenial, and humorous villagers who survive to carry on the woodland work, but when they speak their attention and ours is drawn to the corrupting influences, conflicting loyalties, inflexible attitudes, and unfulfilled hopes that mar the lives of their neighbors.
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2 Peter J. Casagrande discusses the impossibility of restoration or reparation in this novel, comparing it with Under the Greenwood Tree and The Return of the Native, the other "novels of return." Unity in Hardy's Novels (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1982), pp. 143-53.

3 Casagrande mentions that Melbury is more complex than these earlier "Intrusive Parents" in novels of return, p. 145.

4 Casagrande notes that Grace is "deluded by nostalgia," as her father is deluded with regard to the divorce laws, p. 148.

5 See, for example, Charles E. May, "Far from the Nadding Crowd and The Woodlanders: Hardy's Grotesque Pastorals," English Literature in Transition, 17 (1974), 154, and David Lodge, Introduction, pp. 16-17. These critics discuss Giles's obedience to social laws when Grace follows her instincts and calls him to the hut. Albert J. Guerard states that there is sympathy for Giles's fidelity and generosity, but that his "grotesque 'heroism'" in dying to save Grace's reputation is horrible, in Thomas Hardy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), p. 118.


7 Guerard discusses "Melbury's loss of ancient and necessary certitudes," p. 23.

8 Merryn Williams states that "the community, unlike those in the earlier novels, seems to have almost no capacity for resistance. Its attitude towards those who exploit it is one of passive criticism or, worse still, of passive acceptance," in Thomas Hardy and Rural England (London: Macmillan, 1972), p. 167.


11 William H. Hatchett observes that in Hardy's novels action and happiness require insensitivity. Hardy has a nostalgic envy for the villagers' happiness, but dislikes their insensitivity. "The Woodlanders, or Realism in Sheep's Clothing," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 9 (1955), 251-55.

12 Andrew Enstice discusses the kinds of decay seen in the houses of the Souths and other characters, pp. 95-98.

13 Charles May writes, "Hardy's central vision springs from the tension between his longing for a ground of meaning and value inherent in the natural world and his hard recognition that no such value or meaning exists there," p. 150. David Lodge relates South's obsession to "a neurotic and superstitious side to the sympathy between woodlanders and woods," Introduction, p. 21.

14 Enstice notes that the minor characters connect the past, present, and future in this community, p. 104.


16 Merryn Williams describes Charmond's relation to her estate as predatory, since she takes hair, home, and husband away from various villagers, pp. 161-62.

17 Merryn Williams points out that Melbury is ignorant of the "lax sexual code" of the class he admires, p. 185.

18 Merryn Williams observes that the amoral, noisy, promiscuous Suke is a new type of girl in Hardy's fiction, pp. 159-60.

19 Introduction, p. 20. John Holloway notes that, by missing the man-trap, Grace is escaping the harsh elements of rural life, in "Hardy's Major Fiction," in From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad, eds. Robert C. Rathburn and Martin Steinmann, Jr. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958), pp. 239-40. Mary E. Saunders relates the man-trap to the cruel and obsolete class distinctions that

20 Gregor discusses the deadlock resulting from Grace's modern self-awareness and primitive longing for rural life. The community's crisis is that the old ways are exhausted and the new ones aimless, "Hardy's World," p. 283.


22 Squires, pp. 158-59. Millgate also discusses the contrast between the idle frivolity and wasted skill of Fitzpiers and Charmond, and the realists who continue the morally valuable work, Marty and Giles, pp. 252-53.

23 David Lodge discusses the relationship between the demonic Percomb's purchase of Marty's hair, and the wickedness of Charmond and Fitzpiers, p. 12.


25 Lodge says "remembrance, not renewal" is guaranteed by Marty's vow, p. 28. Merryn Williams points to "an unspoken resilience" in Marty's flowers and Giles's trees, that is beyond the destinies of individual lives, p. 167. Casagrande discusses the limitations on "the regenerative instinct" seen in Marty. He observes that "such loyalty to the dead, however noble, is pure folly," although Hardy sympathizes with the loyalty to the past, pp. 152-53.

CHAPTER VIII. CONCLUSION

George Eliot and Thomas Hardy had very similar starting points in their writing of fiction, with their early works growing out of their own deepest memories and direct experience with traditional rural life. As their early novels show, they both began by affirming the positive and enduring value of life in a stable, harmonious community close to the earth. By using a variety of supporting characters to populate their villages and towns, they were able to convey the richness and variety of rural community life. Throughout their rural novels they varied this cast of family members and neighbors, embodying the strengths and weaknesses of rural life in different combinations and with different emphases to dramatize their changing views of the individual's relation to the community in each novel.

The basic elements of community life remain the same in all of these novels--family life, shared work, neighborly conversation, memories of a common past, and familiar customs. In the small, close-knit communities of these novels these features have the potential to promote human fellowship and sympathy, but these ideals, emphasized in both authors' early novels, are set against their perceptions of
the harsher realities of rural life and human relationships. Supportive community representatives and congenial communal gatherings fade into the background of the novels when internal weaknesses and detrimental outside influences disrupt the community and dominate the foreground. The same elements that have a beneficent influence in one community or one situation can be disastrous for characters in a different set of circumstances. Inescapable family dependencies and psychological inheritances, grueling and degrading rural labor, harmful gossip, inflexible moral conventions, superstitions, and antisocial folk rituals bring division and destruction, rather than fulfillment, to some of the characters in these rural novels.

In some ways the three novels by each author studied here follow a common pattern with respect to the development in their views of rural life, with a middle novel containing a tragic plot set in a larger market town, followed by one last examination of life in a small village that reveals more of the limitations of the old-fashioned rural mentality and society than the early novels do. However, the differences in Eliot's and Hardy's visions of the communities in these novels, revealed in the supporting characters as much as in the protagonists' experiences in the community, sent these two authors in quiet different directions in their later careers.
In her first novel, *Adam Bede*, Eliot demonstrates a deeper faith in the beneficent and enduring influences of old-fashioned village life than Hardy does in *Under the Greenwood Tree* or *Far from the Madding Crowd*. In spite of the irrevocable loss of the wayward Hetty and the long exile of the young squire, the village of Hayslope heals itself after tragic suffering threatens to uproot its most valuable members, while the sources of discord in Weblestock and the irreparable loss of the ancient choir are treated with light irony. Although the story of Gabriel Oak and Bathsheba Everdene in *Far from the Madding Crowd* is similar to Adam Bede's in showing renewal and reconciliation after tragic crises, the congenial rural community that accepts these admirable new farmers offers less support than Adam's native village does. In Hayslope a number of strong supporting characters—Mr. Irwine, Bartle Massey, Mrs. Poyser, and even Adam's weak but devoted family—provide sympathy and individual human understanding that reinforce his ties to the community, leading to his recovery and the marriage that symbolizes the continuity of their traditional life.

In *The Mill on the Floss*, however, Eliot created her last and most intense portrayal of the conflict between a family's deep, unshakable loyalty to a lifelong home and the social pressures that make life there unbearable. The male Tullivers' attempts to stay at the old mill and restore the family's honor lead them to value money and revenge over love
and forgiveness. In the society that rejects Maggie (including Mrs. Glegg, who wants to defend Maggie in the end, but would punish her as well), the most powerful characters are honest but oppressive and narrow-minded. Maggie can not live by the code of her Dodson relatives, which places respectability and public reputation above human sympathy, nor can she bear the prospect of leaving all she loves behind to wander in the world homeless. Her obsessive ties to her brother and their past place her in a dilemma in which the only possible release is death.

After portraying this community in which social cohesion is based on materialism and inflexible standards of conduct, Eliot returned, in Silas Marner, to the setting of the older village to find a community where compassion and love could overcome prejudice and isolation. The fate that seems unbearable to Maggie, being cut off from one's past, is a debilitating experience for Silas, but he and Eppie create a new family so that in the end they are bound to their humble home through the same kind of loving memories that stayed with Maggie, but had no real relation to her present or future life. Silas' integration into his new community is not achieved through his contact with the villagers as a group when his gold is stolen, but it develops gradually through his individual interaction with the child and with Dolly Winthrop, who teaches him to adopt the customs and rituals that bind him to his neighbors.
Godfrey is also reformed by a virtuous individual influence, although his past violations of community values and Nancy's rather narrow code of piety and respectability separate them from the more vital life of the villagers.

This last vision of the achievement of harmony and stability within a simple, static community encouraged Eliot to go on to more ambitious examinations of complex heroes and heroines in social settings where conflicts and changes occur on a larger scale than they do in the small rural community, and where the achievement of enduring communal bonds seems increasingly difficult. In her Italian historical novel, *Romola*, and her political novel set in provincial England, *Felix Holt*, she had limited success in relating her idealized heroine and hero to the complex historical forces of their worlds, although they both, along with Daniel Deronda, find ways to help others who need their guidance and support on an individual level. Eliot's statement in *Felix Holt* that "there is no private life which has not been determined by a wider public life, from the time when the primeval milkmaid had to wander with the wanderings of her clan,"¹ reflects her continuing interest in the individual's relation to the larger community, which has its roots in the antique pastoral world of her childhood and her early fiction. In *Daniel Deronda* the hero's troubling experiences in Victorian society lead him to leave England in the end, seeking a new kind of community among the Jews.
One of Eliot's most famous passages on the moral value of one's native community occurs in this last novel, expressing in relation to its modern protagonists, who have never had such roots, a nostalgia for the beneficent rural influences portrayed in her first novels, although even her earliest protagonists had difficulties as they struggled to maintain their ties with their imperfect traditional communities:

A human life, I think, should be well rooted in some spot of a native land, where it may get the love of tender kinship for the face of earth, for the labours men go forth to, for the sound and accents that haunt it, for whatever will give that early home a familiar unmistakable difference amidst the future widening of knowledge: a spot where the definiteness of early memories may be inwrought with affection, and kindly acquaintance with all neighbours, even to the dogs and donkeys, may spread not by sentimental effort and reflection, but as a sweet habit of the blood.  

In her masterpiece, *Middlemarch*, Eliot focuses on a single provincial community, as she did in the early novels, but with a much larger scope. Since Dorothea, Lydgate, and other important characters are not natives of this town, as the Tullivers are in St. Ogg's, their problems do not involve conflicts with the forces that endanger their lifelong ties to their native community. But they are all struggling to find fulfillment and acceptance within the complex web of relationships that makes up the society of the town. This novel contains Eliot's most successful depiction of a variety of supporting characters and background figures,
who represent the different classes and family groups of the town, and who are involved in the interrelated plot lines. They provide constant commentary on the actions and moral choices of Dorothea and the other main characters, often illustrating the limiting influences of a materialistic, class-conscious society. This provincial community is too confining for Dorothea's ardent, restless spirit, and she goes to London with Will Ladislaw in the end, while her more conventional relatives oppose this marriage. Lydgate and Bulstrode also leave Middlemarch in the end, taking their wives away from their family homes, because, although both men's violations of community values are forgiven through individual acts of sympathy and reconciliation, scandal has caused them to be rejected by the town society, as Maggie is in St. Ogg's.

Of the many supporting characters in this novel, the Garths follow the traditions of the Poyzers of *Adam Bede* and the Winthrops of *Silas Marner*. Although they are poorer than most of the other characters, they demonstrate the diligence, family unity, and honesty that provide the backbone of community life, and that are lacking in so many of the other inhabitants of the town. In one of the subplots of the novel, Mary Garth helps Fred Vincy become a stable, productive member of the community for the rest of his life, under the influence of her love and her father's disciplined guidance. Mary and her mother, like Mrs. Poyser and Dolly
Winthrop, are two of the strong spokeswomen for the traditional virtues of family and community life who appear throughout Eliot's novels. Although the Garths' role in this novel is relatively small in relation to the Poyzers in *Adam Bede* or the Deweys in *Under the Greenwood Tree*, these supporting characters represent the achievement of human happiness and communal harmony that is completely lacking in Hardy's later novels.

The Hardy novels studied here span most of his career as a novelist, and he wrote more rural novels than Eliot did. In these novels there is a more consistent pattern of development in his view of the rural community than there is in Eliot's novels—a growing emphasis on the debility and decay of rural life. As Hardy's protagonists become more complex, troubled by rural hardships, conflicting loyalties, and unconventional problems, the communities that surround them appear weaker, with relatives and neighbors unable to help each other survive or remain integrated into a unified community. Close examination of the community representatives in these novels provides evidence that Hardy was not just portraying the defeat by outside modern influences of the happy, productive way of life depicted in *Under the Greenwood Tree*. As John Holloway explains, Hardy's increasingly gloomy view of traditional rural life is based on:
a gathering realization that the earlier way did not possess the inner resources upon which to make a real fight for its existence. The old order was not just a less powerful mode of life than the new, but ultimately helpless before it through inner defect.  

In Under the Greenwood Tree the choir's "fight for existence" is lost, because the new parson has authority over the villagers, but the ancient customs are most valued by the older men. They accept this unwelcome innovation with dignity, while the young people continue the traditions and family life of the community through their joyful marriage, surrounded by their families and neighbors. In The Mayor of Casterbridge Henchard cuts himself off from his family and alienates himself from his community. Although there is a younger generation that adjusts to social changes and prospers in this community, the weak or degenerate background figures help keep the focus on Henchard's deterioration and tragic death.

In The Woodlanders, corruption and passivity isolate and alienate the younger generation, including the protagonists, Giles and Grace, so that there is little hope for the survival of the old-fashioned village. A supporting character, Marty South, is the only young character who stays in the village to carry on its work with pride and dignity, but the death of the man she loves, along with the other hardships she has suffered, leave her as a solitary, hopeless figure. The other background characters who continue the
life and work of the village do little more in the novel than comment on the disruptions in their community caused by outside influences.

After this gloomy view of life in an isolated old village that is dying out because it cannot resist the corrupting influences of modern ambitions and the exploitation of irresponsible outsiders, Hardy abandoned his focus on individual rural communities in each novel. His last two major novels contain tragic protagonists who are wanderers, unable to find a community where they are accepted. The heroine of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is shown first as a native of a rural village, where her experiences involve many of the elements of village life in the earlier novels. But the decay and fragmentation of rural life contribute to her merciless victimization by Fate and by everyone around her. She is forced out of her village several times, by her mother's ambitions for her, by the disgrace of being an unwed mother and then an abandoned wife, and by her family's forced migration when they lose their cottage lease. *Tess* enjoys an idyllic interlude at a prosperous dairy farm, but the troubles of her past mar her entire life, and the attractions of Angel Clare disrupt the lives of Tess and the other dairy maids. After he marries and abandons Tess, she ends up working on a rough, ugly farm, the setting for some of Hardy's harshest views of the cruelties of rural labor. There is a wide variety of
background characters around Tess—people who are coarse, ignorant, immoral, or passive. Their roughness and insensitivity enable them to survive the hardships and corruptions of rural life, while Tess, "a pure woman," is destroyed in her youth when she is finally driven to murder her seducer.

Jude the Obscure contains an even more bitter exposure of the restrictions and injustices imposed on the individual by society and by an indifferent universe. Jude's relationship with Arabella reveals the coarse and bestial aspects of rural life, while his other experiences demonstrate the frustrations and rejections facing a poor man with intellectual ambitions and unconventional morals. The background characters in this novel consist primarily of a series of miscellaneous voices reflecting the gossip and prejudice that follow Jude wherever he goes. Mrs. Edlin, the descendant of the rural housewives in the earlier novels, is the only loyal friend who assists Jude in times of trouble throughout the novel, but her ironic commentaries placing Jude's experiences in the context of traditional views of marriage do not relieve the hopelessness of his condition. Jude has no real roots in a rural past and no future in or out of Wessex. Thus Hardy's protagonists do not go out into the world, like Eliot's, to find new kinds of communities where they can establish the ties of human sympathy and charity that characterized the old rural
community. Hardy's painfully realistic portrayal of his belief that Nature is indifferent to the laws constructed for the benefit of society, at the expense of the few who have exceptional talent and insight, was rejected by his late Victorian readers, leading him to give up novel writing.⁴

Despite the differences in Eliot's and Hardy's developing views of human nature and society, especially in their later careers, all the novels here convey both affectionate longing for the old rural community and perceptive criticism of its weaknesses. Both writers felt nostalgia for a simpler life based on natural and permanent ties with nature, family and neighbors, yet both realized that the pastoral community they idealized in their early novels was never perfect, and that it could neither accommodate unconventional problems and exceptional individuals, nor survive modern social changes. The supporting characters in these novels embody both the weaknesses that led to these authors' disillusionment with the traditional community and the indestructible human dignity and sympathy that always survive the worst hardships brought by social oppression or an indifferent universe.
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