CHAPTER III
A SURVEY OF EARLY NOVELS

It was but an accident that Hardy, a true lover of poetry, should have entered into the career of a novelist. Poetry, that eternal charmer, had always had its spell upon young Hardy, and by 1860 when he was a young man of twenty he composed a number of poems and even sent them to the publishers. But most of them remained unpublished for nearly thirty years; perhaps literary London was not then prepared to admit a new intruder into the field of poetry. Hardy was, however, bent upon a literary career; and somewhat unexpected publication of a prose feature *How I Built Myself a House* written primarily to amuse the pupils of Bloomfield happened to be its starting point. The young Hardy turned his attention from verse to prose. Perhaps a little success in the field of poetry at the initial stage of his literary career would have deprived us of such immortal tragic masterpieces as *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874), *The Return of the Native* (1878), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), *The Woodlanders* (1887), *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1896).

Novel was thus a forced medium to Hardy for his literary expressions; and naturally in his early novels we cannot expect to get from him what he has given in his later novels. In his early novels he was an apprentice, practising novels as an art form, and making his way somewhat unsteadily until the writing of his first fictional masterpiece *Far From the Madding Crowd*, without knowing certainly whether it would...
ever see the light of the day. He was, ab initio, writing in serials for the Cornwall magazines and very often he was forced to accommodate the wishes of his readers in general and his publishers in particular.

In the survey of his early novels we should not overlook the conventions which Hardy chose to adopt to compose his pictures. Every artist has to choose his own convention within which he has to frame his work of art, and unless we are aware of it, we cannot make a fair judgement of his work. David Cecil rightly says that "Hardy's convention was that of an earlier age, the convention invented by Fielding". 1. It was the convention of not merely an accurate chronicle of ordinary life, as would be intolerably dull to the ordinary reader. Therefore, a working compromise was evolved. The characters and the setting of the stories were carefully chosen to be realistic; but they were fitted into a framework of non-realistic plot consisting of a variety of sensational events.

Some of the elements of this convention which was more or less a loose make-shift affair, were accepted by almost all the novelists until George Eliot. She was a revolutionary in the sense that she has given us for the first time novels without romantic heroes and villains, with subtle analysis of motive and character. Action is determined not by conventions of plot but purely by logical demand of character and situation.

1. David Cecil: Hardy the Novelist.
This change was carried further by the later novelists, such as Henry James, Meredith, George Moore etc. The novel entered a new phase; and Hardy may be looked upon as a part of this new phase.

From intellectual standpoint Hardy was a man of the new age, a thinker much ahead of his time. For his was an open rebellion against traditional orthodox views about religion, sex and so on. And from the very beginning of his novel writing career he seemed to have used his novels to express his heretical opinions. From aesthetic standpoint, Hardy was, however, a man of the past. For he adopted the convention of an earlier generation. It was partly due to his circumstances which perhaps moulded his temperament also. For Hardy's birth and upbringing in the rural atmosphere of Dorchester seemed to have contributed much to the making of what he is. Temperamentally, Hardy was much less concerned with the everyday surface of things but more with the deeper principles and forces that lie behind them. Naturally he was in need of a convention that would give him the full scope for the expression of the spiritual and the imaginative aspects of his experiences. So, as David Cecil rightly observed, instead of turning forward, Hardy turned backwards in order to discover the most appropriate mode for his art.

Indeed, it was the tranquil atmosphere of the rural Dorset along with its customs and conventions, coupled with its occasional novelty of things that made Hardy naturally disposed to draw his inspiration out of rural life, country humours and traditional customs. His imagination was fired by ancient stories, ballads and superstitions; and even more he
saw the life of his own day in terms of its history, with every house, every landmark stamped all over by the associations of its past. It, again, gave him a taste in story telling, which was that of a simple rural society wherein he had been born and bred. Hardy’s natural inclination was that a story should be a story in every respect. It must have a beginning and an end. Apart from being full of action, a story must be sufficiently unusual to arouse the immediate interest of its hearers. Thomas Hardy’s notebook entry dated September 15, 1913, as quoted by his second wife Mrs Florence Emily Hardy, shows his observations as follows:

“September 15. Thoughts on the recent school of novel-writers. They forget in their insistence on life, and nothing but life, in a plain slice, that a story must be worth the telling, that a good deal of life is not worth any such thing, and that they must not occupy a reader’s time with what he can get at first hand anywhere around him”.

Hardy’s further observation on the same subject, according to his notebook entry dated February 23, 1923, as quoted by his second wife Mrs. Florence Emily Hardy, was that—

“A story must be exceptional enough to justify its telling. We tale-tellers are all Ancient Mariners, and none of us is warranted in stopping wedding guests (in other words, the hurrying public) unless he has something more unusual to relate than the ordinary experience of every average man and woman”.


2. Ibid: P.352
Before entering into a detailed discussion of his novels, it is relevant to mention at the outset that Hardy classified his 'Wessex Novels' into three broad categories: The first group is distinguished as "Novels of Character and Environment", the second group as "Romances and Fantasies" and the third group as "Novels of Ingenuity". According to Hardy, his first group comprises those novels which "approach most nearly to uninfluenced works"; but one or two of these novels "may claim a verisimilitude in general treatment and detail". 1. The second group has a sufficiently descriptive definition, while the third group, according to Hardy, comprises those novels which "show a not infrequent disregard of the probable in the chain of events, and depend for their interest mainly on the incidents themselves". 2. Besides these three broad classifications, Hardy did not seem to have classified his individual work. Perhaps on the strength of this general classification H.C. Duffin holds that "Hardy classified the novels as under:-

I. Novels of Character and Environment - Under the Greenwood Tree, Far From the Madding Crowd, The Return of the Native, The Mayor of Casterbridge, The woodlanders, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, Jude the Obscure.


III. Novels of Ingenuity and Experiment - Desperate Remedies, The Hand of Ethelberta, A Laodicean" 3.

2. Ibid : P.46
3. H.C. Duffin : Thomas Hardy (Indian Branch : Oxford University Press 1967) P.xiii
It may be noted that Hardy's general classification was sufficient enough not to warrant any further classification. On the strength of this general classification one may safely classify his particular novels as was done by Duffin.

Thus Hardy had a predilection to stories which are sensational, stories which are more unusual than the ordinary experience of ordinary man and woman. Of course, in his first published prose feature *How I Built Myself a House* there is nothing sensational or unusual about it. It is the simple sketch of the building of a house by one John who used to live with his wife Sophia and three children in a house called "A Highly Desirable Semi-detached Villa". But in actuality their house was the very opposite of what the couple wished it to be. Their house had no additional room to accommodate their friends when they visited them, and they were obliged to keep their coals out of doors in a heap against the back-wall. Further, if they would have been invited a few acquaintances to dinner, there was very great difficulty in serving it. For want of side-board room the maid on all such occasions had to put the dishes in the stair-case, or on stools or chairs in the passage. Such a house was hardly suitable to be put up with and so, John and Sophia had long in their minds a notion of building a house of their own a little further out of town than where they had hitherto lived.

The new residence, according as the couple intended, was to be of some mysterious size and proportion. It should be
right and proper in every respect, and it should make both
the husband and wife peculiarly happy ever afterwards. The
construction cost should neither be too much nor too little;
it should be quite in proportion to the comfort which they
were likely to derive out of the new construction. The house
was to be situated on a healthy spot, with a stratum of dry
gravel, ninety feet above the springs with trees to the
north and a pretty view to the south, the spot was also to
be easily accessible by rail. But such a site was impossible
to be had. In the end, the couple chose a place which was
rather convenient and healthy but without the other advan-
tages. This place was taken on a lease for an established
period of ninety-nine years.

Having chosen the site and obtained the place on lease,
both the husband and wife began to make their respective
sketches. It was soon found that their respective ideas would
never fit together and that their respective drawings would
never agree. So they could come to no conclusion, and finally
the couple called at the architectural office of Mr. Penny,
who was reported to have architectural talent of every kind.
Mr. Penny made the couple his "puppet" and settled everything
in a miraculous way. John all along insisted that the stipula-
ted cost should not exceed eighteen hundred pounds. But the
estimated cost was at first calculated by the architect's
Clerk, Linen at two thousand two hundred pounds. This was
finally reduced to eighteen hundred and seventy pounds. This
Mr. Penny assured John that this was the most satisfactory sum.
Sophia also agreed with the architect: "I am sure it is exceedingly moderate: Elegance and extreme cheapness never do go together". 1. John did not bother the architect any more, while Sophia reminded him of a nice conservatory. Mr. Penny assured her to send some suitable sketches to them. He assumed such an air as if he was a complete guide to the minds of all people who wanted to build.

Plan-making was followed by the appointment of a builder. The house had been marked out, and one morning John and Sophia paid a visit to the place to see how the foundations looked. It is really strange that a new house drawn in outline on the ground always looks ridiculously small. So by looking at the outline of the house John and his wife were very much disappointed. The sitting-rooms seemed to look like cells. The kitchen was no better than a large box. The study appeared to consist chiefly of a fireplace and a door. Sophia was much disgusted with the size of the drawing-room and it was on her insistence that the room was lengthened. The building gradually crept upwards and the chimneys were put forth. When the last chimney was almost finished one day John had to climb up to that height, though not willingly, but under pressure from his wife and on a request from the builder's foreman.

In the midst of continual anxiety and frequent journeys from the old house to the new one, at last the building was almost finished. In the beginning Sophia's ardour in the business was intense, but subsequently it died out entirely.

1. Thomas Hardy's personal writings: Edited by Harold Orel. (Macmillan, London 1967) P.152
So John was left alone to tackle the later difficulties of construction. He wished that his newly constructed house must have a model porch. But neither did he mention it to Mr. Penny nor did Mr. Penny suggest it to him. So the house was constructed without the porch. To a complaint from John, Mr. Penny replied that a porch was entirely a matter of personal feeling and taste. He did not put one because it was not mentioned. Nevertheless a porch would be a definite improvement and could still be constructed. But it might lead to a trifling darkness. John wanted to be relieved of the gloom by the use of reflectors. Accordingly the porch was constructed and the reflectors fitted; but unfortunately the gloom was not removed. It remained for all the time and almost in the whole house.

A new construction through the agency of a builder has always an obvious pitfall of what is technically known as "getting into extras". The value of the 'extras' invariably works at a considerable amount over and above the contracted sum. On completion of this particular construction came a host of things "not included" - a sink in the scullery, a rainwater tank and a pump, a trap door into the roof, a scraper, a weather cock and four letters, ventilators in the nursery, ventilators in the kitchen etc. John was astounded to find that the additions altogether came to some hundreds of pounds in addition to the contracted amount of eighteen hundred and seventy pounds. A surveyor was called in, and he settled the payable amount to the half of what was originally charged by the builder. The accounts of the work were thus finally closed.
Soon John's family shifted to the newly constructed building along with its furniture and other personal effects. The very first thing that struck the family as a standing nuisance was the smoke. With the lighting of the study-fire, every particle of smoke came curling into the room. A complaint was lodged to the architect, who, however, suggested an immediate remedy. The last thing which John was able to recall was the sudden outburst of Sophia one night. She jumped up from her bed and exclaimed: "O that builder! not a single bar of any sort is there to the nursery-windows. John, some day those poor little children will tumble out in their innocence - how should they know better? and be dashed to pieces. Why did you put the nursery on the second floor?" 1. And some bars were invariably put up to the nursery windows the very next morning. Even with attending to these preliminaries, nothing was possible to be done to increase the total area of accommodation. For the house was almost like a match-box. This was perhaps the reason for which Sophia became indifferent right from the stage of the construction of the house. John, on the other hand, was much upset because the all-in-cost far exceeded the contracted amount of eighteen hundred and seventy pounds. Even then the total accommodation fell far short of their requirement. In other words, it was a sheer irony of fate that even at the cost of too much expenditure and too much sacrifices the couple did not get the type of the house which they wanted to possess.

This charming sketch, though neither sensational nor unusual, was perhaps the outcome of Hardy's mixed lessons in literature and architecture. In later years Hardy called it "jeu d' espirit", a "trifle" and "unrepresentative". Nevertheless, it has its value, and its value is more historical than literary. It has not only the credit of being his first published work but also turned his mind from poetry to prose. Thenceforward Hardy began to write prose fiction in right earnest. Further, though this prose sketch does not show anything of Hardy's future shape, yet it bears an indirect testimony to something of Hardy's fatalistic notion that man is destined to be unhappy, and there is a great divergence between what a man dreams and what he actually gets.

Hardy's first full length fiction The Poor Man and the Lady was undertaken sometime in October 1867 and was finished by the early part of June 1868. Initially the title of the book was The Poor Man and the Lady: A Story with no Plot: Containing some original verses. But it was ultimately abridged to: The Poor Man and the Lady: By the Poor Man. As no publisher was willing to publish it, this novel never saw the light of the day.

The most important scenes of the novel were laid in London of which Hardy had gained a wide and varied experience of about six years from 1862 to 1867, while he was working
for the architect Arthur Blomfield. The hero of the novel was an architect—Will Strong by name. The story of the novel was indeed a sweeping satire of the squirearchy, of the nobility and of the London Society. The satirical representation obviously suggested certain radical, if not revolutionary, tendencies. Further, the vulgarity of the middle class, modern Christianity, church—restoration, and political and domestic morals in general were also bitterly satirised in the novel. The views expressed by the author were seemingly those of a young man with a strong passion for reforming the world.

The architect hero, Will Strong, had a mistress and he worked at his office for other architects. The mistress used to add to her lover’s income by designing for him the pulpits, altars, reredoses, texts, holy vessels, crucifixes and other ecclesiastical furniture which were handed on to him by the nominal architects who employed her protector. When not engaged in designing the Christian emblems, the lady used to dance in a music hall. Hardy told his tale so clearly that it pointed to the actual degeneracy of the age. Hardy might have had a socialistic purpose, but the manner in which he developed his narrative made his writing appear to be radical, if not revolutionary. It was perhaps for this reason that the manuscript of the novel was rejected not only by Mr. Alexander Macmillan but also by Messrs. Chapman and Hall.
Though the manuscript was rejected by Macmillan, John Morley, Macmillan's reader, rather passed a mixed opinion about the novel. As quoted by Mrs. F. E. Hardy, John Morley is reported to have said: "A very curious and original performance; the opening pictures of the Christmas-eve in the tenant's house are really of good quality: much of the writing is strong and fresh. If the man is young he has stuff and purpose in him." 1. The faults of the novel, as pointed out by John Morley, were that the thing was hanging too loosely together, and that some of the scenes were so extravagant that they seemed almost like the wild dream of a clever lad.

From Macmillan the manuscript was transferred to Messrs. Chapman and Hall for consideration. At Messrs. Chapman and Hall's it was considered by George Meredith who was of opinion that should the manuscript be put into prints its author might have to face volleys of criticism from the Press, not only because of its episodic construction but also of its wild extravagance amounting to radicalism. "For though the novel might have been accepted calmly enough by the reviewers and public in these days, in genteel mid-Victorian 1889 it would no doubt have incurred, as Meredith judged, severe strictures which might have handicapped a young writer for a long time."2. Meredith, however, felt that the young writer had promise in him and so advised Hardy to write a novel with a more complicated plot, and the result was Desperate Remedies.

It may be relevant to point out that *The Poor Man and the Lady* theme was based on an episode of Hardy's unlucky attachment to Louisa Harding, the daughter of a rich farmer at Stinsford, who was about a year younger than Hardy. Her family was socially superior and it was quite clear that Louisa was not to encourage him. But Hardy believed that his love was reciprocated, although the only words that passed between the two were "Good Evening". Within a couple of days Louisa was sent to a Boarding school at Weymouth. Hardy went all the way to Weymouth to be awarded only with a shy smile from her. The irony of the situation was obvious. Hardy thought that his love was being reciprocated, but it was far from true. Louisa, whatever she might have felt within, was forced to be silent in consideration of her social superiority. This obviously ironic situation, the bitterness of which was tasted by Hardy in his personal life, was amplified in greater details in his later novels.

C

In obedience to Meredith's suggestion Hardy composed his *Desperate Remedies* with a complicated plot. In his insistence on complicated plots and uncommon events Hardy was perhaps more like Walter Scott. Like Scott he had great attraction for old ballads, old folk-lore and old forgotten far-off things. So, as David Cecil says, it was but natural that Hardy's first published novel *Desperate Remedies* should preface with a quotation from Scott: "Though an unconnected
course of adventure is what most frequently occurs in nature, yet the province of the romance writer being artificial, there is more required from him than a mere compliance with the simplicity of reality." 1

*Desperate Remedies* which was classed by Hardy as a 'novel of ingenuity and experiment' was first published in the year 1871. In this novel Hardy shows his knowledge of girlish coquetries and mannerisms. Miss Cytherea Graye, the heroine of the novel, is in love with a young architect named Edward Springrove. Miss Graye has to accept the post of a lady's maid, the lady being Miss. Aldelyffe with whom Cytherea's father was in love in his young days. Gradually intrigues follow. Cytherea, to her utter mortification, comes to know that the man of her heart, Edward Springrove, has been in a long standing and apparently inviolable engagement to Adelaide Hinton.

Under the circumstances and also under the compelling necessity of supporting a sick brother Owen Graye, Miss. Cytherea Graye is forced to accept the hand of Aneas Manston, an illegitimate son of Miss. Aldelyffe. Springrove is, however, set free from his first entanglement the day before her marriage. But the girl is not aware of it. A few hours after the honeymoon departure, the information that Manston's first wife is alive comes to hand. It makes Cytherea flee from her newly married husband in order to be united with her original lover.

Manston, in his bid to win Cytherea, murders his first wife and then hangs himself in the cell. Both the lovers being now free, Cytherea from Manston and Edward from his first entanglement, are at last united.

The love intrigues no doubt have their remedies; but the remedies are really desperate. This is indeed a novel of the period of Hardy's experiment and apprenticeship, and the author was perhaps feeling his way to a method. There is in this novel, an assignment of too much space by its author for mystery, enlargement, surprise and intrigues with a view, perhaps, to excite the immediate interest of its readers. Nevertheless, some of the scenes, such as, the sketch of a country house, a cider-making scene, a couch grass-burning, the description of an old mill etc. and some of the characters, such as, Cytherea, Edward Springrove, etc. are not quite unworthy of enduring interest. These are some of the flourishing specimens of Hardy's genius in the kind. "The principles observed in its compositions are no doubt too exclusively those in which mystery, enlargement, surprise, and moral obliquity are depended on for exciting interest; but some of the scenes and at least one or two of the characters, have been deemed not quite unworthy of a little longer preservation..." 1. This is what Hardy himself admitted in the preface of this novel.

The novel by virtue of its too many elements of crime and mystery, even though rich and satisfying, is likely to be viewed by a modern reader as a "Crime Book". Duffin rightly observed: "Desperate Remedies, if sent to a publisher today, would be marked by the reader as a likely crime club 'book of the month'".  

1. The amateur detective activities of Springrove and Owen Graye require but a moderate degree of further development so as to bring them up to modern standards. As is characteristic of Hardy, the plot hinges on coincidences and accidental happenings, while the machinery of this complicated plot has not been properly oiled and greased. There is certainly some amount of crudity in the method of discovering and developing some of the necessary facts - as those given by Manston in Chapter XIII.  

3. To the woman masquerading as his wife.  

Notwithstanding these basic defects, there are certain parts of the book that stand out like a oasis in a desert. "There were some half-dozen passages of rustic dialogue so exquisitely easy and unforced as to read like dictaphone records of actual conversations, yet artistically so perfect, and so vital in substance, that they could have come from the mouths of none but Olympian rustics. Here at least was a view worth working".  

2. In so far as the chief characters are concerned, there is much of originality of conception. They are well organised and carefully studied, but seldom do they

1. H.C. Duffin: Thomas Hardy  
   (Indian Branch: Oxford University Press: 1967) P.1 
2. Ibid : P.2
come alive. As against Cytherea's force of character, Manston has an ungovernable passion, and both these aspects are well shown and provide the germs of Hardy's later success.

The style of the book is often clumsy and inexact. Nature, which is almost of Wordsworthian proportion in the Hardian scheme, plays here, an incidental and insignificant role. Nevertheless, it is hardly possible for one to overlook the water-butt into which Manston gazed, with its myriads of happily sporting creatures. It seems to be the forerunner of the heath-pool observed by Mrs. Yeobright. Again, the analysis of rain-sounds at night is almost reminiscent of the classical passage in The Return of the Native about wind-voice of Egdon.

According to a review in Athenaeum dated April 1, 1871, as incorporated in Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage, Desperate Remedies is undoubtedly a very powerful novel, even though its story is unpleasant in some respects. Almost all the characters are often exceedingly good. The parish clerk, 'a sort of Bowdlerized rake', who refers to the time 'before he took orders' is almost worthy of George Eliot. Equally interesting is the cider-making scene at the end of the first volume. The west country dialect has also been well managed, without being caricature. There is also an occasional happy hit - "the latent feeling which is rather common in these days among the unappreciated that, because some markedly successful men are fools, all markedly unsuccess-

While the Athenaeum was favourably disposed, the Spectator was very critical. It took a serious view of the novel’s morality and made uncharitable remark about the novel on the ground of its story being disagreeable, and its machinery being commonplace and clumsy. A murder is at the root of the story and the merest sensuality is the only motive of the murderer. The murderer has a wife and he wants another. He even fills the interregnum with a mistress. Still more miserable creation is his mother, an unmarried lady of position and fortune. She is unnatural, uninteresting and nasty.

It was but natural that the Spectator should have condemned *Desperate Remedies* on moral grounds. It may be noted that Hardy was writing his novel in an untrained and orthodox Victorian society in which the very idea of an unmarried mother was inconceivable and was looked upon as an act of unpardonable moral offence. But the notion of morality according to the modern standard is not the same as that of orthodox Victorian standard. And in spite of the Spectator’s uncharitable comments, Hardy, when judged by the modern standard, does not seem to be either unnatural or immoral.

It simply points to one basic truth that Hardy was much ahead of his time and perhaps caught the spirit of the present generation more than that of the past.

It may be noted that some of the characters of the novel were drawn from real life. While Hardy was working in Mr. Crickmay’s drawing offices, a new assistant was appointed sometime in September 1869. This young man was sketched as
Edward Springrove in *Desperate Remedies*. Harold Child, the author of 'Thomas Hardy' which was published by Nisbet & Co. Ltd., London, first in 1913 and then in 1925, was of opinion that like many young writers Hardy attached much importance to plot, and this tale of mystery, entanglement, surprise and moral obliquity was arranged and managed by its author with admirable dexterity and originality.

D

In his second published novel *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872) Hardy did not continue the attempt at the sensational; for his *Desperate Remedies* inspite of being sensational was sold off cheap. But he could perceive that he had a strong chance of satisfying himself and his public by way of presenting the Dorset countryside and home scenery. Here, perhaps the praise of John Morley, to whom the manuscript of *The Poor Man and the Lady* was shown, was of some significance. According to Stewart, Mr. Morley "praised the strength and the freshness of some of Hardy's rural scenes, and these Hardy made the basis of *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872), in which he comes into all that part of his kingdom which knows more of sunshine than shadow". 1.

The novel, bearing its sub-title as 'A Rural Painting of the Dutch School' was originally titled 'The Mellstock Quire'. But the original title, even though appropriate, was subsequently changed to "Under the Greenwood Tree". Hardy himself

confessed: "In reading the narrative after a long interval there occurs the inevitable reflection that the realities out of which it was spun were material for another kind of study of this little group of church musicians than is found in the chapters here penned so lightly, even so farcically and flippantly at times". Accordingly the change was made, and change was made not perhaps to suit the time only but also to suit the poetic insight of its author.

This delightful little novel which Hardy himself labelled as a novel of "Character and Environment", brings home to us the most endearing pictures of wessex village life. The very opening of the novel with its careful observation of nature, its conscientious description of the Mellstock villages, and its minute study of those inhabitants, who form the staple of the book's interest, is suggestive of Hardy's characteristic hold on rustic theme. It is apt to remind one of the lovingly faithful pictures that Hardy painted for his wessex poems. The Mellstock choir is the rustic group consisting of an old grandfather, William Dewy, his son Reuben, the tranter, and Dick Dewy, Reuben's son, Michael Mail, Robert Penny, Elias Spink, Joseph Bowman, Thomas Leaf etc. With a few exceptions, these rustic villagers are chiefly old and middleaged men, knowing life as thoroughly as the kitchen wives know their kitchen. In spite of differences in their constitution, they, however, possess one common quality - the quality of being mellow crustedness.

1. Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings: Edited by Harold Orel (Macmillan : London : 1967) P.6
These rustic people have their daily work; but their pre-occupation is always with life and human nature which they observe through country air with sometimes a humorous and sometimes a cynical eye. Most of them have, however, quite a small part to play in the action. They stand aloof, interested yet, detached, and offer their humorous, cynical commentary on the principal actors and their actions.

In Hardian schema, the rustic group has always a collective mind. Each member contributes his own angle of observation. And the collective judgement affords a tolerably shrewd summation of objective truth. Their functions are almost parallel to those of the Greek Chorus. Even though they maintain a humorous detachment, they are nevertheless affected by the rise and fall of the fortunes of the principal characters. In this novel, the Mallstock choir forms a collective entity, one of the prominent actors of the village drama.

The Mallstock choir struggles hard to retain the time-honoured orchestra by keeping out the invading organs, and its struggle appears far more interesting than the novel's love-story. But even in its struggle for the retention of the traditional orchestra, it evinces a reflective rather than an active character. Its actions consist merely in the preservation of a point of view, and the choir is content with having been able to prevent it. Fate is not diverted; it is only a little postponed.

Against this vivid, strongly pictured background, the love story of Dick Dewy and Miss Fancy Day; appearing almost
as an intrusion, verily pales into insignificance. At the very outset of events, during the rounds made by the Christmas 'waits' of Mellstock parish church, Dick Dewy, the son and partner of Reuben, falls in love with the newly appointed mistress of the parish, Miss. Fancy Day, who is slightly above him socially. She is the daughter of a neighbouring game-keeper who is comparatively well-to-do in the world. Except some interruptions and slight difficulties, the "course of true love" runs smooth and the novel ends happily with wedding dance and feast. The interruption in the true love of this simple village couple is caused by the gawky attentions of Mr. Sinhar, a wealthy farmer and a churchwarden. Further, the curious episode with the vicar also interrupts the otherwise easy going love of this simple village couple, Dick and Fancy. At times it so happens that Fancy momentarily yields to the temptation of marrying the local priest, Mr. Maybold; but she is able to regain her poise in time and marries Dick. Thus the novel has finally a happy denouement.

While love-triangle forming the central theme, the novel has a number of subsidiary scenes, and some of them were well managed by Hardy, such as, the description of the card-singers' rounds, the village party of the tranter's, the interview of the choir with the vicar, the bee-taking at the keeper Geoffrey Day's etc. Another most interesting aspect of the novel is its personal sketches, and the foremost among them is Reuben Dewy, the tranter or the irregular carrier, who is the most fully worked out type of the Mellstock choir class. A man full of
human nature”, he is fond of broaching his ideas with his village friends about him. He is straightforward and outspoken, yet inclined from good nature towards compromise. Around the tranter, there are several other figures - old William Dewy, the grandfather, and the leader in all things musical, Mr. Penny, the book-maker and Thomas Leaf, who sings treble in the choir.

The novel is not, however, free from its weak points. The story is flimsy and slight and the element of suspense is absolutely lacking. The treatment is throughout humorous. The story moves slowly and sluggishly, even though with sustaining interest. The love passages of the simple village couple are at times unnecessarily prolonged. Another definite fault of the novel lies with its dialogues, the village folk, forgetting their natural speech sometimes begin to talk in the language of their creator. In fact, Hardy had a dual aim, and in trying to do justice to both the impulses in him, perhaps allowed some weak spots to creep in. Hardy wanted to present a faithful picture of the village life as well as to tell a story of deep love of two young hearts reared up under bucolic environment; and factually the plot consists of two clear-cut halves. Hardy was no doubt able to achieve what he wanted, but at the same time he had to sacrifice the artistic unity of his novel.

But in spite of its weakness, Under the Greenwood Tree immediately after its publication met with a kindly and gentle reception of its reviewers. Athenaeum dated June 15, 1872, as incorporated in Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage.
edited by H.G. Cox, reviewed it as a book which could induce people to give up their valuable time just to enjoy a marriage accomplished in its pages. As reported by Hardy's biographer, Florence Emily Hardy, whom he married after Emma's death, Pall Mall Gazette of the time called it a story of much freshness and originality. Further, Hardy seems to have shown much skill in the first introduction of the heroine of the novel, Miss. Fancy Day. Duffin rightly says that "there is much cunning in the way in which the heroine is introduced, via a dainty boot in the pocket of Penny the shoemaker, the candle flame approaching the window-blind, and a vision of beauty that makes an anti-climax of the minx-like character of the young woman as it presently develops". This novel, however, does not fully represent Hardy's many-sidedness, nor does it have an wider range, and it prevents the novel from being included in his great novels; but within its limited range, Under the Green-Wood Tree has a kind of perfection achieved by none of his masterpieces.

If Under the Green-Wood Tree has a limited range, it gives us at least a three dimensional picture - (i) the Wessex village with its men and women; (ii) their seasons and customs; and (iii) the choir of Hardy's village folk. We see all the walks of village life in it - the tanner, the shoe-maker, the butcher, the inn-keeper and even the village wits and the village idiots. This novel also affords us to have a glimpse of church services, Christmas carols, inns,

marriage, honey-making, nutting, marriage preparations and even death. It is an accurate observation and faithful presentation of realistic events pointing to Hardy's whole-hearted sympathy for rural life and living. "Under the Greenwood Tree is filled with touches showing the close sympathy with which the writer has watched the life, not only of his fellow-men in the country hamlets, but of woods and fields and all the outward forms of nature". Hardy's close sympathy for the Mellstock choir, for these bygone instrumentalists, for these poor dwellers of hamlets far away from the maddening crowd of the city is one of the elements that should class him as a modern writer.

In this novel Hardy clearly exhibits an art which has been carried to a high point. It is the art of developing the action through dialogue, a dramatic method which can be traced in a direct line from Shakespeare, through novelists such as Fielding and Jane Austen, but which subsequently fell out of fashion during the later Victorian age. In his later novels Hardy himself also fell from the standard which he had set himself in his early work. A beautiful example of this art is the episode of the choir's encounter with the vicar: discussion, planning, execution and reminiscence. Another example is the conversation between Fancy and Dick on the road from Budmouth which results in their engagement. It was rather to his disadvantage that the art of developing the action through dialogue was abandoned by Hardy in his later novels.

Hardy's third published novel *A Pair of Blue Eyes* may be regarded as the last piece of his apprenticeship. It falls into the category of "Romances and Fantasies". In his first two published novels, Hardy did not dare to disclose his name and adopted nom de plume. It was for the first time in his *A Pair of Blue Eyes* that Hardy disclosed his real name. If *Under the Greenwood Tree* shows Hardy's power in the use of rural background and rustic chorus, *A Pair of Blue Eyes* on the other hand will show Hardy's power in the handling of character on a large scale.

The whole plot of the novel hinges on the figure of Elfrida, the heroine of the novel, who is born and bred in the solitudes of the west country. She is the motherless and the only daughter of the Cornish Vicar named Mr. Swancourt. He is worldly, orthodox and a commonplace parson of the old school. The heroine's tragedy results from the operation of quite ordinary events upon her sensitive and simple nature. Her situation is ironic, and she is almost conscious of it. But she is so passive and powerless that she can never free herself from her ironic situation and finally pays her penalty. She is the sort of a butterfly, full of sparkling life, born for happiness, but is destined to be broken on the wheel of a man's egotism. Stephen Smith with whom she falls in love, is her counterpart in everything except birth; he is perhaps the man she could have been happy with, but destiny ordains otherwise.
Stephen Smith, the young architect, comes from London to Endelstow to restore the tower of a church, the vicaragehip of which is vested upon Elfride's father, Mr. Swancourt. The blue-eyed daughter of the Vicar looks at the man from London with a "Miranda-like curiosity and interest that she had never yet bestowed on a mortal". 1. The snobbish Clergyman recklessly favours the attachment between his blue-eyed daughter and the promising London architect, because he regards Stephen Smith as one belonging to a well-known ancient Caxbury County family - not ordinary Smith in the least, despite the latter's protestation to the contrary."...And, Mr. Smith, I congratulate you upon your blue blood; blue blood, sir; and upon my life, a very desirable colour, as the world goes." 2. Thereupon the young man replies sadly but modestly: "I wish you could congratulate me upon some more tangible quality".3.

But when it is known that the same Stephen Smith is by parentage a son to Lord Luxellian's master mason John Smith, the snobbish father turns his back and pronounces a characteristic condemnation: "Yes, I was inclined to suspect him, because he did not care about sauces of any kind. I always did doubt a man's being a gentleman if his palate had no acquired tastes. An unedified palate is the irrepressible cloven foot of the upstart". 4.

1. Thomas Hardy: A Pair of Blue Eyes (Mackmillan: London: 1968) P.2
2. Ibid : P.16
3. Ibid : P.16
4. Ibid : P.93
With the discovery of Stephen's parentage, the weaving of the tragic web begins. In spite of her father's disapproval to the match, the young pair plan a sort of escape, entirely innocent in design and thoroughly imperfect in its execution. Agreeing to the proposal of secret marriage, Elfride accompanies Stephen to London. But the girl vacillates at the last moment and their project fails. She returns back home overnight without being married. On her way back home from London she is however, unhappily discovered by Mrs. Jethway, whose son was reported to have died on account of infatuation for Elfride. The idea of "secret marriage" also makes Hardy alive to the fact that it is not passion but impulse and emotion, accident and circumstances that rule at this as at other moments.

Not quite out of frustration but with a renewed hope of assurance from Elfride, Stephen Smith goes to India to seek his fortune. In the meantime Henry Knight, the old friend and mentor of Stephen Smith, comes into Elfride's life. Henry Knight has the natural advantage of being several years senior to his predecessor, Stephen Smith. He is a matured man of experience, a writer of reviews, and withal a relative of the rich widow whom Mr. Swancourt has opportunely married. Without much conscious effort, the new-comer achieves a gradual hold on Elfride's mind and feelings. But she still clings to Stephen, and she goes to have a look at the Puffin, a steam-boat, which is bringing her future husband home. Knight also accompanies her.
To save Elfride from an inevitable death, Knight finds himself hanging between life and death on the edge of the sea-crag. But finally he is saved by the girl's wonderful presence of mind. She tears her under-clothings and makes a rope, with the help of which she manages to pull him out of the edge of the sea-crag. In the meantime the Ruffin, the little summer steamboat passes away, and Elfride has no knowledge of it. It is likely that she would have remained faithful to her first lover Stephen Smith but for an adventure on the cliffs. The imminent presence of death forces Knight and Elfride into an unconscious and inevitable avowal. All the most refined and the most thoroughly womanly elements in Elfride now contend on the side of her new love. The two are now engaged. To Stephen, she was a queen, but now she does not long to be a queen. Now she wants to adore rather than to be adored, to worship rather than to be worshipped.

Although with a mature passion Elfride responds to Knight's love, and looks upon him as the only anchorage of her whole being, yet she finds her steady tower gradually becoming unsteady. Soon it becomes clear that Knight always meant to be the first comer in a woman's heart. Being apprehensive of a lurking doom Elfride, in spite of her prick of conscience, dares not to disclose anything to Knight about her previous love. But soon Elfride is exposed and Knight comes to know her earlier love adventures through the letter of late Mrs. Jethway. It results in their engagement being broken off.

"Elfride, we must bid good-bye to compliments," said Knight: "we must do without politeness now. Look in my face,
and as you believe in God above, tell me truly one thing more: were you away along with him?

'Yes'.

'Did you return home the same day on which you left it?'

'No'.

The word fell like a bolt, and the very land and sky seemed to suffer. Knight turned aside.

'You must forget me', he said. 'We shall not marry, Elfrida'.

Thus, against some supernatural master-strategist who deploys forces slender in themselves with unerring skill, Elfrida miserably fails in her desperate attempts at happiness and fulfilment. This dark power also directs its malevolent fun at the end to the two unhappy lovers of Elfrida. Both Knight and Smith accidentally meet in London. Each of them becomes aware how each has wronged the unfortunate blue-eyed girl, and each of them is eager to seek her out. Both of them start for Endelstow by the same train to which a 'a sombre van' is attached at Bristol. This is the van which is carrying the dead body of Elfrida who, out of utter despair, married the widowed Lord Luxellian and herself died of broken heart five months after her marriage. The fact that she is no more is brought home to her lovers in an inn called "Welcome Home".

Elfrida foreshadows Tess just dimly and A Pair of Blue Eyes is but the miniature of Hardy's later tragedies. By now Hardy has come to realise man's predicament in the hands of a

malevolent destiny, but he has not yet had his final
realisation that 'character is fate', nor has he yet come to
conceive of the idea of immanent will, that unrelenting and
cruel supernatural agency that hastens man to his miserable
end in spite of his ceaseless struggle for survival. No doubt,
the note of high tragedy is lacking in this novel; nevertheless
it is indicative of Hardy's future shape as a novelist.

As designed by Hardy, the mode of life led by the
heroine and her lovers is rather a defiance of conventionality.
Elfride's plan of "Secret Marriage", her elopement, the
making of a rope out of a portion of her under-clothings etc.,
are but a few examples of daring acts which were almost
unthinkable in an orthodox Victorian society. These are
certainly some of the acts much ahead of the time when the
novel was written. Further, the heroine, who is the daughter
of an orthodox and snobbish father and who herself hails from
the blue blood, is least interested in heraldry. Her prime
consideration is Stephen, not his parentage, however humble
may be his birth, Elfride consents to marry Stephen and
thereby evinces a temperament of the mind that can be
called modern.